

On Pilgrimage - February 1975

By Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, February 1975, 2, 7.

Summary: Contemplates the mysteries of birth and death, the continuing strength of the youth and peace movements, examples of Peter Maurin's "Green Revolution," and the passing of her long-time friend Maisie Ward. (DDLW #547).

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, let all that is within me bless His holy Name."

I know nowhere else to turn except to Scripture—The Bible—to express exuberant emotion—joy and sorrow, thanksgiving, adoration, or petition.

So, this morning at seven o'clock, with the winter sun gilding the skies, I turn to the psalms to express my joy and thanksgiving.

My granddaughter Maggie has just given birth in January, in West Virginia, to her first child, a boy. Tamar, my daughter, phoned me from Vermont to tell me about it.

Last month I wrote of the death of two of our former Catholic Workers and now I write of birth—the mystery of new life which is always sending up, even in the depths of winter from under snow and ice, new, green shoots. Birth and death, great mysteries;—joys and sorrows, exultation and anguish, how close they are. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, let all that is within me bless His holy Name."

I wonder if Tamar, my daughter, is remembering how she herself had her fourth child, also a son, on a winter night in West Virginia—all by herself, while her husband floundered through mud and snow to help release the midwife's car which had bogged down on muddy roads. The other three children slept peacefully through the great event. What fears and crises we all live through!

I cannot help write personally because many of you, our readers, have lived through it all, one way or another. (When I read the personal pronoun "I" in **David Copperfield**, I myself am David Copperfield.)

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free—we are all one body, in Christ," St. Paul wrote. "We are all members, one of another." Christ said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." And the old I.W.W., that "subversive" organization to which I once belonged, had as their slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all." (There is nothing so radical, or subversive as Christianity.)

Peace Movement

Last month, someone asked Dick Gregory what had happened to the youth movement and the peace movement, and he replied that it was **stronger than ever**. All over the country the young are "opting out" of this crazy social order of ours. One must question the use of the word "order." Sometimes I recall

that dread paragraph in Job, describing hell as a place where “no order is, but everlasting horror dwelleth,” which is sometimes descriptive of parts of our war-torn, famished world.

What Dick Gregory meant by his encouraging words, which I recognize as true, is the fact that radical youth on all sides of us are recognizing that everything starts with their individual selves. They are becoming personalists, making a beginning of a truly “personalist and communitarian” revolution which is based on voluntary poverty and manual labor. Peter Maurin said: “Be what you want the other fellow to be.”—instead of wasting good energy in attacking or resisting others.

To be truly nonviolent is to “resist not evil,” turn the other cheek, put aside all power, walk another mile, give up coat and cloak too. It sounds like insanity to talk like this, repeating the words of Jesus, yet over and over again circumstances in our lives force us into this position. It is taking up our cross and following Him, Who said “My cross is easy—my burden light.”

The Little Way

To get down to cases—there is a strong, vital, healthy movement going on among the young in many parts of the country. They are getting back to the land, emphasizing voluntary poverty, manual labor, the crafts, getting a piece of land near others, clearing it and making a start. If they want the cash for tools, etc., they have to take any odd job and earn it. If they want shelter, they have to cut logs for cabins and build them.

We are seeing plenty of this activity in the Catholic Worker Movement, and among Peacemakers and other groups. It makes the heart rejoice and fill with hope, and even though it seems that wars will never end, and suffering will never cease, man will not give up hope. “In the Cross is joy of spirit,” is a sentence from Thomas A. Kempis.

Chuck and Sandy in West Hamlin, West Virginia have become, for us, leaders in what Peter called the Green Revolution. The phrase has been used several times in relation to the other movements, so Chuck and Sandy are changing the name of their paper, which up to this time has been called **The Green Revolution**, to **The Mountain Worker**. Consistently, Chuck Smith, the editor, has emphasized most perfectly the personalist aspect of the land movement. The hollow and hills of their acreage in West Virginia had only a cabin when they began. They are only now working on a barn. Joined by Sandy soon after he started, Chuck has purposely kept small. Compelled by visitors, they were forced to build a guest house, which holds only two. No-one is encouraged to take over for their own that visitor’s room. The readers of **The Mountain Worker** (until now **The Green Revolution**) visit for discussion or clarification of their own thinking. They participate briefly in the work and go on their way, perhaps

more committed to a new way of life. Fortunately, most young ones have bed rolls and “sleep out.”

