

On Pilgrimage - June 1947

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Summary: Travels by train to the Grail in Ohio, then to the Midwest praising a variety of works of mercy on the land. "A pilgrimage indeed, and a most encouraging one, visiting readers of the paper, families and cells which are growing up everywhere, grappling all of them with the spiritual weapons of hard work, poverty, and prayer." (DDLW #454).

If you take the train at five in the afternoon at Penn station, you can arrive in Cincinnati at eight the next morning. It would take a day and a night on the bus. I would rather have taken the bus and enjoyed the ride through the beautiful Pennsylvania mountains, but I was fitting in engagements so I had to take the train on this lap of the trip. It was very crowded but I was thankful for the reclining chairs. In front of me was an old colored woman who took up a fearful amount of room with a braided rug she was making. First she ripped the strips of bright colored material, then she braided them and then sewed them together. Finally she curled up in her chair to sleep and spread the rug over her.

Grail

I was met at the train by one of the girls from the Grail school of the apostolate, Judith, who has charge of the weaving guild. Since Graham Cary's visit in the winter, they have called the various departments "guilds," and are eventually going to have their own distinctive dress, symbols, feasts, etc. There are the weaving, writing, baking, agricultural guilds, etc. A. de Bethune has also been here, talking on WORK, on lettering, on "whatsoever you do, doing all for the love of God." Next week, after I leave there will be a school for ministers and their wives and many are bringing their children. It is a joy to spend a week here, to rest at the beginning of the trip after a long hard winter. The daffodils are in bloom in the pasture under my window, the goats are keeping the grass nicely cropped but not touching the flowers, the trees are all coming out. The cows are calving, the sheep lambing, the goats kidding. It is paschal time and a time of rejoicing indeed. Elsewhere in this issue there is a notice of Grail courses for the summer and we hope many of our young readers who are eager for the apostolate will get to them.

On April 21 I spoke to the women's club at Green Bay and the next evening in Oconto. I talked of the works of mercy and the lay apostolate, "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor." One keeps thinking of this when travelling around and seeing on the one hand such wealth and comfort and on the other hand such misery. All

through Pennsylvania there are miners and steel workers living in such poor housing that the comfort of a small middle western town shines out. But there is poverty everywhere. There are Indian reservations up here, orphanages, a reformatory—plenty of the works of mercy to perform. One of the great troubles is that people are concerned as to whether or not the poor are **deserving**.

One of our readers whom I enjoyed meeting this trip was Fred le Mieux, whose mother raised fifteen children of her own and then during the course of a long life raised fifty-three more. This seemed an unbelievable number to me, but everyone corroborated it. If she took them a dozen in a batch, she could easily have raised three or four generations of them. She lived eight miles out of Green Bay, and when finally her husband decided that they had done their share for the orphaned, her son, Fred, told her he'd put up housing for poor families with many children on their fifteen acre property. This was in 1938, and since then he has managed to put up on his own and adjoining property about 28 small homes that he sold to people who had no money for down payments, but had jobs so that they could pay off a mortgage over a long period of years, at the rate of fifteen dollars a month. The lots were not too big, but this move out of the town to the country was one step on the way, and some of his neighbors have now gotten farms of their own.

Two of our friends from Milwaukee are living in Green Bay now, Florence Weinfurter, librarian at St. Catherine's reading room and book store, which has been opened by one of the Catholic Action study groups in Green Bay, and Helen Heyrman, Nina Polcyn's sister. Nina is the initial reader in Milwaukee who got the Milwaukee House of Hospitality under way. (It has been closed since the war.)

I spoke at La Crosse, to the Deanery of the Council of Catholic Women, and at Viterbo College. Then I went on to St. Paul, where I stayed at Maryfarm, which is a most delightful oasis of 19 acres five miles out of St. Paul, in Little Canada. The church is across the road, and fellow parishioners have helped with the ploughing so that a good garden was being put in as I visited. The little house has a cellar, three rooms downstairs and a big attic separated by curtains to make three sleeping rooms. In between my visits to our friends at St. John's, St. Benedict's, and St. Paul, I stayed here, and a most restful time it was. I had one visit at Maryhouse where six of the girls stay (there are three at the farm) and we sang the Mass together, and after breakfast, it being a fast day, we went on singing. Alma Taylor had had some instruction from Dom Vitry and so the girls knew a great many of the Latin hymns. Most of all we enjoyed singing the Te Deum. They are all working among the colored of Minneapolis, going out to perform the works of mercy among them, and now that they have the little farm, there will be groups of the colored children going out for holiday to help plant and harvest, and get a little sample of rural living. I enjoyed visits with our friends, Fr. Casey, Fr. Egan and Fr. Judge, but was unable to get in touch with others on account of lack of time and the telephone strike. Where there were no dial phones, it is hard to reach people, and to say there is an emergency when there is none, is like crossing a picket line.

Iowa

From St. Paul I went to Muscatine, Iowa, to visit Sister Bernice. This town is right on the Mississippi, which was at flood level, what with the rains this spring. Msgr. Hauber, Dr. Sacco and Jim Connor came to see me from St. Ambrose College and we had a good talk. From Muscatine I went by bus to Des Moines, the sisters getting up with me at three o'clock in the morning, so that I could catch my bus. I got in to Des Moines at nine and was met by Mary Jane and Bernice, two of the girls from the Grail school who are helping Msgr. Ligutti at his headquarters there. They had an engagement that very day to visit **Westphalia**, which is almost at the border of Nebraska, so at noon we got on another bus and went on to see Father Hubert Duren, who met us in a shabby old car and drove us on to his parish, set in the midst of rolling prairies.

