

% Dorothy Day

1939, Chapter Four, pp. 67 - 80.

Summary: A mixture of colorful stories of guests' travails, daily tasks, and small pleasures. Includes a Peter Maurin presentation on Socialism's faults and the need for action based on a supernatural foundation. Reflects on St. Therese's Little Way as a way to overcome discouragement. (DDLW #439).

1

It is a hot, hot night. I have just been up to see Margaret at Bellevue, she has been very ill, first with a high temperature and then a subnormal temperature. She had a little baby girl three weeks ago, and after she got back here she had a relapse and Dorothy and I ran around with bottles and diapers in our hands for days. Finally, Margaret got so bad we had to call an ambulance and cart both her and the baby back. Tonight she seemed well and cheerful, but I think they will keep her another week. The baby is in a well-baby ward and gaining day by day. Dorothy and Tom are up at a Stadium concert tonight and were in for a few minutes. After I have finished writing I am going to Union Square where the first band concert and dance in the open air will be held from eight to ten. La Guardia is instituting lots of things such as taking down the railings in parks, so people can walk on the grass, opening new playgrounds and having these open-air dances and theatres.

On Wednesday ten of us distributed anti-war leaflets in Union Square and all but got mobbed by the Communists. However, a few of them came to our Wednesday night meeting afterward and continued the discussion****until one o'clock. It was a very good meeting.

Teresa is still down in Staten Island. She looks wonderfully well. She instructs the other kids in seashore life and has a wonderful aquarium full of eels and killies and some lovely specimens of seaweed. I am going down tomorrow and I languish to think of it. It is so hot and stifling here. . . . But I seem to thrive on it. I've written four articles and have three more to write. I get about fifteen to twenty dollars each for them.

With Margaret in the hospital and Eileen gone south one would think we would be swamped with work, but so many people walk in to help get meals and do dishes and take letters that somehow things always seem to get done anyway.

Next Monday I go up to Stamford, N. Y., to speak, and back here by the fifteenth—the Feast of the Assumption. Then the new issue will be coming out and we'll be working on that. How the summer flies! We make our plans from day to day and I try not to think of the Fall, and all of Peter's plans for a school every night for ten months. The prospect of such a grind, I confess, appalls me. We already work fifteen hours a day.

Just heard the Cesar Franck Symphony which always makes me feel so happy. There is a man in Huxley's *Point Counterpoint* who realizes the existence of God when he hears a certain piece of music, and that is how I feel when I hear the triumphant third movement. My heart is lifted to God. It is a prayer of thanksgiving that God is there. . . .

The goodness of people makes my heart expand too in happiness. Last week or so when we were closing the House of Hospitality for the summer there was an unpleasant job on hand. Most of the girls took very good care****of their beds indeed. But the two old ladies, Emily and Marie, who came to us from the Municipal Lodging House, were not so clean. They were two poor old creatures, ragged and miserable, who walked in one afternoon in the midst of a raging blizzard, and they didn't complain of being wet and cold and hungry. They just said, sadly:

"We can't always be young."

They had been scrubwomen, but their days of getting work were past in these hard times. They had had no work for the last year. So they became our guests and most inoffensive, humble, retiring guests they were. They could not get out of the habit of getting up and out, as they were forced to do at the "Muni." Every morning saw them at early Mass and they were gone for the day, to sit around the armories, probably.

It took me several weeks before I got up enough courage to talk openly about how desirable it would be for them to have baths. They had such a lodging house smell about them!

But they never did take care of their beds. So when we closed the place for the summer—they had gone on Home Relief and had a little room of their own by this time—their beds had to be cleaned and all the other beds, too.

I was alone in the office that day. Dorothy and Tom had gone down to the country for a much needed rest from the city. I bought two gallons of benzene and some paint brushes and was ready for work.

And then Tina and Paula came in, hot and tired with****the continued humidity. They willingly offered to help me, in spite of the fact that it was a Catholic piece of work. If it was a matter of mailing out the paper or helping distribute it, they would not have done it. After all, they are the Opposition, of the Trotskyite faith. But this was a matter of working for humanity, cleaning up after our guests of the winter.

So we went down the street carrying our pails, and we got to work. Mrs. Post had cleaned the apartment pretty well, so all was neat and tidy when we got there. There were twelve beds, four apiece,—three of them in unspeakable condition, because of the carelessness of our guests.

