

On Pilgrimage - April 1957

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Summary: A collection of stories: her daughter Tamar's search for a new farm, the gift of looms, a book by Eric Fromm on community, labor and civil rights picketing, her profession as a Benedictine oblate, and the injustice of Morton Sobell's trial for espionage with the Rosenbergs. (DDLW #719).

The crocuses are up late this year and Tamar was able to fence in the little flower garden by the side of the kitchen door before the geese got in to nip off all the buds. Instead, little Martha, year and a half old, was the first one, and she picked the first yellow flower and brought it to her mother. The gardens are full of all kinds of birds now, and the sun is warmer, and you can almost feel the sap running in the trees and shrubs.

Peter Maurin Farm

This year we want to put in 500 asparagus, rhubarb and strawberry plants and there will be a lot of work for our Saturday work crews to do. We are still eating beets, carrots, string beans and tomatoes besides a great variety of pickles from our garden.

We have been mightily blessed by God this Lent. We have a visitor from Haiti, a Jesuit, who will stay for a few months, and is offering Mass every day in our little chapel. Last Saturday it was a Mass in honor of St. Dominic Savio, especially for the children, since the girls belong to that club in their school. Father preached a long sermon on heaven and hell, with many quotations from St. Thomas. We sang the Mass. Little Clare, my godchild, the same age as my youngest grandchild, sang loudest of all, holding a Kyriale upside down. John Filliger's greenhouse is really green, full as it is of tomato and cabbage plants, and many others too. He built the greenhouse himself from old windows that a neighbor gave us and he works in it every day.

One spring-like afternoon John and Tamar and some of the children and I set out upon a rural ride down Woodrow Road and visited a farm run by a Russian couple for more than a score of years. They had two cows and a bull, and a few hundred pigs, and many chickens, ducks, pigeons and in the midst of these

creatures, Martha could only see a squirrel and chase that around. She cried over the pigs, they were so huge and fearsome.

Vermont

“Another reason for moving to Vermont,” Tamar said, remembering how the others used to ride on the pigs’ back and feed the baby goats and risk the butting of the billygoat. The Hennessys are still writing to friends, exploring real estate catalogues, wondering about jobs, and planning to move in the late spring. First David wishes to take his vacation early in order to explore the possibilities, while I baby-sit with the seven children. He must have Tamar with him in this exploration. Certainly they are used to country living, with their experience at Maryfarm, Easton, and at Stotler’s Crossroads, West Virginia. Now with growing children, they have to be near a school, and within walking distance preferably of town and work, church and school.

A lot to ask, of course, but St. Joseph will help. Something will open up. A week ago when I was spending the weekend on the farm, Becky and Susie came to spend the night, and Becky was telling me about the Dominic Savio club, and how one little boy was going to be put out. He was about eleven, but went around boasting of the movies he had seen, and he especially preferred those on the condemned list, such as *The Moon Is Blue* or *Baby Doll*. He had a collection (\$14 worth) of rock and roll records, much to the horror of the sister who taught him. Between television and movies, the country has become the city too, and it is with no idea of escape that Tamar and David want Vermont. But they want real country, not Staten Island, which is part of New York City, with the greatest oil storage tanks of the Standard Oil within sight of their upstairs windows, and the chemical works, refineries and other factories polluting the air and the water from the Jersey Shore less than a mile away. Staten Island itself remains country, backwash as it is of the city, but the hum of industry can be heard out in the fields, and with a west wind the smog is ugly indeed on the north side of the island.

Weather

This winter the children had a scant two weeks of ice skating, and there was little snow. There are few winter sports, and the weather varies from mild and muggy to bitter cold. The littlest ones more often come in wet to the skin, from wading in puddles and rivulets along the road. Winter has its delights as we well know, and I recall the month of January I spent in Minnesota and Montana a few years ago.

Meanwhile, to get to Vermont miracles are necessary. To sell the house and four acres they have now, and to find a suitable house and job in Vermont. That is

the problem. If they could make the move first and sell the house afterward! But they must have the money to make the move.

So Tamar lightens the tensions of indecision by spinning and weaving and the cooking and washing that go with a big family. She now has curtains for her windows, a bedspread, scarves and towels as a result of her winter's work.

More Looms

We were delighted during the month to receive the donation of two looms, and a great spinning wheel from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Peekskill. They had told me about them when I visited there some months ago, the old sister had died who was using them, and they offered them to us. Now we have two big and two small looms (two of them all set up) on the farm, and the work goes on apace.

