

Day After Day - June 1935

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reports on the ongoing work on the garden commune, and how it provides a green sanctuary from the city offices. Transcribes two conversations with the working poor, one from a biscuit factory worker who had been on strike and one from a restaurant worker. Describes her daughter's confirmation and the lovely gift of a hand-printed catechism. (DDLW #289).

Out on the garden commune, Edelson works in his bare feet, his trousers rolled up to his knees, his shirt off, his undershirt clinging to his back.

He works with a pick, wielding it with large, strong swings. Every now and then he pauses and crumbles the dirt beneath his feet, meditating.

He will give us some weeks, he said, for the sake of comradeship, Christian Communism, cooperation, brotherhood, unity, as a member of the Mystical Body, because Christ was in his heart, in the spirit of the priesthood of the laity, and for a good many other reasons. Also because it would do him good.

Catherine Smith wanders around in a pair of baggy old trousers, muddy at the knees, and today she is carting stones and making a rock garden.

Hergenhan has been working at the vegetable garden for three weeks, bringing hundreds of boxes of top soil from the woods to enrich the carefully prepared beds. Tomato and cabbage plants are set out, the squash and cucumbers in their neat round hills; radishes, beets, onions and lettuce—all are coming up.

Hergenhan is a German and works with order and precision. It will be remembered that he was the author of two articles on the Municipal Lodging House which ran in the CATHOLIC WORKER last year, and also the one on the Harlem riot, printed a couple of months ago. The first articles roused grieved protests from city officials and the last brought in many favorable comments.

Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Johnson are in charge of the conference house as Hergenhan is of the garden, and some of the office work of the paper is done in the country, Mr. Johnson having formerly helped in town.

In town there is no back yard, there are no green things to refresh the eye. We have moved away from our petunia garden, with its asparagus plants, and fig tree and privet hedges. It is true that across the street there is an ailanthus tree,

“tree of heaven” it is also called, and it arouses hunger and thirst in us for the country.

Aside from it, however, there is not a speck of green. For trees we have the masts and funnels of ships along the docks, and for grass and earth we have the uneven cobbles of the sidewalks in front of warehouses and trucking stations, with bleak and ugly tenements in between.

We are happy, all of us, in the consciousness that the garden commune is there, within a few hours ride of the office. Already in the past month there have been about thirty-five visitors and the garden work has progressed from day to day. The week-end conferences have not yet started, but postals will be sent out during the month announcing meetings to be held either over the entire week-end or on Sunday alone.

Conversations

“The Sisters lost a lot on the biscuit strike. The ones that kept a day nursery and settlement used to come around every Friday night and one stood at each door. They must have got seventy-five dollars or so. They must have missed it for those sixteen weeks.”

“Lots of the girls got fat during the strike . . . It’s funny. I guess it was being out on the picket line for hours in the sun. I gained fifteen pounds. That comes of not being rushed all the time. There used to be eight thousand people working there you know, and after the new machinery there were only three thousand.”

“Do you remember last summer when we picketed with the brush makers? We all got fat, too, and sunburned!”

Childs

“Yes I got laid off for three days . . . I made a penny error in the sales tax . . . Under the code we were supposed to get 19 and a half cents an hour but it only averaged 9 and a half cents. They take out fifty cents for meals every day and then you have to pay for your uniforms. They’re not supposed to charge you the fifty cents unless you work six hours, so if you work five and a half hours, they pay you for six and take out the fifty cents just the same . . . It would be cheaper to bring your lunch or eat at home. . .”

“I went to work in Childs’ restaurant because I used to stand at the window and admire the food so much. I had worked as a cook on a freighter and then I was out of a job for a long time and used to study at the library. I was always hungry. I used to stand at the window and look at the food. So I went to work there.”

Confirmation

“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” And if it were not for this indwelling of the Holy Spirit we would not have this impulse towards the Father, to seek Him.

These thoughts are because Teresa was confirmed last month and received the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. She also received a new dress. “The only time I get new clothes,” she accounted, “is when I made my first communion and now for my confirmation.”

She was radiant and composed. “Did you see me?” she wanted to know. “I didn’t see you.” “But you knew I was there, didn’t you?”

“I thought you were, but I wasn’t sure. You might have had a *meeting*.” Always a slight impatience and scorn at the word meeting. “I can remember even the fruits of the Holy Ghost—maybe I can, if I don’t forget.”

But with the present of a Catechism (which I shall save for her) with wood cut borders by Philip Hagren, hand-made paper, handset type, printed on a hand press St. Dominic’s, at Ditchling, Sussex, I am sure reviewing catechism will be a pleasure. I have never seen so exquisite a piece of work, and we all, down on the garden commune, pass it reverently from hand to hand and in looking at the pictures, refresh our memory as to grace, the commandments of God, and the Beatitudes.

Mr. Graham Carey sent it to us as a present, and if he knew the pure and undiluted pleasure it has afforded us all, he would be well-rewarded.