Tina and Paula, even when they are in house dresses, always have an air, thanks to their mother's skill as a dressmaker. Tina had on a brown linen, her coolest

dress, which she wore neat and pressed for “best,” and rumpled, but still stylish, for every day. Paula had on a blue blouse and a clinging gray skirt. They are both artists by trade, and it was with the touch of an artist that they set to work. It was a picture to see their graceful young bodies bent over the beds. Tina’s fair hair curled around her face with the heat; Paula was flushed and dark. And as they worked, they talked: of revolutionary technique, of the Opposition and the class war tactics which were directed by the orthodox Communists against them. They talked of the street speaking that Paula had to do that night. And they worked!

What good and faithful friends they are! I was intensely grateful to them, and the work was made easier by their presence.

Margaret continues ill in the hospital, with fever every day. But her baby is thriving. We do not know when she will be able to leave. It is funny how responsibilities suddenly loom large and awful in the dead of the night.

I rush headlong on about my work during the days, but often in the dead of the night I awake terrified at the responsibilities which we assume. It was the same with the House of Hospitality when we were starting it. It seemed like such a terrific job, but it really turned out all right.

And now about Margaret’s baby. It is here. It must be with us and Margaret must, too. What if it is a delicate baby? What if it cries all day about the office? What if it should get sick? What if Margaret becomes frivolous now that she is no longer in a helpless condition, starts to dye her hair again, put on lipstick and eyebrow pencil and go out on an evening, only to go through the whole sad tale again? What if she disappears and leaves us the baby? What if we cannot take care of her as we should?

But all those things are in the future. I recall St. Teresa, a headlong soul if there ever was one.

2

Peter was talking at dinner tonight:

"The NRA is pragmatism in politics. Experimentation without theory is back of it. Let’s try—let’s try! Bump your head against the wall and then find it’s hard. Try everything but the door—and only then the door. First****the RFC, then the NRA, the AAA, CCC, PWA, CWA, FERA, and now it is no longer emergency administration, but rehabilitation—one foot on the land the other on industry. Attempting something without trying to get at the root of things.

"Socialism is the state doing things for people instead of people doing things for each other. It is opposed to Communism, the ideal Communism of the Church which means people doing things for each other—the corporal works of mercy.

"Socialism never implies a mode of living. Socialists believe the state will force people to be good. . . . Norman Thomas criticized MacDonald for not having a philosophy of labor. But Socialism has no philosophy of labor. Socialism is gradualism. Gradually the state will take over everything. . . .

"But Socialism is founded on the doctrines of Karl Marx and Engels, just as Communism is. Communism does not pretend to be Communism now. They are aiming towards Communism, they say, when the state shall have 'withered away,' to use their own phrase. Right now it is Socialism in Russia. It is the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. It is the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. A dictatorship of a class instead of a dictatorship of an individual.

"Socialism is diametrically opposed to Catholicism because it is essentially materialist in aims and leaves entirely out of accounting our first beginning and our last end, which is God.

"The problems of the day are fundamentally ethical problems. The problem which faces us is not of fighting Communists, of which so many young priests speak so enthusiastically and so ignorantly, but of changing the hearts and souls of men.

"Here is what Karl Adam says:

"'Today, when poverty stalks the streets and the idol of Mammon disinherits millions and keeps them in permanent servitude, pitilessly destroying the happiness of family life, and with unparalleled levity inflaming class hatred—even today there is still room and a fertile field for the Savior's work to be done by the Church.

" 'But it cannot be done merely by beautiful sermons.

"Even the great social organizations are no longer sufficient, not even the devoted labours of charitable societies.

"The only remedy is a new life in the Holy Ghost, a return of all of us to the paradox of the supernatural, a determined assent to the poor, crucified Jesus. That is the road to the rebirth of the West; there is no other way.

"The path to reform is then clear. But indeed, when describing this path, our heart fears and we would like to exclaim with the Apostles: Lord, who then can be saved?

" 'It is quite evident to us that we of the West will not of our own accord set foot upon this path. . . .

"But are not all things possible with God? Perhaps the Lord Christ will call again from His Church apostles and saints, who, attired in the strength from on high, will bring a new spring into His Church.

