

House of Hospitality

Dorothy Day

Chapter Three

Summary: Tales of hospitality, distributing the paper, and propaganda meetings. Affirms the primacy of performing the works of mercy over “talking and writing about the work.” Quotes from Frederick Ozanam on putting faith into action. Describes homey scenes at the beach house with Theresa and their beachcomber friend Smiddy. Tells of their poverty and their joy amid their city neighbors, a busy parish Church nearby, and Peter’s efforts in Harlem. (DDLW #438).

ALTHOUGH the Communists and Socialists had their hundreds of thousands out in the streets yesterday, we feel that *The Catholic Worker* made its presence felt, too. Fifteen or more high school and college students, from Manhattan, Fordham, St. John’s College, Cathedral College and from City College distributed papers and leaflets in Union Square all afternoon and in the evening up around Columbus Circle and Madison Square Garden.

The man who was selling the I.W.W. paper in Madison Square came up to get a copy from me, and said, “I was a Catholic myself once—I’d like to see your paper.” And people of all nationalities were anxious to get it.

One young woman came in this morning who said she had seen a copy in the Square and wanted to find out about the House of Hospitality. She had been living down on Rivington Street and now her money was all gone and she had no place to go. She was telling me about her friend, who was also down and out, who went to take a room, or a bed up in Harlem, was seduced by a young Spanish American and threw herself under a subway train a week later. Her lips were trembling as she talked (it was only eight-thirty in the morning), so I invited her out to have a cup of coffee.

Last week a colored woman who has been staying up at the Municipal Lodging House came in for a bite to eat. She looked in need of a shelter where she could stay in bed and rest for a few days instead of having to walk the streets from morning to night as the guests of the lodging house have to do.

So that evening I went to talk to the girls to see if it would be all right with them to invite Mary to stay up there. After all, I did not want to run the risk of submitting her to insult on account of her color—nor did I expect too much of the girls in the way of freedom from race prejudice, since I know very well that Catholics of means and better education are not free themselves from it.

I talked to the girls, reminding them how our Lord washed the feet of His disciples the night before He suffered and died for us, and told them how we all should serve each other, whether we are white, black or yellow. The girls were perfectly happy to welcome the new guest, and it was like a special birthday present for the paper to find this continuing of the cooperative spirit among them.

Mary took the paper up to Harlem to distribute for us yesterday, and all the other girls up at the house went to Mass or Communion to offer it up for our special May Day work. Margaret, our cook, despite her condition, for she is expecting her baby in six weeks, went on the subway yesterday, passing out papers from Times Square to Astoria and from Manhattan to Brooklyn. I was much touched and grateful for the help they all gave us.

An old Irishman of 73 came in this morning for his copies of the paper. He lives down in the Bowery and has a thirty-dollar-a-month pension, from which he insists on giving us a dollar. He comes in regularly every month.

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It was good to sit out in the back yard this afternoon and have tea and I was glad to see Helen Crowe here when I got back. She had been attending a meeting around the corner and she had some work to do, and so came in to use our typewriter. Peter read and argued with her from *The Militant* which calls for a Fourth International, and he, Peter, was arguing for a fifth. I had to keep shushing him so that Helen could get her work done and come out and have tea. We had moved a couch out into the back yard and brought out the rose bush, the hyacinth and the daffodil plants, and the sun was hot and it was delicious.

Peter should be happy now that he has a companion with****whom to carry on dialogues. Haig, as he is called, has been staying up at the Municipal Lodging House for some time and Peter wanted to take him in at the office in order to have him to argue with for the school. So now Peter sleeps on a mattress on the floor, and Mr. Haig on Peter's bed. Haig is not a Catholic, but a German Evangelical, or something like that, but he has not practiced any religion since childhood. Peter introduced him to me as an anarchist, but for the purposes of argument, he is a Communist orthodox one night, Left Wing Opposition another night, Socialist another, Fascist, etc.

He is undergoing a course of reading under the supervision of Peter, starting with Christopher Dawson's *The Modern Dilemma*, and he is writing an article for the paper on the Municipal Lodging House. Tonight he is making himself useful by going up to Father Scully's parish to a Holy Name meeting to argue with Peter. It is to be a regular Platonic Dialogue and Peter is reveling in the thought that he has been given the floor for the evening. I am afraid they will be regarded as entertaining rather than instructive. Father Scully's parish, being one of the richest in the city, is not fertile ground to work in as far as I can see. The Psalmist says: "Those who are in honor are without understanding."

