

Notes By The Way - October 1945

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Some thoughts on death after the sudden passing of a co-worker. Tells of Workers returning from war, painting chores, and prayers for conversions. Speaks of wanting to finish a novel that includes themes from the retreat given at Maryfarm and which has drawn criticism. (DDLW #415).

Last night Jim Eriksen died around one-thirty, of heart failure, after a coughing spell.

He just lay back on his pillow, closed his eyes and was gone. Joe Motyka, who was his roommate, ran to get Gerry, and by the time they got back he was dead. He was forty-two years old and had just been back the last month from overseas. The night before he died he worked until 11 o'clock in the office, lettering envelopes to contain the stickers to mail out the paper. He didn't want to go to bed until he finished it, he said. And then, not feeling well, he stayed up a while longer acknowledging some of the answers to our appeal. Many of you who answered us and received cards, neatly typed, and postmarked October 12, will be receiving the last words of

Jim Eriksen, telling you that we of the Catholic Worker were grateful.

He died last night; his body was taken away this afternoon before the soup line started at 4:30. Duncan was helping in the kitchen, and then after supper, he took up where Jim left off last night and sat down to share the job of answering our friends. I went out to the kitchen to make fudge—not a good time to do it, but Gerry wanted to mail it to Jack Thornton for Christmas and the package had to get off before Monday and there was no time Friday or Saturday. Dave Mason and Herb Welsh shelled the nuts, and Shorty found me pans and wooden spoons and Chu kept washing the pots and we listened to the symphony while the fudge, made of brown sugar and milk, boiled on the stove.

The symphony was Tschaikovsky's Fifth, the Pathetique, the same one my brother and I listened to while we waited for his wife to have her first baby. Such music to accompany our thoughts of life and death. Struggling we come into the world, struggling we go out. Duncan came in and said he could not work, he could not stop crying. We cry for ourselves, we told him, not for those who are gone. This life is a darkness compared to the life to come. Now we are in the womb, Fr. Ehmann says. We are going to be born to eternal life, and there is

all eternity before us, forever and forever and forever, as St. Teresa used to like to say.

All the beauty that is here, all the beauty of music, of sweet flowers, lovely smells and sights of sunsets and autumn trees and babies laughing, and women loving, and men strong in spirit—

these are such samples of the light and freedom and joy to come. Why do we weep?

Arrivals

Tom Sullivan, formerly of the Chicago Catholic Worker, is staying here for a while, just back from the Pacific. Jack English, formerly from the Cleveland Catholic Worker is staying, too. Gerry Griffin is back for good now and in charge of the house. That will give Dave Mason more time for writing, makeup, printing, and a good deal of that work can be done on the farm.

He used to love the Philadelphia farm and spend a good deal of his time there. He'll be able to get more to the country now after being tied in New York for the past three years. Charles O'Rourke beams to see the gang coming back, and Father Duffy keeps thinking his labors are going to be lightened, but somehow they never are.

Thanks to such a crew around, there has been a lot of painting going on. The office is painted throughout. Also the front of the building painted green. The halls are washed, and part of the rear house painted red. The back fence is a brilliant green. We begin to look festive, and by the time Christmas is here, we'll probably have Christmas trees blooming in the back yard.

What I've always wanted is ailanthus trees.

Next?

Looking over an old notebook, I find this: Rogation days, May, 1944. Prayer for conversions: Budenz, Minor, Mike Gold, Bridges, Curran, Lawrenson, Smith, Quill, Hathaway,

Browder. Well, the first is taken care of. I don't know why I picked just those and no others. I have other much longer lists. Bob Minor, someone very nice whom I worked for in Chicago a brief period, is next on the list.

Book Reviews

And now that people are coming back from the war, maybe we'll have time for a few book reviews in the paper. It is so wonderful to get all the books and so hard to write good reviews.

