

Thanksgiving Dinner and Other Things

Dorothy Day

The Catholic Worker, December 1939, 4.

Summary: Describes their Thanksgiving feast. Despite the fact that donations were sparse, all enjoy a filling, yet sober, celebration. Notes the beginning of Advent and thoughts of feasting turn to fasting. Describes her speaking tour of New England, meditates on the virtues of manual labor, and reminds her readers that the truckmen of Burlington are suffering real privation during their strike. (DDLW #351).

Today the yard looks like a junk shop. We just cleaned out one of the cellars to store three tons of coal that Frank O'Donnell trucked in from Tamaqua, Pennsylvania. We have burned one ton so far this winter already.

We had to move the furniture we had stored in the cellar out in the yard and for the day we have looked like an evicted family. One old man sat in the rocking chair, sewing canvas together, trying to make himself a pair of shoes for his decrepit feet. Three other men waited for a chance at the shoemaker's bench to sole and heel their shoes. A few other men were chopping up boxes for firewood and others waited to see if any clothes had come in.

First Day

This year we had a delightful Thanksgiving in spite of the fact that all our friends seemed to have forgotten us and no one sent in any food except Schuyler Warren who brought in two magnificent pumpkin pies. We had enough money, however, to buy some chickens which we cut up and potroasted so that they would go further. With those and cranberry sauce (Sharkey put too much water in and then added gelatin to stiffen it so that it finally looked like red cabbage rather than cranberries), creamed onions and mashed potatoes,—it was a feast indeed. For once on a holiday, not one of the family circle over-indulged. Usually our Italian neighbors are so neighborly that they offer our weaker brethren hospitality in the way of wine and groppa and the result is maudlin sentimentality if not pugnacity on their part and wrath on mine. But this day was indeed a day of cheer. Every one cooperated even to the five cooks in the kitchen. To be exact I should say four, because Shorty is all-around assistant. But Roddy, John Cannon, Sharkey, Katherine Travers, all worked to make the feast a pleasant one. There were white tablecloths, second helpings for those who wished, and enough to feed all our own gang and about fifteen others who came in. About sixty meals were served and it was a leisurely and homelike meal.

Less Eatings

And now Advent is upon us and we must begin to fast. We read (in a Hearst paper!) picked up from a subway seat, that the Holy Father is beginning a week's vigil for peace, spending the time in prayer and fasting. Rabbis and ministers, of New York City, according to the story, are joining with him in prayer. It gives one a sense of great loyalty and devotion to our Holy Father when we hear of his storming Heaven with his supplications. We want to join him, to add our prayers and sacrifices to his. Last Lent our priest in the Precious Blood Church around on Baxter Street was enjoining us all to fast. "Too much eatings, and too much drinkings!" he told us sternly. And too little prayer.

Mohammedan Friend

Last month we visited the Burlington group for the first time and met the landlord of the House of Hospitality there. He is a Mohammedan and announces proudly that he prays five times daily. There is no mosque in Burlington, though there is one in Brooklyn and one in Canada, so he makes a temple of his own heart. And when he fasts, he fasts from four in the morning to five in the evening.

We are weak creatures and cannot go so long without food, but we can eat the soup that is put before us at noon instead of too much eatings and drinkings of coffee and bread, we can organize our lives in more disciplined fashion. . . . We can be more recollected and lift up our hearts more often in prayer.

Travelings

The trip up through New England a few weeks ago was very pleasant. I spoke in Providence at the home of one of our readers and many of the students from Providence College came. In Boston the next day I spoke at Old Town Meeting House on the subject of peace and even the New England leader of the Christian Front said he was in agreement with what I had to say. Like the philosopher who has just been applauded, I wondered what I had said wrong.

At the farm at Upton I had a long talk with Arthur Sheehan on manual labor, and I realized that we have not been writing much about it for the paper. We talked about voluntary poverty and the Works of Mercy as being the basis of our work. Of course manual labor is involved in many of these works of mercy, but we have not gone into detail about it. Ade Bethune has dealt with it in her pamphlet "Work," so has Eric Gill, and Etienne Borne. Gregg, who wrote "The Power of Non-Violence" a splendid book for our times, deals with the philosophy of labor in a pamphlet for conscientious objectors.

Last Sunday the boys all went to the park at the end of Mulberry Street to play football, and we all go in for walks for exercise. But manual labor carries with it a satisfaction and sense of accomplishment in itself. When I came back from one trip last month, I scrubbed up the office floor as a cure for backache and brain fatigue, and felt most beautifully limbered up. The only trouble was that though it was early in the morning, right after Mass, half

a dozen tried to gang up on me and deprive me of my labor. Which shows they have not been sufficiently indoctrinated. The boys get plenty of it scrubbing and cleaning, but another tendency about work is that when one takes a job around the place he does not want to share it. He wants to work alone, or do it all. Sometimes it becomes even more than a friendly competition for jobs.

Worcester

Spoke in Worcester at the Ancient Order of Hibernian's Hall and someone in the building who preferred to remain anonymous defrayed the expenses of the hall. The CIO organizers of textiles and steel who have offices in the building, came to the meeting and we had a good conversation afterward on the condition of labor and the opposition to organizing. It's an uphill job and it takes the courage and patience of a saint to keep at it. Stayed at the home of the Brady's this time who, with the McGinn's, are the mainstay of the house in Worcester.

Truck Strike

Next up to Burlington where Norman and Donald Langlois run the House of Hospitality down on Battery Street which is just across from the lake front. The truckmen are on strike in Burlington and the boys had turned over half of the headquarters for the men to meet in. They use it as a hangout, day and night, and the night I arrived we had a meeting to discuss the rights and duties of labor from the standpoint of the encyclicals. They were a fine bunch of men, newly organized, and struggling hard for the elementals, a decent wage to maintain a family. They are mostly employed on long hauls and get very small wages. Some of them are forced to live in company houses and the rent is deducted from their pay. When the strike began, the company raised the rent. They have no funds to keep themselves going so it means sacrifice of the most real kind to strike.