"Perhaps He will give us a second St. Francis, a saint with****a burning heart, who will seek and love poverty in human life in the brutal nakedness of its reality, in the many forms of its oppressiveness, narrowness and savagery; who will set

out daily with His brethren and himself bear side by side with His children the hard yoke of dull factory-work, to share with them and lead them in to the wedding-feast.

"Or perhaps God will come to us in storm and tempest and we shall have to descend again into the catacombs in order to find Christ.

"I cannot tell, but this much I know; whether God's grace renews us in the whispering of the breeze or the roar of the storm, it will renew us only by making us small again.

"'. . . What are we to do, oh my brothers, my sisters? We are the collaborators of Christ, Christ's soldiers in the battle against anti-Christ. Perhaps Christ needs but three hundred men to overthrow the Amalekites. Perhaps only a dozen men of the people would suffice Him as they sufficed once before.'

3

Today we are not contented with little achievements, with small beginnings. We should look to St. Teresa, the Little Flower, to walk her little way, her way of love. We should look to St. Teresa of Avila who was not content to be like those people who proceeded with the pace of hens about God's business, but like those people who on their own account were greatly daring in what they wished to do for God. It is we ourselves that we have to think about, no one else. That is the way the saints worked. They paid attention to what they were doing and if others were attracted to them by their enterprise, why, well and good. But they looked to themselves first of all.

Do what comes to hand. Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with all thy might. After all, God is with us. It shows too much conceit to trust to ourselves, to be discouraged at what we ourselves can accomplish. It is lacking in faith in God to be discouraged. After all, we are going to proceed with His help. We offer Him what we are going to do. If He wishes it to prosper, it will. We must depend solely on Him. Work as though everything depended on ourselves, and pray as though everything depended on God, as St. Ignatius says.

One young fellow wants to get out and demonstrate. Wants United Front with the Communists because so many of our aims of social justice are the same. Wants action, shouting, brandishing of placards, clubs, a fight, in other words. Demands, not appeals. Class war again. Hate your enemies. Which is all wrong.

After all, we are not working for the dictatorship of the proletariat, so why work with the Communists? We believe not in acquisitive classes but functional classes. But we are not going to achieve any reform by going out and shooting all the capitalists even though we do not believe in the capitalists' system. (Personally, I'd rather shoot all the advertising men, all the moving picture men who have corrupted the minds and the desires of the youth of the country.)

John Erit wishes to work through the state. To write letters to Assemblymen, Congressmen, work for better laws, minimum wage, eight-hour day, abolition of child labor. These are all palliatives. (It is interesting that the Young Communist League opposed the child labor amendment just as the reactionaries did throughout the country. And they opposed it on almost the same grounds that****the Catholics did. They did not want this present state to interfere with the rights of youth. They did not wish to be limited in their desire to work. Communists are getting back to the idea that work is a noble thing a necessity for man).

The Catholic youth group which meets here on Wednesday nights also wants to be up and doing. They want action. They want definite things to do. They want membership.

It is all right to want definite things to do. Let them model themselves after the Communist youth groups and give out literature, speak at meetings on subjects on which they have informed themselves. To what purpose is all this speaking and distributing of literature which the Communists do?

To change the hearts and minds of men, of course, but towards Communism.

Let us do the same thing. Let us canvass blocks, factories, schools, form groups to study, not Marxism, but the encyclicals of the Popes—the writings of the Church on social questions as well as on the liturgy. The two should go together. There should be daily Mass, a community act, as well as the individual work which we must each do. We believe in the Communion of Saints, we know that in the act of the Mass we are associated with a great body, the Church militant, the Church suffering, the Church triumphant.

But why should they worry about numbers? They want something to show for their efforts. Perhaps there is the desire for power, for excitement there. They want huge mass meetings, pageants, demonstrations, such as the youth movement has in Belgium and France.

Not long ago I read the life of Lenin by his widow.

She wrote of a meeting which was held in Paris not so many years ago when twenty or so people attended, and she wrote glowingly of what a splendid meeting it was. Lenin****was an exile and gathered his few followers around him wherever he was, and he and his wife thought their meeting of twenty—the usual number we have on these hot summer evenings—a goodly gathering.

