

Tribute to Mr. O'Connell

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, June 1940, 8.

Summary: An appreciation of the carpentry labors of Mr. O'Connell at the Easton farm, his storytelling, and love of children and animals. (DDLW #362).

Teresa and I never go down to the farm without blessing Mr. O'Connell who built her a little cabin for a birthday present a few years ago. She had saved Christmas presents and birthday presents until finally she had accumulated fifty-eight dollars and with this as a starter (it didn't take much more) the cabin was built. It had plenty of shelves for specimens and Teresa and Arthur Durrenberger roam the fields and woods for their exhibits. The other day when I was sweeping I almost disposed of a rattle from a rattlesnake which had fallen from the shelf. I'm sure that didn't come from the farm! There is room for two bunks, a couple of tables and chairs. When more than two are in it, it seems crowded, since it is only nine by twelve, but when you stand outside looking in, it is quite spacious.

John has a long field of alfalfa and oats sloping down the front, and on either side of this narrow field there are cherry and pear trees. There is also a hedge of raspberries that our neighbor, Mrs. Smith, put in.

Mr. O'Connell's latest accomplishment is a four-room house for the Buley family. They had been living in the guest house on the lower farm all this last year and it is very disconcerting for a family always to have people wandering in on them. Now they have their own frame house, covered with tar paper, more suitably arranged than the other house, and the cost was \$315 in lumber. We had decided to put it up before we had the money, and ordered the lumber on faith. During my western trip, one of our friends gave the check which covered it and the bill was paid. She will have the happiness of knowing that she has housed a family of five and has deproletarianized a worker!

Mr. O'Connell built his own tool room and living quarters, a place for the Montagues, and rebuilt a chicken coop for John so that now it is a comfortable two-room place. In spite of the coldest winter in seventeen years, everyone got through, if not with comfort, at least with health.

In his spare time, Mr. O'Connell reads history and biography and he can tell you a good deal of history from his own experiences. He is over seventy and has traveled the world over and fought in many wars.

The most beautiful stories he tells are of his childhood, his mother and father and his twenty sisters and brothers, and there is tenderness and poetry and joy in these memories. He has a great love for little things, children and animals, and you'll usually find them clustering around him.

"And all the animals," he said, one time, "kneel down before they rest. Far more faithful than men, who forget their prayers, who forget to kneel morning and night. The camel kneels to have his burden taken off at the end of the day. You can see the animals around here doing it, even that bit of a goat out there—down on her knees she goes before she lies down. The gentle creatures."

It is good to sit out by Mr. O'Connell's headquarters and watch the twilight deepen in the west. The fields slope down in a deep valley, and each field stands out in various shades of green like a patchwork quilt. Far off the steeple of St. Joseph's stands against the sky and occasionally you can hear the sound of the bells ringing the Angelus when the wind is in the right direction. Here there is peace.