

On Pilgrimage - November 1963

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Stays with newly forming community of families while on a speaking trip to England and recalls Peter Maurin's agronomic vision and support for the family farm. (DDLW #809).

All Saints Day

It is good to spend the Feast Day with this community of families which had its beginnings in 1940 and through three moves, and various vicissitudes, has continued until now, and will, God willing continue. There are twelve adults and twenty-three children. Three single men, a farmer, a potter and sculptor. There are not enough workers of the land for these 130 acres, with its 25 cows, 45 sheep and 80 chickens, 15 acres of wheat, and 5 of potatoes, so they hire a lad, David, and recently a group of girls from a reform school nearby came to harvest the potatoes.

Barbara goes out to work as a county nurse, George Ineson as an architect, Tom as an accountant, but now he has been in the hospital with a stroke. Say a prayer for him.

Community and The Land

I have slept at Ronald and Hillary's home these last nights and there is in the house besides me, two single men and eight children, and Hillary's mother who is visiting. Hillary, a tall young woman who met her husband in Germany in Quaker Relief Work, and has spent her entire married life in community, does all the cooking, washing and caring for eight children. It is an old stone house with no, God forbid, central heating. The kitchen is a large room facing south and all the cooking is done there, so the place is warm. But the washing up is down a short flight into a half basement, and the lavatory up one flight, and the bath up another. We all eat together at the table, and the older children, Benjamin, Rebecca and Robert, are very keen. We have animated discussions about interracial problems, and Guy Fawkes day which is November 6. They have prepared a man-sized effigy with a clown-like face, all stuffed with straw, dressed in a man's suit, a most startling figure to come upon, lolling in an easy chair in the living room. Rebecca sits on his lap and Rachael wags his head,

but he will not be treated so kindly next week when he will be burnt on a huge pyre already prepared for him in a meadow below the house. It occurs to me to be shocked at this, and I suggest that the children have a trial and pardon the dynamiter but they will have none of it. He must be burnt and all over England on what has become a children's holiday, the fires will be burning. For the last weeks in London, the children in the slums have been parading their Guy and soliciting pennies for Guy but after he has afforded them all these treats he must crown their enjoyment by going up in flames. Fireworks of all kinds complete the picture.

All is green and beautiful still here in England. Flowers in profusion, nicotiana, calendula, snap dragon, blue gentian, stock, and many others, and it has been raining these last few days and the colors are the more brilliant. Many of the trees will stay green, but those with leaves turning are in rich browns, and yellows, but not the flaming colors we are used to in our New England states. It is not cold yet, though the nights are sharp. But we are glad of the heaters, paraffin (kerosene) and electric. The foundations of the house I am in are very old, sixteenth century, and the house has been built on.

The rest is seventeenth and eighteenth. Full of drafts of course, with high ceilings. I had wanted to get up to Yorkshire to see where Charlotte Bronte lived, but could not make it. But it seems to me that this house, though larger than the one described as the Bronte's, must be rather like it. There is another tiny old cottage, where silversmith Philip Lowery lives with his wife Angela who was brought up in the community at Ditchling. I have dined also with George Ineson and his wife Connie twice and with Barbara McNulty, a public health nurse once. We had a gathering one evening and four or five members of the Bruderhof were there and also some Quakers. Most of the talk was about community and the need for such oases in a world where such problems as large scale farming, migrant labor, automation, unemployment, juvenile delinquency and old age exist. Peter Maurin used to say, "There is no unemployment on the land," which made everyone angry, so that they pointed out to him the dire situation of the migrants who wandered from state to state looking for work. These terse statements of his always started things off. Given the land, rented or owned, there was always work.

