

Day By Day - January 1945

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Summary: Updates about new residents and helpers at "Mary's rooms" on Mott Street and the activities in New York and the farm at Easton. Meditates on the means and ends in the spiritual life noting the tension created between those who concentrate on "good works" and those who prefer "spiritual methods." Asks for books and supplies for Maryfarm. Keywords: retreat (DDLW #407).

A warm foggy day and my first day in Mary's rooms, which at present is a very dirty, dingy apartment on the third floor of 115 Mott Street and which eventually will house women guests going to and from the retreats at Easton. It needs to be scrubbed and painted, to be made habitable, but it will have to house a few soon, regardless of whether we are ready. Ruth and Veronica from St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn helped start the work off by scrubbing and cleaning sink and tub and stove, not to speak of walls. And John Curran helped by tending to the stove and lights, and even as a special present to Mary, giving a scrubbing to the kitchen floor. I certainly was grateful.

Our first guest was sent us by a nurse at Bellevue, a woman who is an attendant on the psychopathic ward and herself just out of the hospital and needing a place to stay and company for a few days, until she gets back to work again. She has been helping us too.

Many visitors in these days. Peggy Stern, who is working for the Catholic Bureau in Hartford, Tina, Anne Battam, Mary Coisman Durnin, Mary Agnes Dougherty and a friend from Rochester, Grace Chippendale from Boston, and Sisters and students from St. Saviour high school and from St. Joseph's college.

Arthur Sheehan came home from Nova Scotia yesterday where he had been visiting his family.

Here are the things being done right now:

The retreats at Easton, which are like a foretaste of heaven.

The bakery. We are going to start girls making home made bread, pies, baked beans, pot pies, etc., not only to help feed the poor, but for their own instruction. "They knew Him in the breaking of bread."

Mary's rooms. A new guest flat for women.

A new kitchen. Up to this time we have served coffee and bread in the store where Ade's beautiful murals are hung, and lunch and supper upstairs one flight in the rear house. Now the kitchen has been moved altogether downstairs and a coal stove put in, so that though the kitchen is smaller, the dining room is bigger and there is a more companionable feeling all around.

Clothes room is being reorganized. Several girls have volunteered to come in each Saturday to sort out all the clothes that have come in during the week and to repair the disorder attendant on trying to take care of so many men together with so many other duties.

All the literature cleared out and put into circulation. Cellar cleaned.

It is good to make these inventories at the end of a year.

Outside it is slushy under foot. It is five o'clock and getting dark. It has been a quiet Sunday afternoon (some of the staff here are down on the farm making the retreat, so I am holding the fort) and the solitude has been wonderful, for a change.

I made a meditation today on the means and ends in the spiritual life. We have among us many examples of those who are ever pondering and working at the means and others who concentrate on the vision and keep holding it aloft by word and example and writing. Both are necessary. But often one calls the other a visionary and an anarchist, and the other talks of the heresy of good works and the narrowness of those who talk of spiritual methods. Often too there is a conflict of both elements in the same person.

It might help if those working at perfecting the means which will enable others to love God and their neighbor, would be more silent about it. The trouble is, people do not work in peace and quiet. They bustle, like Martha. They give the impression of being impatient and fussy.

In my story, printed in August, "Once Upon a Time," there are some of the consequences of talking in a large general way of the liberty of Christ. St. Benedict illustrates both points of view.

Narrow is the way, but it certainly opens out to wide horizons. First steps always are hard, and it seems to me we are always beginning. For a long time we were laying burdens on people too heavy for them to bear when they did not have the means to lead the large, generous loving life of service they wished. We have to make an environment which will enable people to be good. Just as nuns have their convent, the child the home (when it is a good one), we have our retreat house now, from which apostles may go forth into all the earth.

Yes, there seem definitely to be two schools of thought in our very movement itself. Both saying the same thing in different ways.

1. Whatsoever you do in word or deed, whether you eat or drink, do all for the love of God.
2. Love God and do as you will.

The first reflects St. Paul, and, of course, so does the second. The first gives a helping hand, step by step, a sure rule of life and instruction, and the other, unfortunately, has often led to anarchy. Nevertheless, we keep on quoting that marvelous line of St. Augustine's, and keep on holding the vision, in this personalist, and also communitarian, revolution.

A letter from Jim O'Gara comes, back after three years in the Pacific and now in a hospital at Miami Beach with malaria and to be transferred from infantry to air force on that account. He is one of the editors of the old Chicago Catholic Worker. Another letter from Jack English, who was in a prison camp in Romania, and now is in Crile General Hospital in Cleveland, Ward 40B.

There will be days of recollection every second Sunday at Our Lady of the Wayside Farm, Avon, Ohio. There is a telephone there, so our Cleveland readers can call up about these days.

We expect also to have days of recollection on the farm at Easton, but hate to set any particular days, since right now they are snowed in, and no taxis can make the hill. Father Roy will probably be away for a few Sundays in February, so we probably will not begin until March.

We are looking for a concordance to the Bible for our retreat house. Also for the lives of the Desert Fathers, and their sayings. Also for books written by Wm. Cobbett to add to our farm library and a set of Cardinal Newman's sermons. We also need cotton blankets (we have plenty of woolen, thank God!) and pillow slips, or remnants of cloth to make pillow slips with. The address of the farm is Maryfarm, Easton, Pa.

Everybody reads this “gossip column” as one seminarian teasingly called it, so we take the opportunity here in this January issue, and a very late issue at that, to beg pardon of all for our slowness in answering letters. We are deeply grateful for our friends’ help, and beg God to bless them.