

On Pilgrimage - December 1948

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Summary: After a "hullabaloo" of visiting children she mentions talks and inveighs against industrial capitalism. Visits Pittsburgh and Cleveland and lauds hospitality and the works of mercy, the little way and effective way, as the foundation of the work. (DDLW #262).

This has been a tumultuous month what with a two-week visit from Tamar, Rebecca, Susannah and Eric. In spite of the fact that we are all convinced agrarians, there are some things that need to be said in favor of the city. One is that some of your friends are held captive there by jobs and poverty and such like grim necessities. John Cort unkindly refers to them in last week's issue of the *Commonweal*, as though they were wedded to the city. Marge and Joe Hughes are an example, with their three children. Anyway, the six children, racing about our few rooms, made a general hullabaloo and holiday atmosphere around the place. On one occasion Barbara Bouret with her two came over, and Harriet Sappe and hers, and Ann Freeman and hers, and if the twins were only big enough to have joined in there would have been a riot indeed. Eric, aged nine months, enjoyed the night life very much since he was cutting teeth, and appreciated the company until two a.m. quite a few nights. Beckie and Johanna, Tommie and Sue had a great time playing and fighting about possessions and there was much visiting of relatives and much talk of all the vital things that concern babies, which included the joys of country life compared to the hardships of city life for the young ones.

Another time Tamar wants a holiday in the city, I'll go to Stotler's Crossroads and take care of the children and she and David can come to the city and visit bookshops on Fourth Avenue and hear music and see a show or two, and visit publishers and gather material for the Cobbett Anthology Devin-Adair wants David to do in his spare moments when he is not repairing his old farmhouse or working as a hired hand on a neighboring farm. (Plenty of work on the land at sixty cents an hour!) And then there were speaking engagements for me; one at New Rochelle college where I forgot I was supposed to talk on Communism, Capitalism and Distributism and talked on the works of mercy instead. They should have reminded me, but they were so interested in the topic I chose that some of the girls have been down helping us. I spoke also at a Communion breakfast in Rutherford, and the result was a carload of clothes for the needy a week later. They also promise some canned goods!

Late in the month, I spoke in Butler, Pa., at the forum of Msgr. Spiegel and was introduced by Fr. Hugo who has recently been transferred to that parish. Butler is near Herman where Jack and Mary Thornton and Gerry Griffin are now living on a fifty acre farm they are buying there. To make their payments, Jack has to work in a steel mill in Butler and Gerry is working as a farmer at St. Fidelis Seminary which adjoins their property. To get to Mass

in the morning all you have to do is cross a lovely meadow and a slight hill, go through a woodland where the Stations of the Cross are placed, and there you are. The parish school is next door, and on all sides are rolling fields and hills. It is a beautiful and a happy spot, one more toehold on the land. Let us pray they can keep their grip on it. It is a hard struggle for our worker friends on the land front. I also saw Bill Schirra and his wife, and visited Carl Bauer at the Center of Christ the King. He proudly showed me all the bacons and hams and lard and other results of their recent butchering, and we talked on group dynamics and working on the basis of qualities inherent in the individual rather than on the basis of natural leadership—ideas which will be very fruitful in the lay apostolate in the future.

Commonweal Controversy

Fr. Hugo added his contribution to the discussion on whether there can be a Christian industrialism by pointing out that the philosophy of industrial capitalism is based on a hedonistic theory of consumption—that it forbids you to deny yourself, as Christ commanded, but makes it our duty to consume more; also that it is based on the enlightened egotism expressed in Adam Smith's **Wealth of Nations** which preaches that wealth for myself benefits others, and is a denial of the consequences of original sin. He pointed out that it was good to see that Catholic countries are generally poor countries and that Catholics are generally at the bottom.

He referred us to a few good books, such as Penty's **Tradition, Modernism and Politics**, Haye's **Political and Social History of Modern Europe**, the new Cambridge economic history on **Agrarianism in the Middle Ages** and **The Church and the Liberal Society** by Emmet John Hughes.

House of Mary

Thanksgiving dinner I had with the Hugo family and that night I spent at the House of Mary down in the hill section of Pittsburgh, where Sister Cyril and Sister Angelica live in the Negro section and work at the House of Hospitality nearby as well as in the neighborhood. We went to Mass next morning at Roselia Home, which is like our Foundling Hospital in New York. I had a chance to visit the hospital before I left next day, and was shocked to find that none of the mothers nursed their babies! It is the policy!

