

On Pilgrimage - March 1950

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Summary: Shares her conversations with old friends in California on charity, social justice, and Jubilee. Visits priests and bishops in California and Ammon Hennacy in Phoenix. Keywords: Jew, prayer (DDLW #607).

The train was over-heated and everybody had been sitting up all night. Those few young men who had room next to them sprawled like insects across the seats, looking as though they had been flung there. Young women made their way stiffly to the wash room, to take care of their hair which they had neatly bobby-pinned and encased in scarves the night before. The old were too stiff to move and kept trying to sleep. It was the last lap of a cross-country trip for me, and it had been the most uncomfortable night I had spent on it. We, of **The Catholic Worker**, are not used to central heating, we are used in sleeping in refreshingly cold rooms in winter. The night had been a foretaste of hell.

And then, as I made my way half blindly down the aisle, I came upon a sight that shook me from my discontent, that “cleansed my heart, enlightened my understanding, inflamed my will.”

It was an elderly Jew with long hair and a beard, clothed in a prayer shawl of brown and white wool of most beautiful pattern, with a phylacteries about his forehead and arm. He was worthily, attentively and devoutly reciting the psalms and most surely deserving to be heard before the presence of the Divine Majesty.

I knew that the little box bound upon his brow contained those verses from Deuteronomy:

“Thou shalt love the Lord the God with thy whole heart,

and with thy whole soul,

and with thy whole strength.

And these words which I command thee this day

shall be felt in thy heart.

And thou shalt tell them to thy children;

and thou shalt meditate on them

sitting in thy house

and walking on thy journey,

sleeping and rising."

All my fatigue and my discontent was blown from me as by a desert wind, and I thanked God for the Jews, our brothers, whose Father Abraham is our Father, who gave us Christ. May they find what they are seeking.

I met, too, another Jew on the trip who moved me profoundly. It was Dr. Pritcher, of Los Angeles, a friend of Frank Scully, who had a dinner party for me in his house on the Hollywood hills. John Ford, the producer, was there with his wife and the priest who is running the St. Francis hour on the radio and who is going to use John McKeon's stories for radio presentation, and J. Greenberg, New York publisher, whom I had known in the anti-conscription days before the first world war and General Holdrige, who is going to run for governor of California, and a few others.

Dr. Pritcher was born in the Ukraine, the son of a Rabbi, and he too was brought up in a prayerful home and with study of the Old Testament. He studied medicine in Kiev and in 1922, after the revolution, he came to this country to finish his studies at the University of Colorado.

"A year without the practice of social justice will be no holy year," he told me. "I have written to Pope Pius XII and asked him to call attention to the Jewish year of jubilee and what it used to mean. He calls for social justice, but what does it mean, now? You talk about people forgetting the Sermon on the Mount. They have forgotten the old law too."

Looking up the year of jubilee in the book of Leviticus I found there that in the jubilee year all debts were remitted, there was a "general release and discharge from debts and bondage, and a reinstating of every man in his former possessions."

These were the things Peter Maurin talked about when he was quoting the "prophets of Israel and the Fathers of the Church."

It took me a bit to get used to Dr. Pritcher and his hatred of charity. "You and your houses of hospitality," he stormed. "It's as though I, a doctor, held the patient's hand and comforted him, instead of performing the operation that was needful. Get on with your farming communes, your villages of equality."

It had been Dr. Pritcher last May who took Robert Ludlow's editorial of our positions and had offsets made which he distributed to all his friends through the year.

There is no end to his own charitable work. He left early that evening because he and his wife made sandwiches every night for the school children she taught. "The city gives lunches," he explained, "but they have to eat breakfast too. And I shed tears over those sandwiches," he assured me. "It should not be, this giving out of charity!" And I agree with him.

Dan Marshall and his wife were there also that evening, and he is the Catholic lawyer who was responsible last year for the removal from the books of a California law forbidding interracial marriages. We should have had a story about this fight and victory in the pages of **The Catholic Worker**, but our California correspondents were remiss. That is the trouble with our program of the works of mercy, it takes up so much time (there are not enough doing the work) so that we are apt to neglect other aspects of the struggle.