Some have returned to acquire acreage in the West Virginia mountains, so now a land trust has been formed. There is cooperative food buying among them of rice and other staples impossible to raise. I think there are five or six farms involved now, including Maggie’s and Bill’s.

Some of the best all around accounts of this ferment which is going on, among the young especially, is in **The Peacemaker**, 1255 Paddock Hills Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45229. This small packed newspaper deals extensively and specifically in works for peace, listing all those imprisoned for conscience-refusing conscription; one valiant woman is confined on Terminal Island for refusal to pay taxes (Martha Tranquilli, Terminal Island, San Pedro, Ca. 90731). All those activities which we Catholics call “works of mercy,” are also performed by many Protestant, Quaker, and other groups in the country.

We ourselves feel very close to The Peacemakers. For some years now there have been summer Peacemaker Conferences at our farm at Tivoli. One of the editorial contributors of this extraordinarily interesting sheet, Peggy Scherer, organizer of last summer’s conference at Tivoli, stayed on with us and is giving us a year of her life—a wonderful contribution. When it comes to doing a hard job, the first person one thinks of is Peggy. She is always on hand, takes her turn at every job, whether cooking or shopping or driving. The St. Joseph’s House family at First St. has gotten used to seeing this small, young woman piloting our huge (comparatively speaking) truck, gift of the United Parcel Service, several times a month back and forth between Maryfarm and St. Joseph’s House. It is an occasion for car-hopping, of course, especially during the dull winter months. The tasks in the city, which call for a truck, are getting our mailing out (almost 85,000 copies of the **CW** each month) and collecting food at Hunt’s Point market. The truck never goes back to the farm empty. It is hard to believe, but rumor has it that seventeen car-hopped their way to Tivoli the last time Peggy drove down.

Another Death

And now, as I finish this column, I am told of the death yesterday of Maisie Ward. I am so thankful I had that last visit with her and Frank Sheed, her husband, New Year’s Eve, and we had a very happy afternoon, Eileen Egan and I. She had been ill for some time and grieving that she had to lay aside her work for India, which had meant much travelling, writing, and lecturing these last years. Eileen Egan is writing a review of Maisie’s last book for this issue, and of Frank’s latest one too.

My grateful memory of her begins with her visits to us in 1933, when we had just begun to publish the **Catholic Worker**. Sheed and Ward published Peter Maurin’s **Easy Essays**, in England and America, and my book some years

later—**House of Hospitality**. Maisie and her husband were our first friends and over the years our most faithful ones. My heart aches with sympathy for Frank and his two children, Wilfrid and Rosemary. But God had “blessed her with length of days,”—she was 85 when she died and hers was a full and fruitful life. I, too, will miss her. Frank Sheed called up to tell us about the “wake,” and the very large funeral parlor, near St. Vincent Ferrer’s Church where the Mass was to be celebrated the next morning, was packed to the doors with a multitude of friends. The church, next morning, was filled too, and long lines of people whose lives had been touched by Maisie Ward went to the communion rail to receive communion.

I have a new project now and I ask the cooperation of our readers for it. I would like to have in our Catholic Worker library, which will be housed at Maryhouse, a section devoted to all of Maisie Ward’s books. It is fitting that we have a complete account of this great woman’s work. In this way she will be with us still, and blessing us.

Maisie had concerned herself from the beginning of our work with a similar work in England. There had been in the past a London **Catholic Worker** for a brief time, and a house of hospitality in Wigan. Maisie contributed to both and began her own extensive work in trying to provide housing for the poor. Bob Walsh was editor of the English **CW** and his wife, Molly, worked with Maisie to alleviate this dire need in London.

We are praying Maisie will help us overcome the difficulties all the State and City agencies have raised which are delaying the opening of the house for the homeless women.

We want to assure our friends who are helping us with the gigantic (to us) outlay of funds for practically rebuilding the fine old settlement house back into a “residence,” that, in spite of all obstacles, we manage somehow to find corners to tuck people into out of the cold during this interim of waiting. Perhaps our clouds of trouble do have a “silver lining.” Perhaps someday there will be a “Christ room in every home.” However, “misery loving company” as it proverbially does, many small houses of 30 or 35 women would be not only better, but best, for permanency.