Bentleyville

That morning I took the trolley down to Bentleyville which is an hour south of Pittsburgh, and adjoining almost to the town of Donora of smog fame. Fr. Yunker is stationed at St. Luke's, Bentleyville, and his parish is a little paradise, physically speaking. It is made up of coal miners, and there are three mines in the neighborhood, all owned by Bethlehem Steel. Most of his parishioners are Polish or Lithuanian. Across the little valley and on the side of another hill is a Slovak Church. Bentleyville is one and a half miles long. The entrance to

one of the mines is not far from his rectory, and you can look across the little valley to the coal breaker which is twelve stories high and which is lit up like a skyscraper all night. The men work in three shifts and the whistles for the early shift woke us in the morning.

Father drives around in a 1935 Plymouth and can handle machinery and tools the way Fr. Roy used to at the farm at Easton.

He himself, when confronted with a housing problem in a former parish in Derry, Pennsylvania, got out, bought a lot, hired a bulldozer and put up a house in less than five months and had the dispossessed family whose plight had impelled him to the job, installed in it. He did this with the help of the fifteen year old boy of the family, and the younger ones and with very little help from anyone else.

A Work of Mercy

Here are some of the exact details. On August 19th he blessed the ground. They cleaned up the trees and brush. On August 22 the bulldozer moved the ground, costing \$45. There is no cellar and a two foot ditch was dug, 24 feet by 30. Eleven hundred and fifteen cement blocks cost \$227. The ceilings are 7 feet 8 inches high. The floor has a base of 6 inches of cinders and four inches of cement, and he bought it already mixed and two loads or so poured in the floor. The kitchen is nine by twelve, utility room four by nine, living room thirteen by fifteen, two bedrooms, nine by thirteen, and in clothes closets two by six and four by seven.

The cement floor cost \$117. Attic floor, \$70. (The four boys sleep up there.) Windows \$220. Sheet rock \$190. Doors, because he made them himself \$9. Roof \$175. Singles \$95. Bricks for the chimney, 1,000 for \$34. Lumber \$200. Plumbing \$100, what with buying second hand sinks and toilet. Nails and hardware and miscellaneous brought the entire cost of the house up to \$1,850. The family are paying it off at the rate of \$26.50 a month. Father donated the lot and the labor. He does not believe in interest, and recently loaned a fellow priest ten thousand dollars for building purposes without interest.

If there are further questions, write to Fr. Yunker, Bentleyville, Pennsylvania, and he will advise you on your building problems. If only workers had a knowledge of tools, given a piece of land to start with, they could put up houses for themselves by working Saturdays and holidays, buying the materials as they go along.

Cleveland

The next day Father Yunker took me to Donora to look over the situation there in order to write a first hand account of the situation, and then I proceeded on to Cleveland to see Bill and Dorothy Gauchat and the Blessed Martin House of Hospitality and Our Lady of the Wayside Farm.

Thanks to Grace Catavish and Clem Murray and other members of the Third Order of St. Francis and their priest adviser Fr. Daniel Feilshefter, who have visited the house steadily every Friday night to go in for manual labor and the works of mercy, the house has had a

new lease of life and it presents the appearance of another oasis of peace and joy in an ugly world. The Blessed Martin house is in a solid Negro district now, but its situation on a hill overlooking a river and the lake boats at anchor below is an attractive one. The place is homelike but small for their needs. However, now that Bill is a married man with a family of four children, and much work on the farm, the work of hospitality is spread to Avon too. At the farm at present there are two Mexican families and with the winter now upon us there undoubtedly will be more. Last winter when Bill read an account in a Cleveland paper of a family living in a tent in zero weather, he went out that very night and brought them in to the hospice they have on Our Lady of the Wayside Farm. During the summer a Negro family stayed with them on their way to Erie, Pa.

Hospitality, the works of mercy, manual labor, voluntary poverty—these are the foundations of the work in Cleveland. It is the *little way*, and the effective way, small as the loaves and fishes were small in the face of a multitude's needs, but our Lord knows how to multiply such efforts. We can well leave it all in His hands and not worry about the results. Just the same, humanly speaking, we like to hear from our fellow workers as to how their work is going, so we beg them to write in and give an account of their stewardship every now and then, for the encouragement and enticement of others. It's the only way we will get others' houses started, so let your light shine!

(Next month there will be an account of the visit to Donora, scene of the twenty deaths which we unhesitatingly would lay at the door of finance capitalism, in other words, the United States Steel Company's zinc plant, which has made a vision of hell of the town of Donora.)