

Day After Day - November 1934

By Dorothy Day

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*Summary: Observations about the hardships of Mother Seton, the gift of thirty dozen eggs, the oppression of a steelworker, and an accident befalling three poor boys. Recommends nursery schools so mothers can work and not be separated from their children by the city. A book review of Calverton's *The Passing of the Gods* which is dismissed as "the shallowest book of the month." (DDLW #283).*

During Sunday I read the Life of Mother Seton. The first years of her work in founding the Sisters of Charity in America held much hardship for her little community. The sisters subsisted on carrot-coffee, salt pork and buttermilk during one winter. For Christmas they had smoked sardines. Their first community was housed in a four-room shack in the country, in Maryland, and it was so cold a winter that they had to sweep the snow out of their rooms which had drifted through crevasses by the barrel full. They went outside to get their water from the pump.

The most extraordinary donation received during the course of the month was a crate of eggs, thirty dozen, shipped from Indiana by a Pullman conductor as a donation to the cause. God bless you, Mr. Greenen! The eggs we had been eating were all right scrambled, but would not bear eating soft-boiled. They were rather sulphurous. Our friend, Mr. Minas, made them palatable by sprinkling red pepper over them plentifully, but we have not his oriental tastes. Fresh eggs! What a panegyric we could write on the subject! Soft-boiled for breakfast, with the morning paper and a symphony on the radio, preferably the first Brahms!

The Teresa-Joseph Co-operative enjoyed them and some unemployed friends enjoyed the unexpected luxury. A christening feast which took place in The Catholic Worker office was positively an egg orgy to be alliterative. Dozens were consumed, with gusto, the guests coming from Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan, New Jersey and Long Island City, representing eight nationalities. Indeed if there had not been eggs there would have been no feast.

Again, thank you, Mr. Greenen!

To pass from the jovial to the tragic. George Issoski, Aliquippa steel worker, a union man, was arrested for distributing union literature and was sent to a lunatic asylum by a lunacy commission appointed by the sheriff of Beaver county. Investigation by the state labor department into the terrorism in Aliquippa,

resulted in the worker's release. Jones & Laughlin are the bitter anti-union steel employers in this Pittsburgh district.

Here's another horror story. Three boys were killed as they dug stray lumps of coal in a colliery near Wilkes-Barre and an avalanche of 1,000 tons of debris buried them alive. The boys were 12, 14 and 16. Two other boys, 10 and 15 were taken to the hospital with possible skull fractures. They were trying to help out their impoverished families.

Shallowest book of the month: V. F. Calverton's *The Passing of the Gods*. There is much talk of the "unverifiable promises of religion." At least he realizes that it is Protestantism that is allied with Capitalism. "Today, with capitalism visibly tottering, religion may be expected to perish with it," he says. Ernest Sutherland Bates reviews it very approvingly. "The postponement of the religious triumph to the future life . . . turned out in the long run to be of inestimable service to religion by insuring its dogma against any possible disproof through experience."

The *Daily News* in its correspondence column had a threatening letter in regard to radical agitation, signed "Castor Oil." The *Tribune* the same day carried a first page little feature about how they are enforcing discipline in a little Pennsylvania town which makes the curfew effective for youngsters by punishing stayouts with castor oil.

These stories are like straws showing which way the wind blows. Lawlessness to be curbed by fascist tactics learned from Mussolini. First we train our children to be free and untrammelled and set them an example of lawlessness; then we try to check them by more lawlessness, by technique opposed to the true spirit of liberty.

There is great need of a nursery school for children under one year of age. We heard a sad story from a social service worker last month about a young girl whose twins were taken from her and put in an institution, because she had no money and no husband. She is supported by Home Relief and the necessity to care for her own children, whom she wished to keep with her, would have done much for her rehabilitation. A young woman with twin babies to care for is not going to have much time for men or parties, and on the other hand, no man

is going to go out of his way to try to lead her astray. If there were a nursery where the young mother could leave her children days while she looked for work, the nuns with whom she came in contact, and her own feelings of responsibility would help her. In this case the girl is mourning the loss of her children.

And it will be hard for her to get those children back. They will be boarded out and she will be allowed to visit them once a month for one hour; she will not be allowed to bring them candy or toys, nor will she ever be able to take them home with her until she can prove she has a home for them.

It seems to me that some attempt should be made to keep a mother and child together and only after she had proved herself utterly incapable, should they be separated. There is too much readiness to separate mother and child for the sake of slight material benefit.

Will the Sister Mary Helena who offered us back numbers of the *Commonweal* and *The Catholic World* please send them to us? We will be very glad to have them, but lost her address and could not write.

Summary:

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Although Day could find inspiration in reading of Mother Seton's hardships, she could also express joy and gratitude over a donation of thirty dozen eggs. On a personal note, Day describes her ideal breakfast: soft-boiled eggs, the morning paper, and Brahms First Symphony! Unfortunately, the world's injustices intrude—Day notes that a Pittsburgh steelworker, George Issoski, was temporarily confined in a lunatic asylum for his union activities and three young boys from Wilkes-Barre were buried in a slagheap avalanche while scavenging for coal. In addition, many American communities were adopting fascist-inspired solutions to deal with social problems. Day was disturbed by the tendency of courts to separate mothers from their young families because they could not provide a prescribed level of material comfort for their children. Day recommended the establishment of nursery schools to care for these children, thus enabling the natural mother to seek and retain a job. A book review, Day dismisses as “the shallowest book of the month.”