

Day After Day - November 1944

Dorothy Day

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Summary: In the guise of sending news to those serving in the military or in prison she writes a chatty column "of gossip". Describes life at Maryfarm and her trip through the Midwest. Lauds manual labor and self-sufficiency. (DDLW #406).

"Tell me, I pray thee, how fares the human race – if new roofs be risen in the ancient cities – whose empire it is that now sways the world?" These were the words of St. Paul, the first hermit, when he welcomed St. Anthony, who had sought him out in his desert fastness. Such a longing as we all have for news not only of our dear ones, but of the "human race."

So this month this column, this page, will be devoted to "news," notes by the way, the tale of a trip to some of the groups and houses around the country. It is news for Ossie Bondy and Mary, for Bob and Mary Walsh, in England; for Jim Quinn, some place in Italy, for Tom Sullivan, Jim O'Gara, for Jack Thornton, John Brennan and Dwight Larrowe, somewhere in the South Pacific or in France or Holland; for Hazen Ordway, in the Arctic; for Arthur Ronz in India, for Jack English, released from his Roumanian prison camp and now either on some other front or on his way home on furlough; for all those in camp, for conscientious objectors around the country, for those in hospitals, for those in jail. Perhaps it will reach Fr. Hessler in his concentration camp in Hong Kong, or our nun friends in Budapest. Not to speak of the fifty thousand who get the paper in this country.

We are weighty with great issues this month, so this is a column, as one of our seminarian friends called it, of gossip.

Maryfarm

As we left Maryfarm, Fr. Roy was laboring as priest, electrician, plumber and carpenter, and three Grail girls, sent out as shock troops, were taking over the pioneering work of making the barn habitable for winter, and for our winter retreats. Catherine arrived the day I left, carrying an immensely heavy suitcase, blown by the wind, radiant and energetic, just in time to enjoy a feast of roast

kid in honor of Christ the King. Jane O'Donnell arrived, too, for the feast, and another girl was to come later. Jane has been taking care of the Montague children for the past month, since Helen came from the hospital, and the little family of little ones (six beauties) have enjoyed the vigorous settling into the new home, as has Helen. Maurine has started in St. Joseph's school, first grade, and Aileen, my godchild, is in kindergarten across the street. There are *only* Patricia, James Francis, Cecilia and Dennis Michael at home. There is a long back yard with a beautiful pear tree in it and well fenced in, for sunny days, and the kitchen is practically a sunroom, the whole place is clean and warm and shining, thanks to Jane's ministrations.

Peter Maurin beams over these works. He could talk about the soul of woman, about her needs and her duties and her accomplishments, having such good example around. "What social worker," he says, "would ever think of working in this way?" These are the techniques—voluntary poverty and manual labor.

Visitors come and go at Maryfarm and one never knows when they will show up. Once some arrived at two a.m. (the last train from New York). They come by car on their way to California in one case. They come from New York, Bayonne, Philadelphia, Connecticut. One never knows who is going to sit down to lunch or dinner. It is good to have plenty of home-made whole-wheat bread on hand. One luncheon our guests were three moving men who had been installing a stove.

Simplicity

Fr. Roy likes oatmeal cooked in milk for breakfast and supper. There is plenty of bread and home-made butter, and apple sauce and pears, and cabbage and carrots. Anne Thornton sends over the most tempting cakes and pies which she tosses off exuberantly just because her oven is hot and the bread turns out so well. She has been baking the bread for the community in the barn. Tamar has been supplying us with butter and carrots and her parsnips are good too, she says. But in general gardens were a failure this year. We go to our neighbors for potatoes and cabbage. We did not mention in the paper that our horse, Jim, died. We had had him eight years and it was a great grief to us. So the fall ploughing was done by a neighbor and we put in a field of winter wheat. The seed is paid for, but not the work as yet. One of our friends wants to sell us a mule for a hundred dollars. We are deliberating about raising oxen too, eventually. For such a hilly farm as ours, oxen would be good. As I write news comes that Stanley Vishnewskey, helping us on the farm, was taken ill with appendicitis. (Friends please write).