The Scully Family

I felt happily at home with the Scullys, the Norwegian wife with her high singing voice, slim and young with her four children (a boy going to college, three girls and another child coming). Frank writes a column for VARIETY, the theatrical weekly which owns Rogowski Press, where the **Catholic Worker** is printed, and he is in the center of everything out there in California where he has made his home for years. He too was one of the Columbia University group, though not a conscientious objector. He went over to France and lost a leg there. And here we were together again, two of the pacifist crowd, Greenberg and I, and Frank telling how he tormented Greenberg with practical jokes while they were at the school of journalism together. It was a grand meal with a huge turkey gracing the table. Afterwards Frank disappeared for a while and we were talking so much we did not miss him, until he returned to the living room with a kitchen towel around his lean middle. He had been washing dishes with his three daughters.

St. Thomas More Library

Aside from the night I stayed at Scully's in their Norwegian looking house on the side of a mountain, I was the guest of Dr. Julia Metcalfe whose library is famous around the country. Peter Maurin, Martin Paul, and other Catholic Workers have enjoyed the unfailing hospitality of Dr. Metcalfe over the last fifteen years, and she loves most of our ideas but not our pacifism. But we have always had plenty else to talk about what with our love of books and social justice. The Catholic Interracial Council had a meeting at her house the Saturday night I was there, and it was like the discussion meetings she used to have regularly and now has intermittently. The rooms were able to accommodate about sixty or seventy people. Her library is extensive and there is nothing you want that you cannot find there. The place is an information center too, and students come and get the materials they need for term papers, and prospective converts get the books they were looking for. At night before we went to bed, Teresa, who takes care of the house, and Julia and I knelt down before a nativity of Jean Charlot and said the rosary together.

Archbishop McIntyre

I saw the Archbishop while I was in Los Angeles, and he greeted me with warmth as though he were homesick for New York. People love him out there. They say he is humble and holy and that is the way I have always felt about him. He warmed my heart and increased my devotion to the Church and its hierarchy. How the heart wants to love, and how grateful it is to be able to love, to find people loveable. The Archbishop asked after Fr. Duffy and after he had introduced me to Bishop Manning (I didn't realize until afterward that he was a bishop, he looked so young) he told them of his friendship for Fr. Duffy and how he hoped he would not speak out there under Communist auspices. "He is not a Communist," he told the other Bishops, "but a friend of mine – a misguided one – and I do want to see him if he does come out."

California

It was cold and rainy all the while I was in California and my winter coat was most necessary.

Phoenix

Before coming to Los Angeles, I had spent a couple of days in Phoenix with Ammon Hennacy, philosophical anarchist and pacifist and the Arizona correspondent of *The Catholic Worker*. All our readers have enjoyed his articles on hard labor, on the Indians, and on his prison experiences, which we published during the war. He had been a socialist but nine months in solitary confinement at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia, when he had nothing to read but the Bible convinced him of the validity of the religious pacifist position. He is not yet a Catholic, and as Monsignor Hillenbrand said of him, “he received so great a light that it blinded him.”

He works harder than any one I know and lives the most disciplined life and with his single-mindedness and moral courage one can expect much from him. I hope the friends I visit do not mind my speaking so frankly of them, but I like to share my point of view with others of our readers. Ammon gets many letters from our readers and is somewhat abashed when they ask him to pray for them. He takes things most intensely and I am sure when he says a prayer, it is one of power.

Fr. Dunne

We visited Fr. George Dunne, whose courageous fight for the Negro and for the strikers in the moving picture industry in California, and whose answers to Paul Blanshard has made him known all over the country. He served us lunch and we talked to him for as long a time as he could spare as he was on duty that day, and then Fr. McGinnis former army chaplain, drove us into town again (St. Francis Xavier College is on the outskirts of Phoenix) and drove us around to visit Ammon’s friends. We went to see the Old Pioneer, Lin Orm, on whose ranch Ammon has a shack in which he makes his headquarters. Mr. Orm was head of the Arizona board of pardons for fourteen years, and resigned from the Rotary Club as a protest against the deportation into the desert of the I.W.W.’s from the Bisbee copper mines some thirty years ago.

These On Pilgrimage accounts are short – I will continue with Oakland and Stockton accounts in the next issue – because I am engrossed in writing a book for Harpers and all my energies are poured out on the typewriter these days.

There should be an account of the Oakland House of Hospitality in this issue and if it is not in this March issue, it is because Charles Geoghegan is busy feeding some five hundred men a day there.