

On Pilgrimage - June 1956

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Summary: Reflects on a variety of items—the gift of a statue of Mary, expensive house repairs, appeal to help Puerto Rican children, the crafts of bookbinding and spinning, encouraging children to explore nature, and the plight of the mentally ill. (DDLW #708).

We want to thank all the seminarians who sent us invitations to their ordinations, and to assure them that we put their cards in our missals and will remember to pray for them. Thanks is also due to whoever left me the beautiful wooden carved statue of the Blessed Mother who presides over my desk as I work. I came in one day to find it. I do not know whether it was mailed in, or delivered by hand. It might have been one of those days when there were many visitors, many disasters happening, sick to be delivered to hospitals or to be visited in hospitals, etc. Anyway the only way I can express my gratitude is to beg God to bless the donor, which I do often.

Repairs

Ours is a cheerful and a comfortable house, all told, and well worth repairing and brought into conformity with the rather particular building code of the city of New York. We had hoped to put a bathroom for the women on the top floor. As it is now, twelve women, a large family, share one, on the next to the top, although there are capacious sinks on both floors for sponge baths and washing clothes, besides the big laundry in the basement with its automatic washer. But when we saw the figures of the contractor, \$935 for the installation of the bath, we decided to forego that luxury. \$935 would pay the rent of a summer place for all the Puerto Rican children whom Eileen Fantino, Mary Ann McCoy and Helen Russell have been taking care of for the last two summers. Or it would take care of one thousand eight hundred and seventy nights lodging at one of the clean cheap old hotels on the Bowery. How many families in rural sections of our country live on less than \$935 in cash a year!

Appeal

Anyway, we write here an appeal for help for the three girls in East Harlem, begging our readers to send contributions for the vacations of the Puerto Rican children who so sadly need an outing away from our crowded city streets. Last summer they had some blissful times on the beach in Staten Island, but, sad to relate, Florio's is all taken this year. Or children are not wanted, or maybe it is Puerto Ricans, or maybe it is Jesus Christ Himself who is not wanted in **his** poor. We are looking, and Helen, Eileen and Mary Ann are all looking for a place for them, and they would dearly love to get an all-the-year-round place where they could bring their little neighbors for spring and fall weekends and for winter outings too. Maybe St. Joseph has a place in mind for them. Anyway, such help comes when we do our share. So we beg you to remember them and their work, and send what help you can. You certainly will enjoy your own vacation more if you help.

Visitors

Book binding has been added to the crafts practiced at the Peter Maurin farm. We have had the equipment for some time, but an added impetus to the work came with the visit of Liselotte Stern, (wife of Dr. Karl Stern), who helped Deane Mawrer over one weekend to start book binding. Deane has been at it for the last three weekends now, and two products of the craft have come from her hands and been put in the wooden press we found in the carpenter shop.

In turn we showed Mrs. Stern our newly found craft of hand spinning with a spindle, which Tamar and I are engaging in, and I am so fascinated by the occupation that some day I may get up enough nerve to bring my spindle into New York, to the office so that I can spin while talking to visitors. Old copies of National Geographic magazines have innumerable pictures of women and girls spinning together, from every country in the world. We have started making a scrap book of these pictures.

Lauren Ford has provided us with the wool for some years now, from the sheering of her own sheep at Bethlehem, Connecticut (she is a neighbor of Regina Laudis) and this year, Tamar says, she would like to grade the wool more carefully, and take the softest to spin and weave into baby shirts. The coarser wool can go for afghans and scarves, hats, socks, and so on.

There has been an exhibition recently at the Tottenville Public library of the drawings of the children in the art class of the parochial school of Our Lady Help of Christians, and the children of the first and second grades have certainly done their teacher, Miss Doreen Kerreher, credit. She is a splendid teacher.

This exhibition inspired us to plan an exhibit of our own of spinning and weaving.

The Home

Vincenza Baglioni, who with Viera Brna is engaged in Family Service up around Orangeburg, New York, said to me one time that the more she saw of young people the more she realized how their interest needed to be stimulated by a great number of things in the natural order, such as botany, zoology, bird trips, gathering of specimens, swimming and fishing, clam digging and studying the life of woods and shore. Such interest makes for much happiness and joy and gratitude to God for His creation.

And Tamar adds, while we were talking about these things, that it was *the home* that needed to provide all these interests, first of all, rather than the school or the parish or the community. And teachers were giving too much homework and there were too many extra curricula activities now just as there were in the days when she went to school.

While she talked to me, Nickie (seven) rushed in with the Zamarky boys and rushed out again with an entire basket of fruit. "Those bottomless pits," Tamar cried, meaning their stomachs. And she rushed to retrieve some of the fruit for the rest of the children who had not yet come home from school.

In addition to her own seven, she has two or three Zamarkys and three or four Scarpolis around the house after school and on week ends and holidays, but there are four acres and a big sand lot where nothing but bay berries grow, and here it is pitted with underground houses, covered with boards and bits of old carpet, and the trench houses and the tree houses make quite a village. This is the time of year when the flowers and blossoming trees make such beauty all around that the wild disorder of the children (Tamar believes with Don Bosco in expression rather than repression) is all covered over with green shrubs and the lushness of trees.

The Hennessys live a mile away from Peter Maurin Farm and Tamar is always ready to come over to teach a bit of weaving, spinning or knitting to our household which this week was made up of five children and about twenty-two adults. Just a proper sized family.

New Projects

One of the things Liselotte Stern wanted to talk about on her trip to New York was her idea for a "farmatorium" where people on the verge of or recovering from breakdowns can go to relax and learn some of these crafts and reach closer to the good earth and its healing. When plans are more formed, we are hoping she will write about it for **The Catholic Worker**. Meanwhile there is the St. Dymphna Guild in New York which had its annual day of discussion last month at the Convent of the Holy Souls and at which a number of psychiatrists spoke.

We also want to call attention to the book "**When Minds Go Wrong**" by Dr. John Maurice Grimes, M.D., published by Devin Adair, about the present

condition of our state mental hospitals. "Into asylums there have been dumped the old, the decrepit, the inadequate of every sort; with little consideration or question about mental illness, and with less consideration of the need or effectiveness of treatment. There is no more justification for keeping these patients in prison now than there was a century and a half ago for keeping them in chains."

Only those who have had occasion to visit a number of the many mental hospitals around New York begin to realize how vast is the problem of the mentally ill, and how far we are from meeting it with our giant hospitals caring for as many as 15,000 patients. Anyone who has seen these great structures rising from the flat country of Long Island must be startled into the realization that the building of more and more giant hospitals is not solving the problem.

The National Office of **Recovery, Inc.**, at 116 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago 3, Ill., can send out material on the work they are doing in the way of group therapy for ex-patients and the families of patients who need to be educated quite as much as the patients themselves.