

Day After Day - February 1936

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Heading off by train on a speaking trip she gives a vivid portrayal of the shenanigans in her car. Notes the enthusiastic spreading of the Catholic Worker movement as she meets with groups of Campions and college groups in Pittsburg, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City and Wichita. (DDLW #298).

On the Road

When I left the office of THE CATHOLIC WORKER, Saturday evening, January 24, the boys (Campions and members of the staff) had just finished washing dishes singing Gregorian over the pots and pans. They finished up with a flourish and the chorus of "The Music Goes 'Round and Around." It was the first time that I heard it. But before the night was over, I had heard it at least a thousand times.

It was an excursion train to Pittsburgh, cheaper even than a bus. It left the Pennsylvania station at eight thirty in the evening (I was accompanied there by D. Weston, P. Jimenez and the baggage was gallantly carried by Stanley Vishnewsky, on whom I enjoined the duty of maintaining as much holy silence as possible during my absence.) The train was crowded, but those who had been lucky enough to get two seats turned back one of them, tore them apart and with the help of suit cases constructed a rude berth on which they stretched out under overcoats and snored through the night. It was frightfully cold near the windows, and at the same time, the cars were overheated. Soon there was a little of lunches, of cigarette butts, a haze of smoke, and the constant din of people talking. One young girl, six seats ahead, who was traveling with a girl friend and a young man, on their way to one of the mining towns this side of Pittsburgh, discussed birth-control in a loud and giddy way. "I'd have more sense than have a raft of children, this day and age," she was saying.

Four young men behind me had a bottle of whiskey and became more raucous as the night wore on. Finally, by the time we reached Harrisburg, one of them had fallen in the vestibule, slit open his head and they all left the train with him to have him sewed up hoping to catch another train two hours later. That left

an extra seat for me, and a friendly neighbor constructed a berth for me where I could stretch out and attempt to rest.

Before we got to Pittsburgh, two of the cars broke apart and we were an hour or so waiting. We had to transfer to another train and there we listened to the tail end of what had been an all night vaudeville minstrel show, led by a pert young woman who stood on one of the seats and made wise cracks and led in the singing. She gave imitations of Gracie Allen for the remaining four hours of the trip, and every word was greeted with shouts of laughter. One of the most killingly finny of her cracks was "That's my story and I'm stuck to it." The merriment after that one lasted at least ten minutes. It made no difference that there was a baby wailing at one end of the car, and that a tired and sad faced father was walking down the aisle with a heavy three year old fretting boy.

Pittsburgh

****In Pittsburgh I had time to go to mass at Father Cox's Chapel of the Good Samaritan (old St. Patrick's had burnt down last March.) His district is shut in by freight yards and train tracks, storehouses and commission houses. It is one of those desolate city slum neighborhoods, but Father Cox's heart is there in the work for his people and he loves it.

When I remarked on the beauty of the service that morning—all the children had joined in singing a Gregorian Mass, and they sang it heartily—Father Cox told me that he had 700 oblates of St. Benedict in his parish and he himself was an oblate of the White Benedictines of Mt. Olivet.

Cleveland

In this city there was recently held a convention of the American League Against War and Fascism, at which fourteen students of John Carroll University, under the leadership of Mr. Cikrit, S. J., distributed about 8,000 leaflets defining the Catholic position on war and dictatorships in general. Some of the students were at work at four thirty in the morning with the mimeographing of leaflets. They had a number of discussions with Communists who attended the League conference, on one occasion gathering in the Jesuit's room for a discussion which lasted until two o'clock in the morning.

At an evening meeting in Cleveland at which I spoke, two Negro women offered their help in opening a headquarters, stating that they had a friend who offered to pay the rent and they asked for and received immediately the cooperation of the college students to get the project under way. They already have plans for the evening meetings and lectures, and the store will be used as a distribution

center and meeting place. The work of the Boston Champions was what inspired the Cleveland Negroes in this step. This is the first city in which the Negroes have taken the initiative in starting a meeting place and giving the movement a foothold, and all honor to them.

Chicago

****In Chicago I spoke at Rosary College where there was an animated discussion of race relations, a discussion which will be continued on my way back east at the end of the month.

St. Louis

A meeting of the Champions of St. Louis was held at Father Dempsey's Working Girls' Home which has been open to meetings of the group. They also have for their meetings the Tertiary Hall of the Franciscans who have offered them co-operation in their work. Both Louis Lanvenmeyer and Donald Gallagher have been east to meetings and weekends of the Champions in New York, and we hope that more will be joining us for visits next summer at the meetings held at the farming commune. Cyril Echele of St. Louis has already joined the group in New York for good. All the members in St. Louis are ardent propagandists and in order to intensify their effect they have divided the work among themselves, groups taking up such activities as peace, race relations, co-operatives, the agrarian problem and taxation, and various other subjects. They have met faithfully once a week since last July, and have sold and distributed during that time around ten thousand copies of THE CATHOLIC WORKER. They are planning to use their force as a group to defend one of the leaders of the tiff miners strike which took place last year in southern Missouri about twenty miles south of St. Louis.

Kansas City

****I received gracious hospitality at St. Mary's hospital in this city. I had an hour and a half to make my connections to reach Wichita by evening, and I went to the hospital at eight, hoping to find Mass being offered there at that hour. But the Masses were over. One of the sisters kindly offered to call the chaplain that I might at least receive communion and afterwards they served me breakfast. Inasmuch as I did not introduce myself as representing any group, I thought their welcome to the stranger was one of the friendliest acts I had met along the road.

Wichita

Here in Wichita, in this flat part of southern Kansas, there has been much interest in THE CATHOLIC WORKER. It was the Sodality Union of Kansas which sponsored my visit here to speak at their meeting, and the Sacred Heart Junior College which sponsored the public talk in Wichita which was very well attended. The sodalists came from all over this diocese some of them setting out at four o'clock in the morning in order to reach the meeting at ten, many of them coming 180 miles, through zero weather, with a sleet storm complicating the trip.

Blizzards and sleety pavements prevented me from keeping some engagements in western Kansas, but tonight, the weather is clearing a little, though it is just as cold, I am going west by bus to Pratt and speak to farmers there. I enjoy this open, flat country of the middle west, and it is familiar to me as I spent eight years in the middle west in the past. I have been the guest of Mrs. Angela Clendenning and her sister Madeleine Aaron, authors of many study club text books, the *Mystical Body of Christ Series*, and *Catholic Action Series*. Right now as I write I am surrounded by an entire set of St. Thomas, reference books of all kinds and an entire bookcase of nature books which would delight Teresa's heart. Beside me there is a fat old cat, named Contento, grunting amiably when I speak to him.

And now, after a day and a half of complete leisure, I am setting out again on my travels which will take me all through the state of Kansas, down through Oklahoma, Tennessee, back through Chicago, and then home. So this account will have to be continued in the next issue.