

Day After Day - May 1942

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Summary: Reviews her lecture-tour and visit to Catholic Worker groups begun on March 29th through Montreal; Baltimore, where she revisited acquaintances at St. Peter Claver's; Cincinnati; a lecture at a girls' school in nearby Kentucky and a visit to a state mental hospital; St. Louis where she renewed old friendships and was reminded of America's racial problems; Oklahoma City and a visit to a federal reformatory and St. Patrick's Guest House where she visited conscientious objectors. Muses how this journey is part of the work although she prefers settling down. (DDLW #382).

Oklahoma City

For a week and a half I have been on the road, and it seems I have been gone a year. I'm at the typewriter in Mildred Stone's St. Thomas More Book Stall now, just about to take my bus to San Diego where I will visit friends before I start up the coast to Los Angeles and points north.

When you are trying to give an account of the month, the easiest way to do is to work back.

Oklahoma City is a most hospitable place. Three people offered me the use of their cars, and I have had the pleasure of driving a 1940 Mercury for the past two days in order to visit one day the Benedictine Abbey, St. Gregory's, at Shawnee, and yesterday the Federal reformatory at El Reno, both some miles out of town. Forty miles is just a little jaunt out here. Just around the corner. The warden at the reformatory is a Catholic from Georgetown and we had a good discussion on education, both public and parochial. Father Don Kanaly, our old friend from Louvain, is chaplain to the Catholic boys there, and has a good jociste group started, a cell of young Christian workers, in the reformatory. I was much impressed by the place. I sat in on the monthly classification meeting where the new boys, after a thirty-day quarantine period, were discussed from the standpoint of background, past, and ability, and doctor, psychologist, educational and work director, chaplains, and wardens, went over the case together and decided what work and schooling would work out best for the newcomers.

I had time to see the dining rooms and kitchens and some of the cell blocks and also the weaving room where wool is carded, mixed, spun, woven and finished. Yet no matter how modern the system, how private the cell (in some cases the doors are always left unlocked) still the sight of so many iron bars, sturdier than those used to pen in wild animals, has a

horrifying effect. Most of the boys are poor. Most of them come from rural areas and have not had much education. In many cases the family background is an ugly one. Given the same offenses, a little influence would have kept most of these boys from such sentences. I thought of Tolstoi's conclusions in "Resurrection," and lamented with Chesterton that indeed Christianity had not been tried or these huge detention centers would not need be.

There are ten conscientious objectors, one a Catholic, at the Federal Reformatory. All have refused the civilian camps which were offered them as alternative to military service. All are sentenced to a year and a day. Their protest is against war and against conscription. I was thankful that they had fallen into the hands of those who were enlightened and merciful, and that there would be no such brutality as was practiced against them as in the last war.

New Hospice

There is a new "guest house" in Oklahoma City at 101 W. Chickasaw, in charge of William Phelps, an old circus man. It is called St. Patrick's Guest House and its sponsor is Father Neville, the head of Catholic Action in the diocese. Father Neville is stationed some sixty miles out at Geary, Oklahoma, but as I pointed out before, distances do not dismay people here. He has a farm in back of his rectory and will be growing potatoes and cabbages and carrots for the never failing pot of stew. The house was very homelike and comfortable with a dozen clean beds with warm covers, and a good bath where the men of the road can clean up.

There is a good chance of developing the farming commune idea out here, as there are several priests interested, and Bishop Francis Clement Kelley himself is interested in the idea of developing Catholic communities on the land. We had a good visit with him, and talked of these matters, and the increase of Catholics in this area. They are only two per cent of the population, and there is an increase of Catholics by conversion up to 900 a year.

St. Louis

It had taken from seven in the morning until after midnight to get from St. Louis to Oklahoma City. John Johnson and family had met me as I arrived in St. Louis and it was John who saw me off, getting me up in time for a six o'clock Mass. Everybody's children had just had or were having the measles while I was there, so there were some members of the group which I could not see. But there were several good meetings and it is wonderful how the whole crowd hangs together, what unity and perseverance there is there. "The love of Christ has gathered us into one," I kept thinking as I saw them all again after a two-year absence. St. Louis being somewhat out of the beaten path, I have only been able to visit it at longer intervals. Some of the crowd get on to New York either for a visit to the city or for the retreat each August.

St. Louis House

The house is run by Skip Bogey who has been with us for four years and who took Bill Camp's place when Bill left to be sacristan of a church. Bill had taken Herb Welch's place. There is talk now that Herb may be able to come back to start a farming commune, and everyone is doing a lot of praying about it. They all love Herb and now he has a wife and baby to add joy to the work.

