

Winter Arrives, Work in House And Trip to West

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Summary: Hard winter conditions in New York has them working to stay warm. Takes a trip through the Middle West visiting houses of hospitality and describes their work. Applauds the Grail for a philosophy of labor. (DDLW #368).

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These have been days of snow, sleet, gales at sea. It promises to be a hard winter—hard for the poor, for the nine million still unemployed; hard for the breadlines, and hard for us to some degree, too, in our Houses of Hospitality and on our Farming Communes. Yes, thank God, we can share to some small extent in the woes of our brothers.

The floors in the old house on Mott street are cold under foot, and knitting wool socks has become the order of the day. There'll be no let-up until everyone in the house and on the farm has two pairs. Kate Smith and Tamar are doing mufflers with odds and ends of wool. Miss Harada and Miss Lavin say their oil stoves don't work, and there is continual tinkering and repairing going on. Mrs. Daley, aged seventy, had to go to the hospital with pneumonia last week. A young woman who came to us destitute a month ago left for the hospital last night to have a baby. Shorty is sick with a cold; so is Dwight; Leonard is being bothered with his malaria. Ed and Mike are in bed with asthma. There are no other ailments.

Ready for Christmas

In preparation for Christmas the coffee room where our nine hundred guests are being served every morning is painted a bright buff. Also five of the bedrooms, the dining room and the halls in the rear building are painted. It's quite a job, keeping up with twenty-eight rooms and the halls and the two stores where the activities of THE CATHOLIC WORKER go on. But thanks to the tireless work of Mike Monaghan and Jim Braizel, the work goes on. It's like painting Brooklyn Bridge—as soon as it is finished the painters must start over again.

Circulation

During the past month there has been a ruthless revision of our mailing list, cutting it way down. All those who have not been heard from the past two years have been cut off the list, so if you don't get your January paper please renew your subscription. If we have made a mistake, let us know, please. Remember, all the single subscribers' addresses are individually typed, and all the work is volunteer work, so there are always mistakes and complaints of not receiving the paper.

Reporting a Trip

For three weeks of the last six I have been traveling through the Middle West. I visited Utica, Rochester, Buffalo, Detroit, South Bend, Chicago, Lisle, Davenport, Iowa City, Mason City, St. Meinrad's, Pittsburgh and Atlantic City. Here are some notes copied from my looseleaf book:

Rochester

One of the men works for Bausch's plant, where they make lenses, gunsights for bombers. (Germans hold the patents!) Five thousand are employed there. The young fellow we know who took a job there had been unemployed for a long time. Tonight, he said, Communists were giving out campaign literature at the gates.

Detroit

Lou Murphy's St. Francis House gets on splendidly. The place is comfortable, the basement has been made into a laundry and sitting room, and there is a Nazereth shop in the back yard, an old shed which has been turned into a work shop. A shoemaker was at work there mending shoes when I called. Our meeting began with a holy hour down in the Church, conducted by Father Kern, who is spiritual adviser to the group and a faithful and understanding friend of the C.W. Visited the Ford River Rouge plant with Marie Conti and Lou. A terrifying experience. I felt faint and dizzy from the speed-up I witnessed there. See the story on Ford in another part of the paper. Visited Paul St. Marie and had breakfast with his family (six young ones) after Mass one morning. Paul is a tool and diemaker and is now one of the organizers at Ford's. Marie's St. Martha House made us realize the need for more houses for women.

Notre Dame

Here I spent my birthday, and a pleasant one. Fr. O'Donnell, the president of the college, let us have the use of his car; the boys arranged a meeting at Washington Hall; had a good interview with the president afterward; then a little supper before the train left for Chicago. It was good to see Mooney and Merdzinsky (they spent part of the summer with us in New York and at Easton) and Julian Pleasants and Michael Grace. Saw Sister Madeleva again and had lunch at St. Mary's.

Chicago

A crowd from Milwaukee was down for a Sunday meeting; also Marty Paul from the Minneapolis house and Herb Welsh from the St. Louis house. I stayed in Chicago for several days and so was there for the sudden change of weather from warm to icy blizzard which occurred on Armistice Day. (November 11 is also the feast of St. Martin, the pacifist.) Had breakfast with Father Carrabine and later in the morning drove out to Libertyville to visit the Ladies of the Grail from Holland, who have just come over to start a house here in this country. We wish every girl who works with us throughout the country could serve an apprenticeship with them. They have a philosophy of labor and a philosophy of poverty, as all nuns have, but they are using it as a foundation of a way of life for the laity, too, and inculcating these ideas into the minds of the young high school boys and girls and college students who spend weekends and summers at the camp. Their headquarters is little more than a summer camp but they are going to continue the work through the winter there. Although the place is gaily painted and comfortably furnished, it is little warmer than our make-shift buildings at the farming commune at Easton. The young people are going to learn to grow their own food, prepare it and conserve it, and they are also going to be taught manual labor and the crafts. A good start was made this summer.

Lisle

A meeting at St. Procopius and a terribly stormy night. The Abbey is that of the Bohemian Benedictines and they conduct a college for boys, a big building right out on the prairie, farm lands all around. They are noted for their hard work and it delights me to see the austere poverty of these communities.

They work hard, these monks and brothers and sisters. The nuns put us women to shame. I love most especially those little foreign sisters who work in kitchen and laundries, who wear away their youth and beauty for Christ, their Spouse, and who are so completely happy.

I had wanted to stay at St. Procopius for the night, but Joan Quilty, a young crippled girl, very active in the youth movement in spite of spending her days in a wheel chair, invited me to her home and I had a most comfortable sleep and breakfast there.

Davenport, Iowa City and Mason City, Iowa

Since Gerry Griffen the head of New York House of Hospitality comes from Iowa, we are well acquainted with its beauties. We tease him about the fewness of our subscribers there, and he tells us they do not need the paper. Be that as it may, I did indeed enjoy my visit in these three cities and the priests and lay people I met there. Fr. Burke, the president of St. Ambrose told me of his plans for a summer social action school.

At Iowa City I attended my first concert of the year with Father Hayne (I had to go all the way to Iowa to hear Nathan Milstein, the New York violinist.) After the concert, Father Neuzil invited us over to his rectory. We talked of books (he has a splendid library) woodcarving and foods and seasonings. This over a supper table. We talked of cheap cuts of meat and foreign delicacies and having read an article in the New Yorker on the war and foreign and domestic foods, it set me to thinking with nostalgia of the farm and the culinary arts and crafts to be developed there.

Mason City Meeting

Leaving the next morning at six for Mason City, there was a full moon setting over snow clad fields just as the sun was tinging the sky in the east. I felt very far away from New York. Father Kurt's meeting was a good one, some of our Minnesota friends driving down to be there. People don't think anything of driving one hundred and fifty miles to make an evening meeting out here... Dialogue mass for the children at seven the next morning. A splendid choir. Later we visited a sugar beet factory which was in full swing at this time of the year. There are 350 workers employed and one of the men tried to explain the whole process to us. One of the men stood by his gigantic cauldron and as I passed told me how much he had enjoyed the meeting the night before. But he didn't agree with us on unions, he said. He didn't think they were any good. We argued the point as best we could over the noise, but there was not time for a round table discussion, unfortunately. The American crystal company owns eight plants and at this one 1,852 tons of beets a day are handled, making 5,700 bags of sugar a day. Only about ten percent of the workers are skilled. The Mexicans work in the fields and the Americans in the factories. About 11 tons of beets can be raised to an acre.

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