

On Pilgrimage - March 1953

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Summary: Relishes the antics of her grandchildren and the signs of early Spring at Peter Maurin farm. "Even the senses rejoice in the beauty of God." (DDLW #645).

Spring begins in February, I tell everyone exultantly, but if they don't visit the country they won't know it. Tamar's garden has snow drops blooming and they came out on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

I went there the other day and found Mary Elizabeth sitting on a heap of dirt, watching John Murray dig a ditch for a drain from the cellar so that Tamar can set up her laundry in the cellar instead of in the bathroom. Mary Elizabeth, 19 months old, is only as big as a minute, but full of a tremendous energy and joy of life. At that moment she was still, quietly enjoying a large hunk of clayey dirt which she ate while she watched John. I hear that down south there are regions where people are known as clay eaters and medical men have decided there is something in the soil craved and needed by those who eat it. But all children love to eat dirt.

Nickie, the terror, is the most talkative member of the family. He is a great conversationalist and his tones contain all intonations, moods, emotions. He boasts, he thrusts out his chest, he is deep-voiced and aggressive, he struts; or he is tender, embracing his little sister, having just knocked her down; or "I'll kiss Granny," implying that none else will, and he will come to the rescue; or he is full of fierce excitement over a dog, a bird, a truck, a bus, which he calls upon everyone to share; or resignation, "Okay, all right, I won't," whereupon he goes and does. He is rollicking, big-mouthed, shining-eyed. And the place is never still for a minute while he is around. Eric is quiet, helpful, forever busy taking things apart with wrenches, helping carry lumber, carting out the trash, bringing in the mail. And Becky and Susie are in school, each one as different from the rest as can be. Yesterday we were coming home from visiting the Dellingers and she said regretfully, "oh there was something I wanted to tell Patch—" What could it have been! What lives they lead, these little ones, not yet seven, not yet supposed to have reached the age of reason, and yet they pray, they play, they intrigue for favor, they listen to the adult world around them and without doubt understand and judge. And yet they live in a world of their own, a child's world. The Smith children are fascinating to play with. Bernadette reads to them, Charlie shows them how to draw, they make up games or play cowboys and Indians among the sand pits and scrubby woods around Tamar's house, and through the fields around the Peter Maurin farm.

Peter Maurin farm has always been a place for children, and families come whenever we have conferences and the talk must always be of essentials because you can't get too much talk in.

I went for a walk with Father Clarence Duffy a few days ago, down through the asparagus patch, past the grape vines, down to the northeast corner next to the goat farm where he and a neighbor had been rooting out the sumac and cutting down the brush and tall grasses. Little springs had burst through the ground and were trickling down to the brook which is the border of our property and the brook itself foamed and tinkled among the rocks. The brookside is all cleared now, a place to sit and dream these warmish days. Wherever water runs there is green wild cress bitter to the tongue, wild garlic shooting up along the edges of the roads.

Whenever visitors come Father introduces them to the compost heaps which are arranged in orderly piles here and there around the farm. Ditches are laid out and when it rains the fields are properly drained, and in the course of the work he came across the remains of the old ditch system which former owners had many years ago. For fifteen years tenants had not farmed, but Father is trying to bring back the wornout soil. In return for grass, a neighbor with a stable has brought us his manure, and we hope to go to the beach for seaweed as the men of Aran did. It is good for the asparagus, of which we have a three acre bed which is thirty years old and yet which gave us all the asparagus we could eat last spring, and brought us \$100, selling it to neighbors.

One entire field is green with rye, and when that is cut in the spring the clover and alfalfa will come up and perfume the air. There is nothing that smells so sweet as a field of clover. When I visited Fr. Casey's church in Hutchinson, Minn., and found it fragrant with the beeswax candles he used, I suddenly realized that the beeswax smells of clover. Even the senses rejoice in the beauty of God.

Every morning Fr. Duffy is out right after breakfast digging, cleaning out a little swamp, composting, and he is looking forward to work Saturdays when some of our Catholic Worker readers will come and help us out in the fields. Those who are interested, send for his pamphlets, **This Way Out** and **A Farm in Ireland**, in which he discusses the basic ways to rebuild a social order. Address Peter Maurin Farm, 469 Bloomingdale Road, Pleasant Plains, Staten Island, New York.