

On Pilgrimage - December 1958

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, December 1958, 1, 7.

Summary: A month of travelling and giving talks in Massachusetts, New York, and Indiana. Visits Tamar and the grand children in Vermont. Discusses farming communes and complains about the encroaching State. Admires the Shakers and Hutterites and advocates a personalist and communitarian society. (DDLW #748).

Right after going to press last month, I set out to fill a few engagements. I spoke at a law seminar at Yale, and later the same day at the John Dewey club. Then to Worcester where I was met at the bus by George and Mary Gulick of the Eric Gill Community of Brookfield, who are at present earning their living by baking bread and making stained glass medallions. During the summer they have worked in factories, and in the fall picked apples. This newest of little communities has involved so far Frances and Richard Kemp, Bob Rudolph and Patricia Murphy, who were married in August, and single folk such as Ralph Madsen, Tom O'Donnell, still there, and two of the Roche girls from the group of families at the Upton community, who were visiting for part of the summer. This latter group were formerly St. Benedict's farming commune, a hundred acre farm bought during the depression for a little over a thousand dollars, and used continually since then by families. Since they are not truly a farming commune they consider themselves a community in the sense that a neighborhood is considered a community. Lee and Vickie Pagano lived there for some months last winter and spring, and are now at Provincetown.

The only factory in the town of Brookfield is a paper mill, which has laid off half its men. The factory used to be operated under a patriarchal system, the owner "a just stern man," but it was taken over by the Ludlow Paper company. I met one of the men who worked there, about to be laid off after 21 years of service. He was getting \$55 a week.

The next day I spoke at Assumption College in Worcester, and the next day at Brandeis in Waltham, which is part of Boston area. While in Boston I stayed at the home of Burt and Joanna Housman for one night and for the next at the John Betts at Newton Center. There was a pleasant meeting with friends at the St. Thomas More book shop which is run by Agnes Bourneuf, a delightful place as bookshops in a college neighborhood are when there are comfortable chairs and a feeling of hospitality. Alan Crite has some beautiful Christmas cards on display there. I love his beautiful Madonnas brooding over the slums. You can order from the St. Thomas More Book shop, 33 A Church St., Cambridge 38, Mass.

Brandies

At Brandies I met Sam Shapiro, Sholem Comay and others, and was introduced by Dr. Frank Manuel, a man of great vitality. He had known Fr. Rice of Pittsburgh, so we had a mutual friend. These meetings are arranged by the students of the senior class, I believe, and the meeting the next week following the speaker, there is an appraisal of the speaker by the students and three faculty members, including a psychologist, and the findings are summed up in a mimeographed bulletin which announces also the next speaker. I would like to see the appraisal of my talk, after seeing the one of Victor Reuther's. The judgements of youth are sometimes harsh but I have a great faith in such a group going ever.

Perkinsville

Cecilia Betts drove me to Francis Xavier chapel for the eight-thirty Mass and then to the bus which left at 10:15 for Springfield, Vermont, where Tamar and the children met me at 3:30. Tamar has been spending the day making sausage, head cheese and scrapple and the house smelled good when we arrived. The older children had slicked up the house and David with red headed Hilaire under one arm and a pail of water for the animals in the other hand greeted us at the door. Hilaire is fifteen months old and has been walking since his 12th month and gets into everything. But with seven other children and all their guardian angels to help watch over him, all is well.

Hunting had begun and Eric and Nickie were full of the news of fox and bob cats, rabbits as well as deer, shot by their neighbors. I listened to discussion of guns and bows and arrows, and the prowess of fellow students. School seems to be fun in Vermont. There are only 11 in Becky's class and 14 in Sue's. Becky will be in high school next year. Five of the children are in school now and Maggie will go next year, and tiny Martha will be the oldest at home.

Great changes are taking place in the Hennessy section of the country too, what with a dam being built and many farms and old houses razed, and good roads done away with and neighbors moving away and factories shut down.

While I read Dr. Zhivago and the section about the family going far from Moscow to their old estate and trying to make their living off the land, storing potatoes, carrots, cabbages, making sauerkraut, it seemed to me that a revolution was going on here too, with the state taking over entirely, with little consideration for human rights, or the family but without the violence. In this State, Moses goes ruthlessly ahead with his road building program, cutting through communities, cities, homes. Everything for cars. Nothing for human beings. At least not for the great mass of people who are displaced and can find no comparable cheap housing.