And now, not so many years after, this man has taken possession of one hundred and sixty millions of people, one-sixth of the globe, and has established his rule, his dictatorship of the proletariat, and the people revere him as their saint.

And our youth dares to be discouraged, with Christ as its leader, with the Church at its back,—its wealth in writings, the very deeds and virtues of its saints to draw upon,—and wishes for numbers, for demonstrations, for something to do!

It is overcast, drizzling, warm. "The ear is not content with hearing, nor the eye with seeing." I'm thinking of this because I'm listening to the Symphonic Hour on the radio and they are broadcasting Brahms' First Symphony.

I'm enjoying it very much, though Margaret bothers me with remarks about there being no butter; Tom asks for****stencils, the baby frets, etc. Even so, I enjoy it. But we cannot depend on our senses at all for enjoyment. What gives us keen enjoyment one day we listen to with indifference the next; the beauties of the beach arouse us to thanksgiving and exultation at one time and at another leave us lonely and miserable. "It is vanity to mind this present life, and not to look forward unto those things which are to come."

Hardships to offer up. Going to bed at night with the foul smell of unwashed bodies in my nostrils. Lack of privacy. But Christ was born in a stable and a stable is apt to be unclean and odorous. If the Blessed Mother could endure it, why not I? Also, Christ had no place to lay His Head in the years of His public life. "The birds of the air have their nests and the foxes their holes, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His Head."

Yesterday Monsignor Scanlan, the Rector of the Diocesan Seminary and the Censor of the diocese, honored us with a visit to tell us about his and the Cardinal's approval of our work. He says he wishes to approve a spiritual adviser for us, to be consulted on doctrinal matters only, and not on such subjects as strikes or labor in general, or legislation. Those are matters on which we are free to express our opinions.

He seemed to think we would not like this (though we are glad) and assured us it was only to facilitate our progress—that they would give us public approval if they thought it would not hinder us in our work.

Margaret came in with the carriage filled with the baby and vegetables. Monsignor blessed the baby and, incidentally, our food for the evening meal. Margaret would not put tomatoes on the table because they had not been blessed and she wanted this an entirely blessed meal!

Wrote an appeal and a financial report to send out.

I suppose it is a grace not to be able to have time to take or derive satisfaction in the work we are doing. In what time I have, my impulse is to self-criticism and examination of conscience, and I am constantly humiliated at my own imperfections and at my halting progress. Perhaps I deceive myself here too, and excuse my lack of recollection. But I do know how small I am and how little I can do and I beg You, Lord, to help me for I cannot help myself.

A quiet evening. Mr. Minas and I have just finished our usual late evening repast, cocoa, and bread and mustard or black olives. Mr. Minas sprinkles his bread with red pepper.

He is a little thin man with long white hair, a yellow face, greenish eyes with immense pupils and a predatory nose. The men who work with us get very well fitted out with suits somehow or other, but their shoes are not so good. Mr. Minas' turn up at the toes, which somehow fits in with his Oriental appearance. He is very clean always, and before he uses cups or spoons, carefully rinses them. He is always on the lookout for cockroaches and the funny little silverfish bugs which run around the kitchen drive him frantic. Always red ants are getting into the ice-box. Right now the cockroaches are under cover and not a bedbug has been seen for months. So at present he is at peace. A month ago we had fleas in my side of the house. They are gone since Tom went around with the spray gun. Now there are only****centipedes on my side of the house and the funny silver bugs on Mr. Minas'.

He is very fond of our black cat which Mary Sheehan named Social Justice. He washes her face and paws carefully every day and feeds her a little bit of everything just now, Parmesan cheese, for instance, and she is thirsty and is drinking the goldfish water, terrifying the three fish.

He writes poetry in beautiful Armenian script and carries around his notebook pinned with a safety pin to his pocket ever since he lost it this summer. That was a tragedy—we all felt that his poetry represented everything to him, all that our faith means to us. We started praying to St. Anthony that it would be returned and the next day a young Episcopalian boy came in with the manuscript. Margaret insisted he was St. Anthony in disguise.

We have been reading Dostoevsky, Mr. Minas and I, for the last few months. I've had *Crime and Punishment* and he, *The Idiot*, both of us re-reading them. I had only Sundays and late evenings, but he went around with his under his arm continually, trying to find a quiet corner, which is always difficult around here.