

Notes By The Way - March 1945

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Shares her enthusiasm for William Cobbett, an early distributist, and describes plans and planting activities slated for Maryfarm and New York. Meditates on the virtues of reading, silence, prayer, and proper mental attitude. Scripture, Rodriguez, Butler, Charles de Foucault, and others are quoted at length. (DDLW #408).

Peter first interested me in Wm. Cobbett with his "History of the Protestant Reformation." Then through my son-in-law, who has long been a Cobbett enthusiast, I have read, "Cottage Economy," "Advice to Young Men and to Young Women," and bits of "Rural Rides." He was the forerunner of Eric Gill, Chesterton and Belloc and their distributist program. On my last visit to the Grail family at Loveland, Ohio, I told them about his rigorous life, his advice on early rising, drinking only cold drinks for breakfast, bread and cheese and milk, or water, cold baths (all babies should be started out with cold baths, he thought). He was truly a poor man, a disciplined and a happy one. He was the best historian and economist of his time, and we feel that he belonged much to us in America, too, since he lived right after the revolution in Philadelphia and also on Long Island. He was a journalist, a seedsman, a historian, a pamphleteer. He inveighed against the evils of his day but not so much against his fellows. He was against the system, but his indignation was large, general and generous.

At the farm, Teresa says: "Remind people that they once sent rose bushes and irises for beautifying the upper farm. Maybe they will send some more."

On the feast of St. Vincent of Saragossa, we wrote to Bill Gauchat, whose Lady of the Wayside Farm at Avon, Ohio, is in the midst of the grape country, to send us grape cuttings. Also to Milt Fess of St. Benedict's Farm, Scottsville, New York, for hop plants. St. Vincent is the patron of wine growers. This is a great time for reading catalogues at the farm. We are going in for tree planting in a serious way this spring, and recommend especially the fascinating catalogue from Sunny Ridge Nursery, Swarthmore, Pa. J. Russell Smith is the author, and he has been loving trees, he says, for fifty years. He has written a wonderful book, "Tree Crops."

Rex D. Pearce, seedsman, Moorestown, New Jersey, also gets out a wonderful catalogue, filled with good sketches and bits of homely philosophy, such as, "You can't have both freedom and security, for freedom is never secure nor is security ever free."

On Feb. 15, Teresa and I were picking water cress from a brook down the road and had a fine salad for supper. And she had a bouquet of forsythia all in bloom on the table. I brought some into town with me for the shrine of the Blessed Mother, which delighted Shorty.

My sister has a copy of *Arabia Deserta* by Doughty, which makes good background reading for one's study of the Bible. "Cheerful is the bare Arabic livelihood in the common air, which has sufficiency in a few things snatched incuriously as on a journey; so it is a life little full of superfluous cares; their ignorance is not brutish, their poverty is not baseness."

In another part he writes, "There is a winter proverb of the poor in Europe, 'Fire is half bread.'" I thought of this many times when we were without coal and oil during January and February. Rose Maguire of Jamaica came to our rescue during this crisis. She not only brought a taxi load of wood to us the next day, but went to friends, until she got two ton of coal. God bless her! She warmed our hearts as well as our bodies.

"Attend to reading," St. Paul said to Timothy. St. Jerome writes to Eustochium, "Let sleep creep over you holding a book and let the sacred page receive your drooping face." St. Augustine said, "Do you know how we should read Holy Scripture? As when a person reads letters that have come from his native country, to see what news we have of heaven." Rodriguez says that reading is sister and companion to meditation. St. Jerome wrote, "Where is this fire? (of the love of God). Doubtless in the holy Scriptures, by the reading whereof the soul is set on fire with God and purified from all vices." St. John 6, 64: "The words that I have given you are spirit and life."

Thoughts on holy silence: St. Gregory kept silence during Lent.

Holy Abbot Agatho for three years carried a pebble in his mouth to gain the virtue of silence.

Abbot Deicoola always had a smile on his face and when asked why he was so happy, he said, "Be what may be and come what may come, no one can take God from me."

Newman's picture of a Christian character: free from excitement or effort, full of repose, still, equable. "Act then as persons who are in a dwelling not their own. . . . What matters it what we eat, what we drink, wherewith we are clothed, what is thought of us, what becomes of us, etc."

On the other hand there is the sacramental attitude toward life. "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." (We need a concordance to verify quotations.) Isaiah, 32; 17, 18: "The work of the righteous shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation and in sure dwellings and quiet resting places."

To think nothing of ourselves and always to judge well and highly of others, is great wisdom and high perfection. (Following of Christ.)

Prayer is what breath is to the body. Prayer is the hand of the body, waits on it, feeds it, washes it, tends it—as the hands do everything, so prayer. “If Stephen had not prayed,” writes St. Augustine, “the Church would never have had St. Paul.”

Buddha says that community life is like sword grass in one’s hand.

St. Apollo formed a community of 500 monks near Hermapolis, who received daily communion and listened to a daily homily. In these he often insisted on the evils of melancholy and sadness, saying that cheerfulness of heart is necessary amidst our tears of penance as being the fruit of charity, and requisite to maintain the spirit of fervor. He himself was known to strangers by the joy of his countenance.

“The grace of the Holy Ghost, like a good mother, has put aloes on the breasts of the world that might become bitter to me which before was sweet, and sweetest honey on the things of virtue and religion in order to make that tasty and sweet to me which before seemed bitter and disagreeable.”—Rodriguez

“It was a rule among the Jews that all their children should learn some handicraft in the course of their studies, were it but to avoid idleness and exercise the body, as well as the mind, in some sensible pursuit.”—Butler.

Charles de Foucault wrote: “Manual labor is necessarily put into the second place, to make room for studies, at present, because you and I are in the period of infancy; we are not yet old enough to work with St. Joseph, we are still with Jesus, the little child at the Virgin’s knee, learning to read. But later on, humble, vile, despised manual labor will again take its great place, and then Holy Communion, the lives of the saints, prayer, the humble work of our hands, humiliation and suffering!”