

On Pilgrimage - February 1952

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Updates readers about recent events in her daughter's family. Decries the disbanding of a multi-national and interracial fraternal association because of its Communist connections. Says they oppose "atheistic communism," not economic communism based on mutual aid. (DDLW #629).

My column is being written in New York instead of the snowbound middle west because just as I was getting ready to leave, one grandchild, Eric, came down with pneumonia, Susie was suspected of having an attack of jaundice, Beckie had a cough and Mary and Nickie joined the chorus. At the same time I had laryngitis so I could not have talked anyway, and if I cannot talk, I cannot pay my fare from place to place. So the trip will begin on February 11, a feast of our Lady.

Some days are so crowded with the care of invalids, so packed with one form or another of tragedy, and yet there can be a sense of beauty and joy. It always amazes me, and I must write of it, because I am afraid that sometimes our readers get a sense that our lives are full, too full of the most sordid and all but futile endeavor to combat sin, and sickness. We can do our immediate job on the hunger and cold and by working through the outer man, reach the inner.

On this one day when Eric had to go to the hospital with pneumonia, and we found that David's insurance (some kind of insurance connected with his job) had not gone through, and Susie had to have a test to see if she had had an attack of jaundice, we felt pretty low financially and physically and spiritually. Eric had been driven to the hospital in the old car (1932 Chevrolet) with no windows in it, wrapped warmly in a blanket of course. Later we drove on down to the beach, and it was an extremely low tide, and Beckie and Susie and I walked on the sands and picked up shells and listened to the little waves and had a deep sense of enjoyment at the clear cold day and the beauty of the sky and beach around us. During the month someone sent in to Christie St. an enormous conk shell, with a great roar in it of the sea, and when Eric came home from the hospital we gave it to him for a present. It is half as big as he is, and he was so entranced with it that he sleeps with it beside him, rather a hard bedfellow.

Now Susie turns out to be all right, and can start school at St. Louis Academy on Drumgoole Boulevard on February first. Beckie has been going there since September and can now read! She will be seven in April, but Susie will not be six until August so she must go to kindergarten.

The Hennacy family moved from Peter Maurin farm to Cobbett Cottage at 201 Winant Avenue, Rossville, just before Christmas and now they are cozy indeed in a four room house, all seven of them, almost too warm even when the thermometer is down to ten. Of course there is a hall which will be transformed

into another bedroom, and there is a front porch which will be used in summer as a sleeping porch, and there is a big attic, which can be made into three rooms, so they feel they have plenty of room, what with four acres all around them which they are still exploring. It is mostly brush, but there are fruit trees, and four big mulberry trees which make an outdoor sitting room, and on mild days they sit out in garden chairs and the children play in the sandy soil which is very good for fruits and vegetables.

The little house has been occupied by tenants for the last ten years, and has not been painted in ten years. So there is a lot of work to do to make the place presentable. When David can close in a room in the attic, and get his books together again, he will reopen his Distributist Book Stall.

As it is, he is taking orders for Gill, Belloc, Chesterton, Cobbett, Fr. McNabb, and other distributists. To earn a living he commutes every morning, a two hour trip to New York. Half a mile down the road, the busses run, and right across Arthur Kill Road, is a brief stretch of meadow and then Kill Van Kull and on foggy nights they can hear the fog horns on the freighters which come into Socony Port nearby. They live on a road with few other houses, they are surrounded by miles of scrubby fields and woods, and yet to the north of them a mile away there is the biggest Standard Oil Storage plant in the world, and just across Kill Van Kull there is the great industrial area of New Jersey with its factories and chimneys pouring out fumes over the surrounding country side. A far cry from West Virginia, which they were forced to leave because of the growing needs of a growing family.

I give this little report of the Hennacy family because if I don't keep up with their adventures in my column, our friends and readers write in to ask about them. And there are so many families, struggling with jobs, commuting, and in these winter months, so many mothers with coughing, sneezing, teething, housebound children. Whether in city or country, they feel isolated, and it is good for them to remember how they share the same trials and bear each other up with their courage.