Eric Fromm

One evening when I was visiting my sister, I picked up **The Sane Society** by Eric Fromm, and was fascinated by it. There is a very good chapter on the radical thinking of the last century and an analysis of the thought of Marx, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Landauer and others of that school. Mr. Fromm comes to the same conclusion that we have, together with many others, that community is the only answer. Peter Maurin started talking about the communitarian and personalist revolution back in 1934; Mr. Fromm's is what he calls the humanist communitarian society. His last chapter says that the only alternative to insanity was the building up of community, but that it looked more likely that we would have a war which would force civilization back to a primitive agrarian society. I was surprised that neither Gandhi nor Vinoba Bhave were listed in the index, or referred to as offering an alternative to war by their teaching of non-violent resistance and non-ownership.

Kohler Strike

We have had a good deal of correspondence over the Kohler strike, and why Bob Steed, one of our editors, is picketing in front of the Kohler show room one day a month, calling attention to the strike and the boycott. Though in a way, a boycott is a use of force, a coercion, still it remains a non-violent way to "make a point" when there is no possibility of sitting down and coming to an agreement on issues over a council table. It is perfectly legitimate to withdraw one's labor, and one's purchasing of a product which comes from a plant where the "needs" rather than "demands" of labor are not being met.

The issue is not really an economic one—it was not a question of wages and hours and conditions of employment. The issue was always the rights of the workers

to belong to a union of their own choosing, and through that union, to have some say in the management of the industry. I am not even sure whether the latter issue ever came up, but every Catholic economist now points out that to deproletarianize the worker, as Pope Pius XI demanded in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, the worker would have to become an owner. Not an owner by owning shares in the company, but an owner having responsibility and share in the management.

From the first the struggle has been over labor management relations. Both sides are determined to win, the United Auto Workers, CIO-AFL throwing the weight of their great membership behind the strike, and contributing gigantic amounts to the strike fund. It is said that they have spent ten million dollars on this strike which involves only 3,000 workers. It is a fight over a principle. Those who complain that unions have become monopolies, too great and powerful, fail to realize that they have become monopolies in order to match strength with the opponent. There is still a great job of organizing to be done throughout the country. The DuPont workers have never been organized; the textile workers though the south are unorganized. The workers in heavy industry form only one part of the labor force of the country.

CORE

News comes to us that the Baltimore CORE (Committee on Racial Equality) is actively picketing and conducting sit-ins at a chain of segregated restaurants. One of our seminary friends writes that he was able to join them on a free day a few weeks back. "They are magnificent and informed people," he writes, "working from Gandhian principles, and have excellent membership, including many ministers, doctors, teachers, etc. among the colored of the city. The day I joined them on the picket line, they were threatened with arrest, but it was only a threat."

Blanchet House of Hospitality

News comes from the Portland, Oregon, Blanchet house of hospitality that they had a fifth anniversary open house and had as guests Archbishop Howard, and many priests, besides the interested laity. Fr. John Domin who has been a friend of the house since his seminary days, and is a beautiful calligrapher, if that is the word for it, designed the sign for the house.

"Our giant stew pot sagged the stove and floor so badly we had to get busy and prop up the floor from the basement with a '4 x 4'," Don Broderick, director of the house wrote. "Some 1933 Chinese newspapers and **Oregonians** of the same vintage were discovered under three layers of linoleum and rugs in the course of cleaning and painting the rooms at the house. We make a point of cleaning these rooms every 24 years," he added. How we would love to visit there again!

Our friends the Manions who used to have a few cigar stores in Portland, moved out to the land some years ago and are living near the Mt. Angel Benedictine Abbey, and they are our most regular correspondents from there.

Speaking of signs, we have a beautiful new sign over our doors at 223 Chrystie Street, with a flood light above it which shows up the beauty of the wood carving. The work was a gift from a wonderful Italian wood carver Henry Beretta who has done the statues for many churches, and has given us this great gift for the love of God and brother.

Benedictine Oblate

I have mentioned a few visits in the past to St. Procopius Abbey at Lisle, Ill. Our beloved Fr. Chrysostom Tarasevich is from there, and our fellow worker Michael Kovalak was a seminarian there years ago. Peter Maurin and Fr. Virgil Michel talked to me about Benedictinism during the early years of the depression, and held up the Benedictine motto Pax, and the balanced life of cult, culture and cultivation as a solution for world troubles; the farming commune as a solution to the problems of unemployment and automation.

Now I am a professed oblate of the St. Procopius family, and have been for the last two years, which means that I am a part of the Benedictine family all over the world, and a member of the Benedictine community at Lisle and every month a news letter comes from St. Procopius, from the pen of Fr. Richard, oblate master. My special love for St. Procopius is because its special function is to pray for the reunion of Rome and the Eastern Church. Their monks can offer Mass in the Eastern or Roman rite and when Fr. Chrysostom came to give us retreats at Maryfarm, we sang the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. St. Procopius is also to be the shrine of the Eastern saints in this country.

One specially interesting letter contained news of a new eastern community which I had never heard of before.