For thirty years people have criticized us for "standing for the family farm" pointing out that it did not work. Of course it does not, given no capital, a large family and no help. But Peter has always talked of the farming commune and the agronomic university, and that is still what we are most interested in. It is good to visit such a community as Taena. Of course there are family differences, controversies, differences in temperament as there are in every community, and of course there are those that deny that there is a community, and insist that they are a group of separate families, each on its own. When I think of Upton, Massachusetts, South Lyons, Michigan and Marycrest, New York, where families have raised their children, and kept going with a great deal of mutual aid over the years, I am overcome with admiration at the hard work, the endurance, the

continuing vision of these families.

When I visited Donald Attwater at Penzance the other day, he gave me a copy of **Saints of the East** to read, published in England by Havril Press, London, in 1962 and I have been dipping into it on my trip.

Theodosius of the Caves (Pechersky) was the father of Russian Monasticism and the monastery at Kiev is open again today, though it was closed for a while during the first years of the Soviets. Perhaps that is the monastery that Mayor La Pira of Florence, Italy, visited on pilgrimage.

Theodosius emphasized the importance of community life. I read today, and one of his monks declared that a “Lord have mercy on us,” prayed from the heart collectively by the community is of greater religious value than the whole psalter said alone in one’s cell. His monastery had a hospital for the sick and the disabled, they had a hospice for travelers and every Saturday a cartload of food was sent down to the city jail.

All communities overflow in good works, even in England where the State is trying to take care of all. Audrey Henson gave me a book of R. H. Tawney’s to read which deals with England today and I must certainly study the socialization which Pope John so recommended. Michael Harrington, whom I ran into in London at the American Express, used to talk to us about the modification of socialism in England. (He was leaving for Paris next day, and was going to Poland. He was without collar and looked as though he were wearing the same suit he had when he lived with us on Chrystie street, and he looked young and happy).

Spode House

This has been the last week of our trip. Eileen Egan and I, to explain belatedly, came to England to attend the annual meeting at Spode House, a Dominican retreat house north of Birmingham where, with Dom Bede Griffiths, we had been invited to speak. It was a large and most interesting meeting, and Father Conrad Peplar and Father Simon Blake were most friendly hosts. Those were the two priests we saw the most of. Dom Bede was the priest who received the group which began the community which became Taena, into the Church, so they were happy to have had a visit from him before the conference began.

I cannot give all the details of my trip. I spoke at another meeting of the Pax group in London, to gatherings at Bob and Molly Walsh’s at Oxford, to the anarchist group at the Dryden room of the Lamb and Staff pub in London, had lunch at the House of Lords with Lord Longford, a socialist peer, had tea with Lady Cripps whose daughter married an African whose husband is now in prison in Ghana, and whose grandchildren, two of them, are doing most adventurous things in Thailand and Kenya; visited Denis Knight and his beautiful family in Tunbridge Wells, stayed overnight at Sennon Cove near Land’s End, saw

Penzance and Donald Attwater's wife Dorothy, and their two daughters, lunched on fish and chips, had tea with Eric Gill's brother Cecil Gill in Cardiff. For eight years, before his conversion Cecil had been a medical missionary in New Guinea.

There was a dinner, and then a gathering of all kinds of people engaged in good works at the home of Victor Gollanz and his wife. There was a boat trip up Thames to Greenwich, starting from Westminster Bridge in front of Scotland Yard, and in Greenwich we saw the Cutty Sark, a great sailing vessel made of teakwood, and so great a boat it dominated the streets around. Tea in Greenwich and then by bus to Hempstead where we had a meeting with secular fraternity of Charles de Foucauld.

And now I write at Taena, tomorrow going on to Stanbrook Abbey to see Emily Coleman whom we knew as Emily Scarborough when she wrote the Peter Maurin Farm column for CW eight years ago. Then to London, and Cambridge for a day, and then to Southampton and the boat for home. I will think of many other things that I should have told, such as my afternoon with Hugh Brock, editor of **Peace News** who drove us out to see Muriel Lester, former head of Kingsley Hall who had the privilege of putting up Gandhi on his visit to England in 1931. We saw Epping Forest, Hemstead Heath and visited the graves of Karl and Jenny Marx in Highgate Cemetery.