

On Pilgrimage - December 1955

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Reasserts the ideal and hope of forming communes and farming communities. Tales of Tamar's mischievous children and the value of reading scripture. (DDLW #696).

There have been many painters of **The Peaceable Kingdom**, but we like the picture of Fritz Eichenberg best of all. It is preeminently a Christmas picture, because it makes us think of the second coming of Christ, when the lion shall lie down with the lamb and all the other animals too, **And a little child shall lead them.** Christmas is such a time for children, a time of joy and light. This picture printed again mostly for them. Let them have their St. Nicholas, their Santa Claus, their sense of richness and bounty and generosity at this time, but let them think too that present sorrows also will be wiped away, and all tears, and suffering, and that, as Juliana of Norwich said, the worst has already happened and been remedied by the coming of Christ. And of His kingdom there shall be no end, and its government shall be on His shoulders. So let the spirit of joy reign, even if we have to rejoice in tribulations too at this time.

This Issue

This issue contains the magnificent review of **The Bridge**, the collection brought out by Fr. John M. Oesterreicher and announced in the last issue. With an increase of anti-Semitism in the country it is good right now to have this profound study. Christ was born a Jew, of God's chosen people, and God does not change. This issue also contains an article on the community of brothers at Rifton, New Jersey, a mature and enduring attempt of groups of families to practice community of goods in order to demonstrate love of brother, and love of God. It is truly an attempt to build "that kind of society where it is easier for people to be good," as Peter Maurin used to say. We are also running an article by Dick Kern, whom we have known for some years as a young absolutist.

The reason, however, that we print his article is that we do think it is a good article in spite of the fact that it will be disregarded as a piece of youthful enthusiasm. Of course it is young. Of course he leaves out of account original sin, and the tendencies it has left with man to idle away his time, to malingering, to

be self-serving instead of unselfish, to be prone to “wrath, anger, contention, and lack of brotherly love” as the Imitation of Christ puts it. Of course it is all but impossible to envision such a community of goods as Dick Kern of no particular religious affiliation writes of without having a community of saints to begin with. But it is the aim, it is the striving that is important. I print it also because after twenty-three years of discussing these ideas of community, I have grown to believe that the more uncompromising we are in our temporal ideal, the more we keep trying to achieve it, the happier we will be. I still have not given up hope of a farming commune, where we will have families who hold all in common, those who have an abundance making up for the want of others by their embracing voluntary poverty, a community where each shall work according to his ability and receive according to his need. It is not only Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who used such words in their communist manifesto. It is St. Paul too who said, “Let your abundance supply their want.” And there is that unforgettable picture in the second chapter of Acts when the early Christians held all things in common.

It is a fact too, that in many poor places, especially among the poor, there are attempts going on to do as Dick wrote, only these people are too humble, and their attempts too small for them to want to write about them.

We don’t wish to make an invidious comparison, but there is a mentally unbalanced old Jewish woman dressed in innumerable scarves and coats and rags who is with us, and then wanders off at night to sleep by turns in empty stores and doorways. It took us quite a few years even to get her to come in and eat. By now she is a “familiar.” Once in a while she will start rambling and tell us of a country, a world where every door is open, and everything you ask for you receive and everyone smiles at each other. . . . An old Communist friend of mind told me once that just before the war, Russia was about to issue an edict that from now on all bread, the staff of life, would be free to all and abundant for all. He spoke with an exalted look and it was indeed beautiful to contemplate.

It is true we must never lose those dreams.

Personal Notes

At the beginning of the month of November, David Hennessy, my son-in-law, broke his wrist on the job which meant a week in the hospital for him, and a week for me to stay to help my daughter with her seven children. Another important event this month, is the fourth child starting school. Nicholas Joseph, born down in West Virginia, and now five years old, could not go to St. Louis Academy where the other three go, because it is overcrowded, but he was fortunate enough to be taken in first grade, when a family moved out of the parish and left a vacancy, at Our Lady Help of Christians school. It is in Tottenville, and it was at that church that both Tamar and I were baptized. We are very happy that Nickie is starting school there. And it isn’t as though he were really starting alone,

since Andrew Scarpulli, one of our neighbors, is also in first grade. Now there are only three little girls at home with Tamar during the day, Mary, Margaret and Martha, and the second one is more work than all the rest put together. She makes a wreck of everything, and if there is sudden quiet, and she is out of sight, one knows she is poking the wax off the jam on the shelves in the back room, or making a cloud of powder in the bathroom, or filling up the wash basin and letting it run over the floor in rivers, or quietly dismembering Mary's dolls etc. etc.

