

On Pilgrimage - September 1951

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Summary: An account of the trip by a dilapidated car to Maryfarm, Newburgh, and the spiritual renewal of a subsequent four-day retreat. Rallies to the cause of Ruth Reynolds, on trial in Puerto Rico for sedition. Reflects on the death of William Randolph Hearst, whose newspapers she disdained. (DDLW #946).

When I left the Peter Maurin farm on Staten Island and started to drive our old 1933 Chevrolet to the retreat at Maryfarm, Newburgh, the tune of a revolutionary song of Paul Robeson kept running through my head. There was a heavy refrain of drums, a pounding rhythm that went well with the heavy work there was in pushing that old car. It could scarcely be called a pleasure car, I ruminated. The accelerator and the starter being together, they somehow got mixed up together and there was an awful grinding going on every now and then and a crawling and groaning as we tried to make the hills on highway 9W. It had been the coming through Bayonne and Jersey City and Union City and all the other small towns and the starting and stopping at innumerable traffic lights that seemed to wear the car out. I had missed the direct route to highway 17. The seat was broken and I was not even out of the city before my back ached. Hans Tunneson, and Ed Foerster, my companions, kept trying to adjust the seat but they were neither drivers nor mechanics, and nothing helped. What cars we have driven in! I have had the gas pedal fall through the floor, the battery drop out on the highway, the clutch stick come out in my hand not to speak of the inevitable flat tires. But having seen the movie *Grapes of Wrath* and the kind of cars the migrants used, I am filled with a great courage about cars. If I had to I would drive from coast to coast in the old Chevy.

The music of the revolutionary song went with the drive. It pounded through my head and I did not particularly like it. It had a brutality, a down drive about it, the smashing push of youth in it, to do violence to the world about one and the people in it. And myself, I am getting older, and I want more gentleness, less violence.

One of our friends who came back from the European front talked once of the fierce exultation that seized him at seeing the destruction of the world about him. He was afraid of this response in himself.

The tune kept pounding through my head, tormenting me and I hated it. I kept trying to reject it, because I am as opposed to the violence of revenge as I am

opposed to the violence of “the capitalist imperialist war monger,” the official villain of the oppressed.

We are all the oppressed, I groaned to myself, oppressed by the weight of our own bodies, our own needs, by the pressure of the needy and the poor around us.

Helene Iswolsky

We continued up Highway 9W until we reached Rockland Lake where we turned off (we had made a mistaken turnoff once already) and drove along Lake Road, past the Tolstoi farm which I hope some day to visit, and came to the old inn where Helene has rooms. She and a friend are staying there now and the country is a welcome rest for Helene after a bad accident and operation from which she has recovered almost miraculously. We had had our Russian weekend just the same, but it was Father Ourousoff which had given it instead of Helene. It had been a stimulating experience for everyone though they missed Helene of course.

Maryfarm

We arrived with no mishap at Maryfarm at three Sunday afternoon after starting out at eight in the morning and it was good to have time for a visit with the family there. There was Marge and her four children, and Vincenza Baglioni, who is in charge, and Helen Adler, ably assisting. They have had the help of two girls, Agnes and Nancy who have been “God-sends” as my mother used to call it. Bob Tilden had done a wonderful job of gardening and there were giant zinnias and petunias and marigolds everywhere and asters ready to start blooming. John Filliger had attended to the vegetable gardening end of it, much to our delight for the coming week and there were usually four vegetables on the table at a time. Nothing like good meals to make a good retreat. Jack English had arrived in time to help out with the kitchen and eighteen began that evening to make the retreat, which was given by Fr. Patrick Veale, Josephite.

What a blessed thing it is to settle down to a week of silence. It is another form of fasting, not to communicate with your fellows for four long days and five nights. The delicious hours of peace and quiet pile up and half the burdens of life seem to fall from you. It begins to seem delightfully simple to stay in a state of recollection, a state of harmony with God, the Blessed Mother, the saints, and the beauties of nature all about one.

The weather was hot, but it was endurable. Each night a thunderstorm came up and refreshed us all. On the feast of the Assumption the fruits and flowers of the fields were blessed and in the afternoon there was a procession which just narrowly escaped being drowned in a cloudburst which came down two minutes after we regained the chapel. There were the stations of the cross out along the

shady lane which Hazen Ordway had carved for us a few years ago. When we made them the children and an ungainly kitten joined us.

Every morning we sang the Mass and some days the singing was so bad, in spite of practice that I could well understand some of the hostility to the liturgical movement. If this was the way we were going to rejoice in Heaven,—if this was praise, adoration, honor and glory,—I didn't think much of it. (One of my non-Catholic friends, accompanying me to a low-Mass last Lent said brightly, "Now I know what the Mass is,—it is a meditation." It was the wonderful peace and quiet that impressed him.)

Just the same, a prayer sung is twice said, St. Augustine reminded me, and it is true that the words sung, stay in your heart. The tune too, I thought joyfully as I drove back to Peter Maurin Farm at the end of the week. For instead of the down beat of the vengeful anthem of the revolution, there was a Gloria in excelsis Deo singing through my mind.

Yes, it was a good retreat founded on the four pillars of the spiritual life,—the aiming at perfection, the supernatural motive, detachment from creatures and the use of the Sacraments. You go away from such a retreat refreshed, strengthened, ready to begin again. (Newman wrote that the great tragedy of life so often was that one failed ever to begin.)

Other Notes

This last month Ruth Reynolds, member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist for many years, long interested in the alleviation of the poverty and misery of the Puerto Ricans, is going on trial on the charge of trying to overthrow the United States government in Puerto Rico by force and violence.

We hope our friend, Conrad Lynn, who is defending her from this unjust accusation, is successful in her cause.

According to an account of A. J. Muste in *The Peacemaker*, the prosecution will be dropped if she promises to leave Puerto Rico and cease interesting herself in the misery of the needy and the groaning of the poor on the island.

She refuses to accept this condition.

Death of Hearst

While I was on retreat an old man who is living with us at Maryfarm shook his head, saying as he passed me, "A great man is dead." My curiosity getting the better of me I broke my silence to ask, "Who?" And he answered, "William Randolph Hearst."

On my return to New York I was shocked at the eulogies from Catholic prelates, priests and the press. In view of the influence of Mr. Hearst on the life of the

people and the example of his own life (his companionship with Marion Davies) I do not see how anything more than a charitable silence was to be expected. Wondering whether I was harsh in my judgement, I picked up a copy of the Sunday Pictorial Review section of the Journal-American which happened to be laying on our library table (I throw out Hearst papers whenever I see them lying around) and opened it at random. Here is one choice excerpt from page seven, August 19th:

“Are conscience and self respect the same? By no means. Indeed, the two often have exactly the opposite emotional effects. Conscience always tends to make you dissatisfied with yourself and to suffer inner conflict, while self respect, even when it takes the form of what is called pride, tends to keep you at peace with yourself and your neighbors . . . You would do well to bear the distinction between self respect and conscience in mind in training your children.” etc., etc.

As Catholics we are under vows to fight the world, the flesh and the devil, and I do not think that Mr. Hearst, with the plentiful sprinklings of the flesh, the world and the voice of the devil through his pages has helped us very much.