Longmans Green, 55 Fifth Avenue, has been sending us such books lately that we can only beg our readers to get their catalogues and go on a spree of buying. There is a new book of Father Gerald Vann, Raissa Maritain's *Adventures in Grace*, Margaret Monroe's *Enjoying the New Testament*, *Mitri*, the story of Prince Demetrius, by Sargent; *No Shadow of Turning*, by Kathleen Burton, and many others.

Controversy

Some day, perhaps, I shall be able to finish the novel I was working on when I met Peter

Maurin, a proletarian novel where the hero, in an era of unemployment, and in flight from the police for his agitation, gets the job of advertising a clothing store while he walks on stilts in

Times Square. The heroine is likewise idiotically employed, walking as a manikin, advertising

fur coats in the window of a clothing store on Fourteenth street. The villain of the piece is capitalism and materialism. The theme of the novel is unemployment and the solution is decentralization, only to be achieved by voluntary poverty and detachment from creatures and in this effort to work for others, to continue to love others in the face of injury, hatred, war, the only motive strong enough is the love of God. And to show how this ever increasing love of God is fostered, my idea is to write about a retreat—for how can we learn unless we be taught, and the priests are our teachers—and write about it at length, giving my heroine's retreat notes, which will be simple, fragmentary, enticing. After all, Aldous Huxley has his novels full of diaries, notes, ruminations on spiritual subjects. *Eyeless in Gaza* is chuck full of it.

But it looks as though I'm never going to get a chance to write that novel, life is so packed

around the Catholic Worker, and one lives with so many people, that it is impossible to live with people in a book as you have to do when you are writing a novel.

And yet I want to write about the retreat in a way to arouse people's interest so that they will write to us for the retreat notes, which we have published, under the title of *Applied Christianity*,

(Imprimatur from the diocese of New York) and for other literature on the subject.

We don't want too many to be asking for retreats as yet, because we haven't room for them on the farm at Easton where we have started a retreat house and we have not enough retreat houses or priests. There are not enough priests to go around for parish work let alone for retreat houses. The South is clamoring for them, the missions—oh yes, there will always be a dearth. What a need for vocations both for the priesthood and the apostolate!

On one occasion I published a page of retreat notes which I had taken on my own annual retreat at Oakmont, Pa., and there were one or two letters of commendation. Fr. Verner Moore said that they were refreshing, and a young man reading them in jail, where he was confined as an objector to war, made up his mind to make the retreat when he was released. He made quite a few retreats after he had served his sentence, and now he is studying for the priesthood in Montreal. He is a convert.

It would take a whole book to write about this retreat of ours, and that is why I get so anxious to get at my novel. I think it is an important retreat, an important *means* for us to show our love for God and our brother. Here we are engaged in this work these thirteen years, running a paper, houses of hospitality, farms, living the communitarian and personalist life. You start doing these things because you love your brother. You want to serve him. The only way you can show your love for your brother is by practicing the works of mercy and by trying to change the social order which makes so many of those works necessary. And yet one is not helping people much unless one puts them into the way of helping themselves.

We want to do so much, and we are able to do so little, not only in the matter of food and clothing, but time and loving kindness. We want truly to give the best we have, and so we want to share this retreat which has brought joy to our hearts.

Unfortunately this retreat has aroused a great deal of controversy, and the published retreat notes have, a year after publication, been adversely reviewed in *The Ecclesiastical Review*, a magazine which for the most part is read only by the clergy. In addition to the published review there have been mimeographed criticisms circulated around the country. To answer these criticisms, Fr. John J. Hugo, who wrote out the retreat notes so that the retreatants themselves would stop passing around their own too often garbled versions of the retreat, issued a mimeographed answer of some length.

Anyone who wishes a copy of the notes and the reply to the criticism may write to us and receive a copy of either or both. The next retreat given on the farm will start the Wednesday evening Nov. 21 before Thanksgiving, and last through Sunday evening. Make your plans now.