The Studite monks of Woodstock, Ontario, have been placed under the jurisdiction and authority of the Abbot of St. Procopius. "The Studite monastic community was founded at the turn of the century by the Metropolitan Archbishop Andrew Sheptitsky. The group follows the rule and the ancient practices of St. Theodor of Studien which rule even today is being observed by non-Catholic communities on Mt. Athos, Greece.

"It was the desire of the Archbishop to reestablish a Catholic group to follow the rule of this illustrious Catholic monk. The community had its beginning with several illiterate swineherds. The Archbishop believed that with these simple men he could find true obedience for a monastic observance as was practiced in the early days of the Church.

"From these humble beginnings in 1900 the Community thrived and attained its peak membership of 220 in 1939. Their greatness then was to be tested,

for through the Nazis and the Communists many of them suffered glorious martyrdom while others went to Siberia. By 1945 there were but 14 remaining members.

"The type of life that was practiced in the community was that of a purely contemplative nature as is revealed by the various states that existed in the community. There were the penitents—the barefoot ones—the fools for Christ—the fasters—the hermits. Their liturgical functions entail an attendance of roughly eight to nine hours daily in the chapel.

"After being dispossessed from the Ukraine they emigrated to Canada. Right now they are penniless, in absolute poverty. But more even than material relief they need paternal guidance and spiritual direction.

"The task of ministering to these monks is one in which our oblates can share fully. Father Abbot has dedicated this work to our Blessed Mother. I am sure we will all count it a privilege to have these holy men among our confreres, since thus we have a real share in their merits."

Morton Sobell

I include this mention of Morton Sobell in my **On Pilgrimage** column because I know that all those who read **The Catholic Worker** read the columns when perhaps they might glance over a news story and evade it, not consciously but because that is the way people read newspapers.

Helen Sobell came in to see us—it was her second visit in the last six months—and talked to us about her husband. At my request, she gave me the eight little paperbound volumes of the transcript of the trial.

Anyone who can read Erle Stanley Gardner's mysteries, where the unravelling of the plot takes place usually in the court room, would follow the story of the Rosenbergs and the Sobells with fascinated interest. That is, if they will only read them. I imagine they could get them at a library if they could not afford to buy them (they cost six dollars). I am reading them now, and I am in the third volume, and for the sake of our readers who will not have access to these reports, I will try to give my impression, sketchy though this mention may be. But I will continue some mention of this case from month to month.

First of all, I was surprised at the indictment under which the Rosenbergs, David Greenglass and Morton Sobell were tried. There was no mention in the first two indictments of any overt act on the part of Sobell, and it was only by going to court and after ceaseless pleas that there was any particular charge.

In the calling of the jury, I was surprised at how many prospective jurors said forthrightly that they were opposed to capital punishment. Thank God! So far this voice of the people has not been heard.

It is too late for the Rosenbergs, though we owe it to the children they left behind them, to re-examine the case. All three were tried together so we have to do this in reviewing the case of Morton Sobell who is serving thirty years at Alcatraz. We are reviewing it in the hope that there will be enough expression of opinion so that there will be new hearings and a new trial. Or at least that he will be transferred from the West Coast nearer to his wife and children.

According to Harold Urey, physicist and Nobel prize winner “The integrity of justice as it is administered in the United states is at stake . . . Mr. Sobell was not properly tried and the verdict and sentence are not justified.”

The most recent action taken was before the United States Court of Appeals on March 5. Dr. Sanchez Ponton, formerly Minister of Education of Mexico, now senior professor of law at the University of Mexico, came from Mexico City and presented arguments charging the knowing use of perjured testimony against Morton Sobell and the violation of the extradition treaty between the United States and Mexico.

There is no decision as yet as to whether another hearing will be granted.

Any one who wishes to get more material about this case can write to the **Sobell Committee, 940 Broadway, New York City**. As for me, I feel convinced that Morton Sobell was judged guilty even before he was tried, that the trial was not a fair one, and that we too must join our voices in a continued protest against a terrible injustice that has been done.

Two years ago I wrote to Commissioner of Prisons Bennett and added my petition to the hundreds of others for a new trial, or at least that Sobell be transferred to an eastern prison so that his wife and two children can see him. The letter I received in reply thanking me for the tone of my letter, which was not antagonistic, was anything but pleasant. Mr. Bennett assured me that Mrs. Sobell somehow managed to get out to see her husband, even though they are a continent apart, and that he himself did not think the two children should see their father.

Helen Sobell told me of their last visit, when she brought their eight-year-old son with her, her first visit in four months, and the child's in four years. The father and son talked of the child's erector set and his toy trains, the wife and husband talked of Fromm's latest book, **The Art of Loving**, discussing father love, and mother love, and all the talk had to be through a heavy plate glass barrier, with the use of earphones. The agony of such intercourse!

“God sees the truth but waits.” He waits on us to open our eyes and ears to justice and charity. Let us be part of His justice, “whose property it is always to have mercy and to spare.”