Latest news is that our beach houses face demolition because of a beach highway, totally unnecessary considering the nearness of Hylan Boulevard, which will effectively block the beach from the people. Perhaps we will have some years yet on the beach, but surely we have here no lasting city.

Making Lard

Monday afternoon Tamar and I went to an auctioneer's to buy some big kettles to dry out the lard and on the way home we stopped in the pine woods for mushrooms. It was a still mild day, one of those blue days of November with a smell of snow in the air. But it did not fall while I was there, and Tuesday afternoon I had to leave. Mary Perkins Ryan called for me to drive me to Manchester, to speak at St. Anselm's that night. I had dinner with the Ryan's and after my talk I drove with Joe McDonald twelve miles south of Manchester to spend the night in his beautiful old remodelled farmhouse. He teaches philosophy at St. Anselm's and the students are enthusiastic about him. Early the next morning two students drove me to Boston to catch a bus for Albany. One a young Italian named Rafael told me more about Boston than I had learned from our own group in twenty years. He could have supplied the culture to the cult and cultivation group of former Catholic Workers, and thus make the synthesis Peter Maurin was always talking about.

The ride to Albany was a beautiful one, and I was charmed by an old Shaker community we passed through between Pittsfield and Albany, the great old wooden buildings and round barns still standing after a hundred years. Under New York state law you cannot remodel or build additions on a wooden building such as our farm on Staten Island.

Community

In The New England Homestead there has been a fascinating story "The Queen of the Shakers" running serially and this week's installment tells of the 5,000 Believers working together from New England to the Mississippi with the exchange of goods, which the Mormons keep up to this day. Maple syrup came from New England, silk from silk worms in Kentucky. In addition to farming, there was elaborate merchandising of herbs of all kinds, garden seed, milk, butter, eggs, cheese and poultry. They built up the straw broom industry, made harnessware, grist mills, cotton and woolen mills. They made stoves, ploughs, weaving, spinning, cloth dyeing, book binding, furniture making, tailoring, manufacturing of burlap bags. President Lincoln recognized the community as made up of conscientious objectors to war, and Presidents treated them with respect and visited their communities.

There is an article about community in Harpers' for December, about the Hutterites of South Dakota and the legislation against their buying any

more property. During the month Dr. Karl Stern visited us on his way back to Montreal from Israel where he had been visiting his brother in one of the communal settlements there near the Syrian border and he described the place as a paradise, a land flowing with milk and honey compared with the barren ground of Syria.

Also during the month there were articles by Adlai Stevenson who had been traveling in Siberia, telling of the communal settlements there.

He told of a collective farm in Kazakhstan of 100,000 acres where 1,680 families lived and where everything was raised from grapes, grain, milk and honey, livestock of all kinds including silver foxes, 40,000 sheep and 180 camels.

“Incidentally,” he added, “35 people were assigned to look after 1,500 pigs, which illustrates the labor waste all over the Soviet Union.”

In the next day’s issue of The Times the headlines of a story read, **Half-billion Paid to State Jobless**. There were 354,900 unemployed workers. Another story on the same page called for a Federal code to protect the migrant workers who numbered 35,000 in New York, 20,000 in New Jersey and 10,000 in Pennsylvania. Governor Harriman said that cattle were protected, unloaded for feed and water at stops along the way when they were transported by train. “But there is no such standard for migratory labor,” he added.

Adlai Stevenson’s article continued after his paragraph about “labor waste” in the Soviet Union, – “On each collective farm each family has an acre or so around its house for itself – the amount varies – and can sell any surplus produce in the free market in town. The farmers’ earnings are computed in workday units and paid in cash and produce.” There were clubs and recreation halls, kindergartens and nurseries to take care of the babies while the women worked on the farm.

Former Ambassador Bedell Smith wrote in the same strain of the collective, communal and cooperative farms, and so did the Iowa farmers who visited on an exchange program some years ago. There is always talk of the labor waste, the numbers living in these settlements.