The Grail

After a day's visit in Pittsburgh, I took an all-night train to Loveland, Ohio, and arrived there in time for Mass on All Souls' day. Although I had spent the month of May at Foster, another farm connected with the Grail school a few miles away, I had never visited the school itself at Grailville. It is a big farm, and there are cows, horses, goats, pigs, chickens, bees (the sheep are at Foster). There are twenty-five girls attending the course, which began October first and will last until next October. I was so happy to see Veronica Forbes there, formerly in charge with Justine Lesperance in Martha House, Detroit, for the past two years. She was delighted with the course, too happy in the present to be planning for the future, though she was eager for news of the C.W. crowd and activities. While she was showing me around, and we were going through the canning rooms and laundry in the basement of the big house, we thought of Ossie Bondy's Windsor House of Hospitality, how neat and spotless it always was, how well managed and developed!

And just as I was thinking how *well-equipped* everything was, I remembered that the farm at Foster had no conveniences, that the washing was done outdoors in galvanized tubs, over open fires, that there were outhouses there too, as in Easton, and no central heating, nor hot water, nor baths. Indeed Foster is a most special small farm, to show how life can be built up abundantly with none of the so-called essentials.

It was a most beautiful holy day, and we feasted on roast pork and apple-sauce, vegetables, fruit, milk, butter and honey – all things grown on the land thereabouts.

Fr. Ehmann, of Rochester, was there for the holy days, and the conferences on plain chant and on the feast of the day were stimulating.

In Chicago I spoke at the Sheil School of Social Studies, at Friendship House, at Rosary College, at the Alexian Brothers Hospital to the conscientious objectors and at a general meeting of our friends, assembled in the auditorium of Corpus Christi parish on the South Side. Several nights I stopped with Nina Polcyn, Margaret Blazer, and Florence Weinfurter, three of the girls formerly associated with the Milwaukee House and now working for the Sheil School; and part of the time at the Martin de Porres center on the west side, which works as Friendship House does, with the Negro.

Slums

As usual one is struck by the ghastly slums of the great cities and one wonders how anyone can get used to them. Dreary wastes of back yards, drab back porches in miles of unpainted houses, garbage, tin cans and refuse, skulking cats and rats, a dim sky veiled in smoke. Here in these sad and endless stretches,

miles and miles of box-like homes on the south side live Negroes in hovels which rent for three times the price white people must pay. There is a very strict color line and the colored feel keenly this segregation. There were horrifying tales of children bitten by rats, and just the week before I arrived one small baby had had its toes and fingers gnawed off by rats while its mother was shopping at the market. Another family building a home, a bit out of their district after years of work and saving, had their place burned down. There were other cases of arson, one in which several colored people were burned to death. The Negro papers were full of these stories, but the white papers did not print them.

Work

There is a new paper out in Chicago, almost a year and a half old now, called *Work*, published monthly by the Catholic Labor Alliance at 3 East Chicago Ave., Chicago 11, Ill. The editor is Edward Marciniak, one of the founders with Al Reser of the Chicago House of Hospitality. John Corley, editor of the former Chicago Catholic Worker, writes for it regularly. The subscription is a dollar a year.

“We chose *WORK* as our name because it expressed our aim to restore work to its rightful place in our society . . . Today’s great tragedy is that manual labor is regarded as some sort of necessary purgatory leading to a white collar heaven.” (August, 1943.)

Unemployment and land disposal, housing programs, racial justice, the annual wage, union issues and legislation, cooperatives and post-war planning; these are some of the issues taken up by the paper.

Minneapolis

While I am in Minneapolis, I am staying in Maryhouse, 2024 16th Ave. S., which opened on September first, as a House of Hospitality “radiating the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, especially to the colored people in the neighborhood.” Since I had met most of the women living there at the retreat at Oakmont, I have felt much at home. They have visited us in Mott street, they have worked, some of them, with Sister Peter Claver, in Mobile, and we hope eventually to establish an exchange of workers back and forth.

The houses for men which were formerly operated in St. Paul and Minneapolis are now closed, but there is a group of women anxious to open the house in St. Paul, which is owned by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The need is great but there is no one to take the responsibility right now. At present there is no one living on the farm at Aikin, and Al and Catherine Reser, who have the adjoining farm, have gone to Chicago for the winter.

(A letter came today from the Boston House, asking why we dropped their name from our list of houses! What an oversight! The house there on Rollins St. is owned by the group and the work has continued for many years now with only a few interruptions.)

Leaving here I am visiting Superior, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Windsor, Cleveland and Rochester before going home in time for our Advent retreat, November 3-December 2. There will be a Christmas retreat of rejoicing, from December 27-January 2. For details, write Maryfarm, Easton, Pa.