

Farming Commune

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, October 1938, 8.

Summary: Relishes the progress of the farm in Easton after two and a half years. Says they are applying “the principles of the personalist and communitarian revolution” and urges unused land owned by the Church be used in imitation of their efforts. (DDLW #337).

THE CATHOLIC WORKER farm at Easton has finished its third summer with bulging barns. These are the pleasantest days of all the year down in the country with trees turning to flaming gold and red and the sunlight like liquid honey. The nights are cold so that more blankets are needed by those who come down from Mott Street for the week-end, but those on the farm all the time seem to take it in their stride. Stoves are being set up in the bedrooms,—those oval, sheet iron stoves that hold logs of wood and cast a quick heat of a morning. The wood cutters are busy every day now with their cross cut saws and it becomes so warm during the day that the men strip to the waist and sweat over their work.

After the cold night, mists hang heavy in the valley, hiding the towns of Easton and Phillipsburg from view.

Arthur is up at five every morning and gets the fire going and the breakfast of oatmeal and coffee started before he goes out to milk the cows. Little Arthur, aged ten, rushes out to the barn to help and he has milked not only Rosie (everyone on the farm has learned to milk on Rosie) but also Mollie. Which is brave of him, since it was Mollie (the gift of some relatives of the Newman School head) who tried to toss him with her horns last summer. Mollie’s calf remains a small thing—it is her first and she will be butchered by Christmas. Rosie’s Gloria, so named by John Filliger, is almost twice her size already. Bessie, who is Rosie’s also, is due to drop her calf some time this month.

Farm Talk

(We get a lot of cracks from our land-minded friends about these bits of news as to the cows, and such like items from the farm. But we who are engrossed in trying to work out our ideas as to the land being a solution of the problem of unemployment in this country, can’t keep from doing it, and our readers seem to find the same interest we do. I have talked with taxi cab drivers, miners and fishermen and many others throughout the country on my many journeys and the actual details of how a farm is working out is what they are interested in. And it is enjoyable to meet readers who upon being introduced ask after the various animals by name.)

Everyone should be interested in George the goat. He is very much in evidence all over the lower farm, following the children up into the woods, wandering into the kitchen to eat up the bouquet in the middle of the dining table, trying out the various beds throughout the house, much after the fashion of Goldilocks, and sampling the shavings in Mr. O'Connell's tool house. He is little Arthur's constant companion and while he milked the other morning, George watched with engrossed interest. He knows when to butt and when not to butt.

There is a milk goat besides, and thirteen rabbits, and almost two hundred chickens. There are the two horses, Jim and Prince, and there is Tug Boat Annie, the sow, who just had a litter of ten pigs and laid on two. The others are thriving and at this stage are almost attractive. Besides these there are ten more pigs. By next year, John says, we should have about a hundred and fifty, and Mott Street headquarters as well as the farm will rejoice.

And for all these animals we are spending only three dollars a week on feed. The rest we have raised ourselves. The cash we need to spend on the farm each week now amounts to about ten dollars for each farm, and all are looking forward to the community being self supporting. Already baskets of pears, apples, bushels of potatoes and turnips and tomatoes have been brought into St. Joseph's house, so there are grounds for hope that the supplies they will bring us will make up next year for the cash we must send to them.

On The Land

There is still the mortgage of course which must be paid off, six hundred dollars a year, including taxes, interest, for the next six years. That is in the hands of God.

But when the numbers we have taken care of, including batches of half a dozen children every week all summer, some of them staying all summer, are taken into consideration, enthusiasm for our farm program is understandable.

We are learning as we work. St. Francis says that you do not know what you have not practiced. And all that we have learned intensifies our interest in seeing this program being put into effect throughout the country.

If all the land owned by the Church, for instance, and by the different orders, that is not being used at the present time, were turned over to the unemployed and their families, and if leadership could be provided such as Father McGoey's up in King City, Ontario,—then the real wealth of the Church would be increased tremendously.

We have had the farming commune at Easton for two and a half years now. We are trying to combine small holdings of one acre and the communal farm on which all work. And in this farming commune of seventy acres we are trying to apply the principles of the personalist and communitarian revolution. We are doing this with no picked group but with the human material which has come to hand. We are doing it though we are propagandists and editors, writers and lecturers, young and old, unemployed and the lame, the halt and the blind. We did not select each other; we somehow came together. And I come back after this week end, thinking how good God has been and how He has blessed the work of our hands.

In the cities there is unemployment and the breadline. There are municipal lodging houses and the parks where men sit all day and are either sunk in lethargy or are racking their

brains for a way out. And on the land there are untilled acres, there is room for every kind of employment where the single unemployed can pioneer and lead the way for the family, thus serving not only himself but the common good.

While we work we pray that the farm at Easton and our writing about it will be so blessed that others will be led in this direction and do likewise. And in the many ways we fail, may they succeed, so that throughout the land there will grow up many communities within communities that will eventually save the nation from disaster.

But even though they be few, we can remember that “the king is not saved by a great army; nor shall the giant be saved by his own great strength. . . . Behold the eyes of the Lord are on them that fear Him; and on them that hope in His mercy. To deliver their souls from death; and feed them in famine.”