In spite of it all, Tamar has made two beautiful hooked rugs, - so beautiful in fact that a visiting priest said that when he got rich enough he'd put in an order for a rug for the floor in front of the altar. She and David designed the patterns themselves. There is also a little table loom, at which the three eldest children, (Becky is ten) have woven scarves and some material out of which they made me a knitting bag for my birthday. Maggie somehow never gets into the rug frame, the loom or the books which line the room. Which is a blessing.

With Martha's birth this summer, the Hennessy's have given up some of their animals, the rabbits and goats, as too much work right now. Becky had learned to milk the goats (four quarts a day) and she taught me, her grandmother! But the goat was too strong for her, and when it came to staking her out and bringing her in at night to milk her, it was a gruesome ordeal of getting chains wound around your legs, and yourself pulled into bramble bushes that could put out your eyes, as in the Mother Goose rhyme. Both Eric and Becky tended the goats, but neither were strong enough for it, and David was working nights all summer. Right now they have a little flock of six geese, and it is wonderful to see fearless little Margaret, two years old, facing down the hissing crowd. When Eric brings their feed to the coop in which they are penned at night and runs ahead of them holding out the quart can of scratch feed, they half fly after him, wings spread, honking at the top of their lungs. Noisy but most graceful birds. It is a picture which makes you laugh for joy.

The Gospels

There are still the chipmunks out in the cage under the mulberry trees. Eric and Nickie saw their cat slinking along the road with a mouthful of baby chipmunks, and caught her and made her relinquish three of them. Eric built a cage, a very large one, in which he constructed a forest scene of branches and leaves, with a large tin can for a house, and there the chipmunks have lived and they must have been all males or all females, because there have never been any young. They are a delight to watch, and the children gather acorns for them, and feed them grass and apples and grain.

One day we were sitting out under the trees and I was reading to the children the epistle and gospel of the day, and talking to them about the potency of the word of God, how holy scriptures were, what a blessing they brought to those

who read them, and how when the word of God was preached by St. Francis and St. Anthony all the birds of the air and all the fish of the sea came closer to hear. And as I spoke and as I read, we looked at the little chipmunks, and there they were, suddenly quiet, no longer racing madly up and down the cage, standing on their heads and performing for us, but they were poised motionless, on the branches inside their cage, their bright little eyes alert and watchful. It was a pretty sight. (Becky is reading the Bible and a few Sundays ago, I found her reading the book of Ruth.)

Children, Children

Our playroom at Peter Maurin farm is finished, and the fireplace which Chris decorated with the words, LUX and PAX on the hearthstone, is working beautifully. Jim Gilligan fashioned an overhanging piece of tin, and raised the hearth so that the fire no longer smokes, and we have gathered driftwood from the beach for fragrant fires. Durring our day of recollection on the first Sunday of the month, while Fr. Guerin gave his conference, the children of the parents present toasted marshmallows there. The room with its three big windows, and its pleasant prospect out over the fields, its chests of toys, its children's furniture, is so pleasing that adults come in and look into the fire and dream, "how good to be a child again."

"Proyects"

And what projects, or as Hans, who is cooking for us calls them, proyects, here is the spinning and weaving, beginning with the teasing and the carding. It is amazing how many pictures there are of all the peoples of the earth, spinning and weaving, in the old copies of the National Geographic which we have on hand. Mary Roberts is painting, and we are both interested too in calligraphy. As for musical instruments, and none to play them, we have a recorder, a piano and an organ.

There is also a small printing press, on which Stanley Vishnewsy prints our stationery, and the prayer cards which everyone enjoys receiving and also two or three booklets. The first was a book by Stanley himself entitled **Teen Age Martyrs**. And the third project was a booklet of the poetry of Elizabeth Sheehan which is of rare beauty. Stanley's work is improving constantly, and when he gets more type (what he has is a bit worn and blurred) he will be able to turn out a better job.

Preparations

This winter we are having days of recollection on the first Sunday of each month, and a series of conferences on the Supernatural life is being given by Fr. Guerin,

Marist father, from Princes Bay, nearby. Next summer we hope to have added accommodations at the farm, for our three or four week long retreats which we are planning.