

Notes By The Way - May 1944

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Delights in the wedding of her daughter Tamar to David Hennessy at the Easton farm. Notes the sad loss of goats to wild dogs but reaffirms the worth of life on the land. (DDLW #400).

Just as in Lent and Advent there are Gaudete and Laetare Sundays, to ease the strain of the self discipline of those holy seasons—so in the midst of “my year,” there has come an important and joyful interim, to prepare for and celebrate my daughter’s marriage to David Hennessy, bibliophile, roofer and farmer, and these last two years a resident of Maryfarm, Easton, Pa. The nuptial Mass was celebrated at eight o’clock, April 19th, at St. Bernard’s Church, by Father Holahan, and later Father Magee and Father Gibson were honored guests at the wedding breakfast at the farm.

The young couple will make their home on two acres there. Guests at the wedding included the mother and three of the sisters of the groom, the mother of the bride: Peter Maurin, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Johnson, David Mason, Arthur Sheehan, who was best man; Maureen Egan, Tamar’s former roommate at Farmingdale, who was bridesmaid, and of course the neighbors on Maryfarm were there. John Filliger cooked the wedding breakfast. It was a beautiful, sunny day after much rain. A kind neighbor who had come for the loan of a horse and plough, gave us the use of his car for the morning, a most kind and unusual favor.

The church is 3 miles away and the hills steep. All of us were already breathless with excitement, so we were glad indeed for this convenience. The bridal gown and veil were made and embroidered by Mrs. de Aragon, mother-in-law of the bride’s uncle, and the bride looked beautiful indeed. Thank God for brides and weddings and growing things for spring and resurrection! Alleluia!

Feed My Goats

The first words of the bride as she got in the car after the Mass was “I must get home to feed my goats!”

Which brings us to one of the sadnesses which seems to be inseparable from the joys of this life.

My diary for the previous Friday reads:

A beautiful sunny day. Leaving Tamar to white washing and painting, I went up the hill at eight-thirty to stay with the children, Eve's two and Helen's ten months' old Celia, whom Eve is taking care of for a time. Eve and Victor had a bit of business to transact in town which they needed to do together, so I had said I would spend the morning with the children.

I stopped on the way up to rest, sitting on the hayrake which stood out in the field by the side of the road to read Matins and Lauds while I rested. These hills are steeper than I remembered them. I had seen Victor leading the goats up the furthest hill as I reached the brow of the hill between the two farms, so I knew I had time.

When Vic and Eve left half an hour or so later, the children were all fed and in their carriages in the sun, and little Catherine was running around with the chickens. I had no sooner settled to write a few lines in my note book when Father Magee (pastor of what used to be the Syrian church in Easton) came up for a visit. Peter Maurin soon followed and as they sat and drank "wheat coffee" which Victor calls "satzy," they talked of Benedictinism, the rural life movement, authority and freedom, while I sat and practiced holy silence though I felt like bursting in with disagreements as well as concordances now and then.

Eve and Victor were back within two hours and Tamar came up with them—also the professor, and in two jerks of a lamb's tail (as my mother used to say) Eve had a delightful lunch on the table. There was red bean soup, whole wheat bread and dandelion salad garnished with raw carrot.

Bread for the Wedding

Eve is doing marvelously and her tiny room in the barn is snug and as homelike as a cabin in a ship. It is amazing how many can be accommodated for lunch. Peter, the Pro., Eve and Vic, and Catherine, Tamar, Celia and I. There is a crib at the head and the foot of the bed, and a big box has been turned into another crib, by the side of Catherine's, for three months' old Margaret. Aside from the bed and cribs there is just room for a bench and table, two chests and the kitchen range which has a vast warming oven where even then eight loaves of bread were rising in their pans. (Eve contributed the bread for the wedding feast.)

Here in this haven of peace Eve's latest baby was born on a cold February night. They had tried twice to get to the hospital, five miles away, but both times it was too soon. Finally Margaret was born at home with the assistance of the father. Eve was sitting up next morning writing a letter to her mother.

This week they are moving into the upper farm house, first floor. The Pro and Peter are upstairs now. In addition to the care of her own two babies, Eve has the Montague youngest, as I mentioned before (Helen not being well) and feeding an extra guest all winter and now two or three. There are also a dozen chickens, half a dozen doe rabbits and young ones, five goats and three kids.

Tamar and I went up the hill to the highest alfalfa field to see the goats. It was a dusty gold all over the Jersey fields, and far down below us the Delaware sparkled in the sun. It winds in a complete and sharp circle around our Catholic Worker hill-top farm.

After we came down the hill, we worked at housecleaning in the cabin, which Dave and Tamar are to occupy after their marriage.

Then suddenly in the midst of the bright sunny afternoon, while Helen and her four other babies, and Tamar and I were resting on a sunny bank—the bad news came.

Vic arrived to tell us that wild dogs had attacked all the goats after we left, killed one outright and fatally wounded three others, which he would have to kill. The scrawniest, poorest goat of the lot was left, with a little white buck kid, and the buck and doe of our best goat, only two weeks old. Tamar is nursing these two now, feeding them from milking battles, and though the buck eats vigorously the doe has to be coaxed and forced into swallowing a few drops at a time.

I feel so badly for Vic and Eve. They have been taking care of all the goats for the last winter, going to an expense in feeding them, too, and now, just when they are productive, losing them. A good milk goat costs up to \$40. I've seen two goats advertised for \$50 lately in the Rural New Yorker. So aside from the loss of loved animals, it is a heavy loss all around. What with all the babies on the farm—there are seven under five years—it would be cheaper in the long run to have a good cow. But they cost a fortune these days, too.

Sometimes it seems to us that the Easton farm is productive only in misfortunes and sufferings, but we all love it. After all, from the supernatural point of view, suffering is of tremendous value. There the ground is being worked for the entire movement. We literally, time after time, water the earth with our tears.

A FARM IN IRELAND

It is good to sit down at such a time to read Father Duffy's new pamphlet, "A Farm in Ireland," which is the story of his boyhood and how his father and his neighbors managed in their little community to raise and educate a family on fifteen acres.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that "a certain amount of property is necessary for a man to lead a good life." St. Paul so emphasized the dignity of manual labor that though he pointed out that the laborer is worthy of his hire, still he labored among the Jews and Gentiles, working with his hands as a weaver and maker of tents, to earn his daily bread. Our dear Lord Himself spent thirty silent years in the home and workshop before He went out and taught for three years.

Father Duffy, who has lived and worked with us since 1937, off and on, is engrossed with the physical details of the good life. This pamphlet is about the land (though in the last half he discusses the situation of England and Ireland) . It is about the family on the land, the parish in a farm community. We have been privileged to have Father Duffy with us, sharing our poverty on Mott street, eating there at St. Joseph's house, saying Mass down the street at Transfiguration Church, confronted daily with breadlines even in war time, when the unemployables, the lame, the halt, the blind are sharing his room with the sick and unfortunate, suffering the cold, the dirt, the confusion of the slums.

Many have asked us about Fr. Duffy, so I am glad to be able to point to this pamphlet, “A Farm in Ireland,” which gives a brief sketch of his background.