Midwest

In Purdue where I spoke the next week, one of the professors told me that farms out in that rich country of Indiana were worth \$60,000 for two hundred acres and that many of them were run by managers, sometimes one manager taking care of half a dozen farms!

Our huge farms have displaced the family, have done away with private property and personal property and created huge slum areas in the cities where the unemployed depend on the dole from the city and state.

It was of these things that I spoke as I went from one school to another, talking of love of God and love of brother, which should mean that we work for justice for the poor, rather than be silent about the causes of his poverty when we perform the works of mercy.

So often our friends say, in praising us and upholding us against critics, “Disregard all this talk about man and the state, war and peace (pacifism and anarchism) and just consider their sacrifices for the poor!” But if we did not speak the very stones would cry out.

It is our friends and readers visiting us who ask us also what we are doing to “rehabilitate” those who come to us hungry and homeless and sick, and yet do not recognize that all the “propaganda” in **the Catholic Worker** is with that end in view – “to make a kind of society where it is easier for men to be good.” And that society will be a personalist and communitarian one, where each man will work according to his ability and receive according to his need, and where the abundance of one will supply the want of another, to quote Karl Marx and St. Paul respectively.

No Utopias

We certainly recognize the fact that we have here no lasting city, that the poor we will always have with us, that there will always be a need for the works of mercy. We know that true community will not be accomplished by force and we do not uphold it as the only way. But we cannot help but contrast the accounts of Adlai Stevenson with the news accounts of our jobless and our migrants. We cannot help but compare the luxury of West Berlin with the poverty and **purpose** of East Berlin.

Rochester

Between my engagements in New England and Indiana, I stopped off at Rochester to visit St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality. Fr. Benedict Ehmann of Glens Falls, New York, who has given us retreats in the past, gave us a day of recollection in the beautiful chapel which Joe Ciernecke built for the house some years ago. It was good to spend the long rainy day in silence and prayer, and to listen to the conferences Father gave on the Mass, the Mystical Body and Prayer. A good many of the group were present, the Farrens, the Lanzers, the Vidinghoffs and the Scahills and many others. Tommy Scahill used to run the house, and it has never been so homelike since. They are about to have their eleventh child.

Indianapolis

The Episcopalian cathedral had been having a series of talks on the Church and Freedom and I spoke in the parish hall on Sunday night and the next day at

Marian College.

After two weeks of travelling and speaking, I returned to New York to hear the good news that there is a house in the offing which would suit our purpose very well, and which the city would permit us to convert into what they have insisted on classifying as our free hotel or roominghouse.

The news is not yet too good however, when we consider the enormous expenditures that will have to be made to make the front and rear house we contemplate comply with the law.

A bath for every four people!

Sprinkler system. Steel self-closing doors.

Central heating. Hot Water.

Each room with a separate entrance.

There was even talk of an incinerator to be installed at the cost of \$4,000 or \$5,000 to consume our waste! We served roast pork and apple sauce, potatoes and string beans and coffee to five hundred on Thanksgiving day and there was not one small can of waste to be scraped off the plates! Our architect reconsidered however, and decided we could tear down the top story which would do the away with the incinerator required for five story buildings.

However, even with all the rules and regulations met with, our family would have to be cut down to about 25 people instead of the sixty we now care for. Altogether the cost of renovating the buildings and paying the price asked would bring the cost up to \$60,000. This seems to us a gigantic sum to put out even if what we get from the city will cover it. But the building seems to be in a neighborhood not slated for demolition, and the cost of keeping people in flophouses and paying rent for stores, lofts, apartments would eat up that much money in six years.

We are waiting to get the assent of the owner to sell, to find out whether the one tenant will vacate, whether we can raise the money to pay the contractors (we do not know how long the city will take to pay us) and what it all amounts to now is that we go from day to day, hoping and praying things will straighten out.

Last Notice

Since last writing there has been a court order permitting us to remain until January 15, over the protest of the engineers who are busily working away all around us. We have agreed to pay the rent which will amount to \$135 a month, the amount of our taxes, so they call it a nominal rent. When you receive this paper, we will have one month more in Chrystie Street. After that our new office

will be in the loft on Spring Street for some months until we see what the next move is going to be.

Are there any of our readers who will lodge and board some of our family while we wait to get a new house?