Father Duren

Fr. Duren is one of the most fascinating characters we have met in a long time, and one of the most accomplished. A former lumber jack from Wisconsin, he was sent to Iowa to the little parish of Westphalia twenty years ago. The story of how he pulled his parish out of the depression, stalled off foreclosure of the mortgages on their farms, by obtaining a moratorium from the state legislature, and built up a prosperous community is a success story indeed. Beginning in a depression there was a need for putting into effect what Father called his five point program—religion, education, recreation, commerce and credit.

A neighbor with 80 acres of woods was clearing them for cattle range, and turned the job over to Dr. Duren and his brother who set up saw mills. This gave a job to the farmers who cut a half million feet of lumber, and in addition to selling it to keep going during the depression, they built a bandstand to seat five hundred, a recreational hall, and provided themselves with fuel. What is more, they learned to work together, so that Fr. Duren was able to get a cooperative store in the town of one hundred and fifty people, which would rival any supermarket in New York. The farmers for miles around can do all their purchasing there. Now they have a credit union, a deep freeze unit and locker space for the farmers, and are planning other cooperative ventures, all based on the parish as a unit working together. These enterprises have kept young people on the land by providing them with work and a social life of their own. Fr. Duren himself paints, composes ballads, plays every instrument, has a parish band, and a very hearty culture indeed flourishes. We were there for Sunday morning Mass, and it was wonderful to hear the whole congregation sing the Gregorian Mass (a choir sang the proper).

No Migrant Workers

All the farms in this section are large farms of 160 or 240 acres, and Father Duren said wistfully that he wished he could persuade his parishioners to break up their farms into

smaller units of eighty acres each. Then he would have four hundred instead of one hundred families. What he would like best of all is to see displaced families taken in from Europe. There are no migratory workers, but fathers and sons do all their own farming. Iowa is the great hog state of the country, and the biggest crops are corn, oats, soybean and red clover.

“What I would like to see,” says Fr. Duren, “is diversification and decentralization. I’d like to see more families on smaller farms. Right now we need a baker, a barber, shoe maker, a printing press, a feed processing plant, a creamery. And of course we need more houses. I myself need a janitor for the church and school. We have to bring in experts occasionally, but as a rule every job around here is done by our own high school graduates.”

Fr. Duren is very proud of his big school, high school and grades, which takes the place of the three-room school the village had when he came. There is a good convent for the nuns and his own rectory is set in the midst of many trees, in front of a beautiful cemetery.

“I’d like to begin all over again,” he said wistfully as he looked around, “with a little church at a cross roads with a hundred families making a village round about. That is the way America should be. That’s the kind of setting which makes it easy for people to be good.”

Granger

My main reason for coming to Des Moines was to visit Granger Homestead (see story elsewhere in this issue), but I had the additional treat of meeting Fr. Duren and back in Des Moines on Monday of hearing the Von Trapp family and meeting six of them afterward with their accomplished chaplain. We had a wonderful evening, talking of farms and farming and comparing our pioneering experiences.

Indiana

After visiting Chicago I journeyed by bus to Evansville, Ind., where I was met by Joe Zarella, his wife and her brother, Ft. Lautner, who is stationed in Evansville. We drove to Troy, which is a small village, just this side of Tell City, where Joe has been working these past two years in a furniture factory. Tell City is a furniture town, and three thousand of the six thousand inhabitants work in the factories there. I visited one of the plants where Joe works, shown around by Mr. Lautner, Alice’s father, who knows everything there is to be known of woods and working in wood, whether by hand or machinery. He is one of the few surviving craftsmen and must get a great joy out of his work.

I’m hoping that Joe will write on labor for us, between his job, his union duties and his own home activities, and I put this in as a hint and a reminder.

Fulda, Ind.

I was delighted to visit some of the readers of **The Catholic Worker** at their farm a few miles from Fulda, where the Douglas family, father, mother and six children, are trying to reclaim eighty somewhat eroded acres. If it were only for the magnificent old house, a museum piece and sample of what pioneers can do in the way of handling huge beams and adobe, the farm is worth working on. Already in the scant year they have been there, Lawrence Douglas has done a tremendous amount of work just in clearing fields, planting gardens, putting in a vineyard, not to speak of working on the house.

He has a smoke house in which there is a great tub made out of one log, long as a bathtub and covered with a screen. Hanging from the roof there were hams, bacons, shoulders of pork, a goodly supply of meat for many months to come.

Bake Room

Next to the smoke room there is a room with a brick oven built in on one side and a fireplace with a huge iron tub set in it for rendering fat, cooking up meat or making soap. Mrs. Douglas, who was born and raised on a farm in Tennessee, bakes all her bread here.

We had dinner there on Saturday and picnicked there again the next day, talking of community and life on the land with all its discouragements and rewards. Douglas said that he was about ready at one point to give up and go back to the city, when he discovered that there were a few more Catholic Workers living in the neighborhood, so he decided to stick it out for a while. But he wished that a few more families would come and help settle the eighty acres. There is still plenty of timber to build houses.

All the wood in the house and barns are hand hewn, and even the stones of the well, Indiana sandstone, are hand hewn also. The farmhouse looks down from its hill over the surrounding land, and there is a beautiful view of the church spire in the little town of Fulda, a mile and a half away.

My trip took me on to Louisville and Cincinnati again, then up to Pittsburgh, Kittanning, and Herman, where the Center for Men of Christ the King have their school. But this account is quite long enough already. A pilgrimage indeed, and a most encouraging one, visiting readers of the paper, families and cells which are growing up everywhere, grappling all of them with the spiritual weapons of hard work, poverty, and prayer.