

On Pilgrimage - November 1948

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Briefly summarizes recent Friday night talks at the Catholic Worker on Ireland, worker priests, use of force, and conscientious objection to conscription. Lists many visitors, tells of pleasant days at Maryfarm, and describes conditions in city-run homeless shelters. (DDLW #471).

Our Friday night meetings have started at 115 Mott, and they begin at eight. The four speakers last month were Shaemus McManus, Fr. Buckley, Fr. Crouzy and I. The first told of the story tellers of Ireland and held us all spellbound with accounts of the well at the world's end and the fairies in Ireland who were the angels who took neither the side of Lucifer or Michael, and so for their penalty were banished to the earth. We realized on hearing Mr. McManus that we too had a storyteller of a kind in our midst, Slim Borne who can hold visitors spellbound with his hyperbole. His stories of *The Catholic Worker* movement and its leaders, (and not of complimentary nature) go on for hours and hours. He has the kind of voice St. Anthony must have had, since people can hear him a block away. He could easily address ten thousand without a microphone. But then I may be exaggerating a bit myself. Fr. Buckley's theme was why men work, the kind of work they do, what work is for, and emphasized that the instrument used, man, should be taken into account. "One does not use a fountain pen to hold up a window, or a watch hand to clean one's fingernails," he said.

From France

Fr. Crouzy is a Jesuit from France, a friend of Fr. Perrin who wrote "Priest Workmen in Germany," and he told us something of the life of the worker priests, who live in the slums, go to work in the factories as mechanics, offer up Mass in the evening at the home of some worker; and later meet with him and his family and talk with groups that gather in the evening. The subject of my own talk was *Love and Hate in the Modern World*, and of course that brought in a discussion of the use of force. We discussed compulsory military training with the French Jesuit also, and still do not understand why it has never occurred to the seminarian or priest to object to this compulsion on the part of the state. To this day there is no resistance to conscription, though as Fr. Crouzy pointed out, such conscription is against canon law.

Objectors

There have been many young students to see us during the course of the month, talking about the new draft law, what provisions are made for conscientious

objectors, and how now it is up to the state to define what “religious belief” is. If the state acknowledges the validity of your religious conviction that war is wrong, then there is the exemption. There has been no machinery set up for conscientious objector camps. It is either the army or jail.

Visitors

Many people take their vacations in October when they intend to visit New York, so I was glad to welcome Louise Mulherin from Augusta, Ga., who is working as dietician in a veterans’ hospital there; Isabel MacCrae who was head of the Seattle, Washington, group during the war and Edith Mary Bown, also one of our Seattle friends, who did not come to the office, but met us at Grand Central Station as I was seeing Isabel on the train. Edith Mary is a wonderful pianist and accompanied Marian Anderson on her visit to Seattle. The former is here now to study and prepare for the concert stage. Her mother is one of the founders of the Martin de Porres Center in Seattle, and her father is a longshoreman who has placed *The Catholic Worker* on many a ship sailing out of Seattle. I always visit the Bown home when I am there, and it is a big family, full of great talent.

Bill Ryan, an old Milwaukee friend, who fought in the Spanish civil war and spent two years in Sandstone penitentiary for his conscientious objection (political, not religious) to last war, visited us for a week en route from Maine to Chicago. Since we were mailing out the paper in the city during his visit, I didn’t get a chance to talk to him until we drove to Newburgh and then he talked for three hours straight on life in jail, the Dunne brothers who were Trotskyite unionists from Minneapolis, Jehovah’s witnesses, Negro Moslems and his friend George Collins. Francis Coyle and Tommy Hughes were along with us, all of us spell bound.

And More Visitors

Pittsburgh people always arrive in the middle of the night. During the Summer retreats we never knew whom we would find sleeping on the side porch when we woke up. And one Monday morning at the farm this month we were awakened at four to greet Nancy Ott, Mary Thornton, Kate Bracken and Mary’s baby,—who came for a flying visit and returned home after twenty-four hours.

The farm these days is brilliant with fall colors. There have been brisk days when walking was good and three of us took a hike over to the next highway, along Rock Cut Road to see a new neighbor, Eula Short and her father and two children who have moved into an old farm house there. We discovered the hidden lane that marks the end of *The Catholic Worker* property and if it were not that hunting had begun and we were afraid of being shot for deer, we would have explored it. Other days when we were tempted to go, there was the job of getting a field cleared of posts and wire from the tomato vines in order that John

might do some ploughing. We are trying to trade in a bull calf of good pedigree for a drag plough for the tractor. There were negotiations going on when I left the farm last. Money is so scarce and our bills are still so high that we cannot afford some equipment we badly need. We did borrow a plough from a neighbor and one field was made ready for winter wheat, just a small sample patch it will be. There have been some delightful evenings in front of the fireplace burning some of the sycamore and pine the Oblate Fathers gave us and which Louis and John Burke hauled in the old Columbia. There are apples to eat, and molasses candy, and hickory nuts, and good books, and reading aloud and discussions of the encyclicals and the new translation of Genesis. Alan Bates is a beautiful reader and scholar and he is anything but dull in imparting knowledge.

There are good days at Maryfarm, beginning with Prime at six thirty and Mass and 6:45. Thank God for Fr. Faley! Other priests come and visit, among them a Franciscan on his way back to China the next day, and it was Mission Sunday when he called, and Alan delighted in giving him some language cards and a book on the Chinese language, to refresh himself on the boat, and Dave Mason had a good time showing him the Chinese typewriter he had been working over for some twenty years, in between jobs and Catholic Worker activities.

Lodging house

I forgot to mention that during Isabel MacCrae's visit to New York, I took her for a tour of the East Side, including the Municipal Lodging House for women and children. At a recent conference of Fr. Oesterreicher on the New Testament, one of the comments he made on the sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt was that they must have lived in the Jewish quarter in a section like our own lower East side. There were slums in those days too, and the Holy family was poor. They were the first dispossessed, and I thought that perhaps they might even have had to accept public hospitality as so many now do in New York. The night manager of the lodging house on 25th St. talked to us about the attempts of the city to care for transients and homeless. We saw only the first floor where supper was being served cafeteria style, and there were separate tables for the families. There were over three hundred there, women and children, since the men have to stay at the lodging provided for them on East Third Street. They are so crowded at East 25th Street that only upper births are empty and it is hard for the older women to sleep there. There are no mattresses, only blankets on the springs. More quarters are being prepared down on East Sixth St. Even during the depression there were not these hoards of women and children, homeless and with no prospect of finding a home. It is the Marshalsea of Dickens over again.