Sometimes when I worry about Tamar being so much alone with her little ones I arrive to find her happily engaged in making donuts, and Susie sweeping the room, and Eric putting things away (all of which tidiness is immediately undone by Nickie, the Terror, who is at that age!) On good days they go out to compost the garden, to rake weeds, or sickle paths through the woods, but cold, rainy, sleety and snowy days they are marooned. "The days are so long and the weeks are so short," Tamar sighs. The mystery of time.

Living in three different places as I have been this last month, St. Joseph's house, Chrystie street, the Peter Maurin farm and Cobbett Cottage, I feel torn between these three homes. In

heaven there is neither time nor space, so we can be with everybody, everywhere at the same time, days without end. It sounds fantastic but you know what I mean. The more you love in this life, the more you suffer, and yet who would

be without love? God is love, the beatific vision is love; in Him we possess all things.

All Men Are Brothers

This is a refrain which I love. It is the title of a great Chinese classic, it is the theme of the last movement of the ninth symphony of Beethoven. I thought of it as I sat at an IWO protest meeting last week with Jew and Gentile, Negro and Puerto Rican, a multi-national and interracial fraternal association founded in the depths of the depression, in 1930 and which is now ordered liquidated by the courts as a public hazard because of the political beliefs of its officers. It is admitted that this fraternal insurance company had a high rating. But the hazard consisted of the danger, in view of the world situation, of the IWO officials turning over their assets to Moscow in the event of a war. Even if such a thing as this should take place, the money loss would be a minor thing compared to the blow now struck at democratic principles by this hysterical action against this fraternal organization. This insurance company was founded during the depression as a recognition of the fact that no matter how much public relief was given, no matter how much alms, men needed to build a sense of mutual aid as well as provide by work and thrift for such eventualities as accident, sickness and death in the family. This corporation provided the lowest cost insurance in the country for Negroes and all lowly, as well as for those in hazardous occupations. Negroes were accounted a bad risk by other insurance companies run on the profit motive because of their bad housing and overcrowding. There was too high a sickness and death rate among them. It is to be remembered too that the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company that went in for housing prohibited Negroes from moving into their buildings. Many of them employ little Negro help. Workers engaged in hazardous occupations were also enabled to enjoy low rate insurance.

Our breadlines are full of men who have not been able to collect the benefits they have earned, who have not been covered by social security, who have suffered long delays in getting their pensions. Many of them have such insufficient pensions that they are forced to supplement their monthly checks by the meal they get from us on the soup line.

If we are trying to see Christ in our neighbor, we must see too his dignity, his worth, his position as a son of God. And to do this it is not enough just to help out in an emergency. "It is necessary to build the kind of society where it is easier for men to be good," Peter Maurin used to say, and that would be a society where people were able by their work to sustain themselves, but were also, by mutual aid, able to bear one another's burdens, when by sickness, or accident men were unable to work.

IWO reached those whom no other fraternal organization for one reason or another were able to reach. There was a program of cultural activities built up

along with the insurance program, to give Ukrainians, Poles, Italians, Germans, Hungarians, Negroes and Puerto Ricans a sense of their rich heritage in song, dance and story. Mind and body and in a sense spirit also were cared for, though with the Marxist background of the leaders the soul was denied. The work was good, and only God can judge the intentions of the heart of the leaders.

We need always to remember that it is **atheistic**communism which we oppose, but as for economic communism—it is a system which has worked admirably in religious orders for two thousand years. The zeal of a capitalist country to oppose communism, a country where the spirit of man is not considered and the holy days are ignored, is not the zeal of a religious spirit. The bishops once stated (was it in 1929?) that many of the social aims of the Communists were Christian aims and must be worked for by Catholics. If our parishes and communities had credit unions, maternity guilds and insurance benefit societies which reached God's poorest, even then we would have no right to suppress those organizations which do not agree with our political or religious point of view. We believe in freedom of association, freedom of speech, the freedom of Christ.

New schedule for my speaking trip: Washington, D.C., Feb. 12; Pittsburgh, Feb. 13, 14; Lexington, Feb. 15; Tell City, Ind., Feb. 16, 17; Louisville, Ursuline Academy, Feb. 18; St. Louis, Feb. 20; Pio Decimo Press, Baden Station; Rhineland, Mo.; Memphis, Tenn.; Ozark, Arkansas; Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Feb. 27.