Skip is very proud of his house. He keeps it neat as a pin even to the bricklined backyard. There is a dormitory downstairs and one upstairs, one living room which can also be used as a bedroom, and a long dining room and kitchen. The place is in reality one and a half little houses down in the oldest section of the city. There is a heavy smell of a tannery in the air, and the house is just a few blocks from the river. We wandered down there to look at the noble stream and thought of Monsignor Hauber and Father Catich and Ade Bethune and the hot summer day we had spent on the river last summer.

There was a delightful day at Mignon McMenemy's home, a farm thirty miles out where again the whole group gathered together with a number of priests, for discussion. Mignon and David Dunne publish *The Living Parish*, a liturgical magazine which comes out every other month, marking the seasons of the Church.

Lynchings

The night before I left St. Louis we had a last little meeting at the house with Father Mann, Redemptorist, from San Antonio, and Father Donovan, from Kendrick Seminary.

Mrs. Simmons, the mother of ten children, one of them studying for the priesthood at Bay St. Louis, was there with one of her friends. She spoke of the lynching at Sykston, Mo., which we reported two issues ago.

"Why don't they kill clean?" she said bitterly. "Why pour kerosene over the poor Negro and set fire to it?" She talked of the increasing bitterness of the Negro through the country.

Cincinnati

Still working backward, I had stopped off in Cincinnati over night, not only to rest after twenty hours on the bus, but to take a side trip to Versailles, Ky., to speak at a girl's school there. I had met Mother Rachel at the Retreat House at Adelynrood, Mass., some years before when Father Darby of New York and I had been invited to give a Catholic presentation of the labor question, and she had been taking the C. W. ever since.

The girls at the academy were much interested in starting a house of hospitality in Versailles, which is about eight miles out of Lexington.

At Cincinnati I met our old friend, Erwin Penker, who drove me out to Longwood, the state hospital for mental disorders, to talk to the chaplain and superintendent as to the

possibility of using Conscientious Objectors to help care for the sick. Here at Longwood there is a beautiful chapel dedicated to St. Dymphna, patron of the mentally ill. Father Firmin, Franciscan, the chaplain, designed the chapel. He has worked with mental cases many years.

Baltimore

Back in Baltimore I had spent the night at St. Peter Claver's rectory, the guest of the housekeeper. Smiddy, Harold Keane, Father Roy, and some of the colored fellow workers and I had had dinner together the night before. We all missed John Doebbles and Jim Rogan, now at Civilian Service Camp, No. 26, in Chicago, and Jon Thornton, now at Mother of Good Counsel House in Pittsburgh. How the Lord does push us around! There are two little hospices in Baltimore still, although St. Anthony's House is no more. The Dominican Sisters allow a little house on their grounds to be used as a guest house, and Father Roy still has half a dozen men with him—men who had helped in some building around St. Peter Claver's.

Montreal

My wanderings really began March 29th, right after the last issue of the paper came out. I left for Montreal on a Sunday night in the midst of the Palm Sunday blizzard, not only to get Tamar from school, but to meet some friends in Montreal, both French and English. I am happy to say that Father Hugo's articles are going to be reprinted in the "Montreal Register."

We stayed a week in Montreal, visiting Civilian Service Camp, No. 15 at Stoddard, N.H., on the way home. All is well there. There are many evidences of the work of the conscripted boys, not only for the government, but for their own community, compulsory community though it be. There has been some good painting done, water colors and oils, not to speak of writing. A miniature farm is under way, with a garden ploughed up and two hogs fattened.

As I write these last lines, I am waiting in Albuquerque for the next bus West, so weary that I could almost say with Odysseus: "Than roaming naught else is more evil for mortals." In general that is true. If it were not for the necessity of visiting our friends, our groups, our houses on the West coast, I would not be here, but home at Maryhouse and Mott street instead. I cannot say my work is specifically there. It is here, too. I wish I could settle on the farm at Easton this summer and finish the Peter Maurin book. But who knows when this traveling will stop, for any of us. We all would like to settle. We all have a craving for stability, for permanence. And look at us, men and women, plucked up by work or war and settled some place else than where we wish to be!

"Life is but a night spent in an uncomfortable inn," St. Teresa said.

And bus stations these days, crowded with soldiers, their wives and children, whole families on the move following the lure of jobs, are anything but comfortable.

The bus is an inn itself, everyone sleeping on everyone-else's shoulder, a mad confusion of feet and legs in the aisles. Floods out here have caused delays, and each bus, detouring, is

hours late.

Only the Lord knows when I will be home. Meanwhile, the paper will be gotten out, and the house will be run by Gerry Griffin and his able assistants, God help them.