Afterwards they are going up to Harlem to argue from eleven to one, taking the tail-end of what street meetings are going on. Later they hope to get permission from the Police Department to do some speaking.

The best meeting of this week was that at which we had Father Donnelly who is a marvel at explaining dogma. He pays his audience the compliment, or rather does them the honor, of explaining the most difficult doctrines completely. He gives them the very best that he has, and when he wondered, a little discouraged at some of the questions which came out of the meeting, whether anyone had gotten anything out of his talk, I told him that my feeling was that it was too much expected today that people should be articulate. That is, if they are not able to repeat back like parrots what they have been told, it is taken for granted that they have not grasped the subject matter. There are so many dogmas which one can feel and yet not express.

The meeting was crowded to the doors. Late in the evening a drunken Irishman came in and listened for a while open-mouthed, and then got up, waving his hand in farewell.

“I have listened and I’ve listened,” he said, “but, never once have I heard the name of the Mother of God mentioned.” And he went disconsolately out of the door.

If Harry Crimmins had been here, his great devotion to the Blessed Mother would have impelled him to rush out after the poor creature and walk the streets with him all night talking of the Blessed Virgin. But as it was the old man got away before anyone could say a word to him.

Another man came up after the meeting and said, “This is one of the worst evenings I have ever spent, how in the world do you stand it.”

But the others stood it so well that they stayed and stayed until eleven, instead of going at ten as we try to persuade them to do. There were men from Columbus Circle there, a number of union men from the neighborhood, and all in all, the majority of them people the meetings are intended for.

After the meeting, Father Donnelly, Frank, Tom, Joe, Dorothy and I went across the street to our German cafe where we had limburger sandwiches and bock beer, which were very good. Father Donnelly had to finish part of his Office to the strains of most atrocious jazz coming over the radio.

A Mexican came in the other day with an introduction from a Mexican Jesuit who had been staying in a parish down on Second Avenue and is going back Mexico this June. Mr. Frisbie is a very zealous and inspiring man, all afire with zeal for souls. But he is also very funny.

He and his wife are staying in New York so that she can be examined by doctors to find out whether her heart will permit her to live in Mexico City which is too high for most heart cases. But if they cannot stay there, then he is going down to the State of Tabasco where there is only one priest and he in hiding, disguised as a porter. Mr. Frisbie wants to assist him with catechetical work. How his wife’s heart will stand that, I do not know.

He very generously offered to go up to speak to the Spanish American group of boys at 112th Street, who have no conception of Catholicism.

I hope he has some effect on them.

3

A few days ago we had quite a time at the House of Hospitality. An old lady who has been staying there, was run down by a truck some time ago and her face badly bruised. The owner of the truck came around and settled with her so that she would not sue, and with the money in her hand she proceeded to get drunk. It took a priest, seven policemen and a steamfitter, and the circulation manager and editor of a paper to get her out of the house and then she won out, and was really victorious.

One old woman who had come in drunk a few months ago was told to go, and why we should waste any more time on Nellie I didn't see. However, I went to St. Zita's and they said they would care for her there. That evening, after having tried in vain twice that day to get her to St. Zita's, and she having consumed four pints, Father Seccor and Harry and I went up. Nothing could be done with her, so Father went out to call a policeman hoping that his uniform would impress her to the extent of accompanying him in a cab to the Home. But one policeman always brings others in his train, and before we knew it, two radio cars had driven up, two policemen from their beats had appeared, and it was indeed an impressive sight to hear the sirens and see the police rushing to protect the House of Hospitality from poor little Nellie.

She finally agreed to get into the cab with one policeman and Father Seccor and Harry, after she had been given the choice of the station house, Bellevue or the Home, but once in the cab she insisted on going to a rooming house where she was known. It was too late by this time to get her in St. Zita's, so they went to the rooming house, going in with her, to impress upon the landlady, who might have been dishonest, that Nellie was not to be tampered with. There she will drink herself out, or go to Chicago, as she said she was going to do with the money.

Yes, there had been a good deal of trouble lately, John with his heart attack, Dorothy sick again and then Nellie on her drunk. It would seem that we lead a disturbed and harassed life, and yet on the whole we are very peaceful. Everything runs really harmoniously and smoothly and our headquarters is a pleasant place of an evening with everyone at his activities. Last night there was no meeting and Mr. Minas sat and wrote poetry in lovely fine Armenian script, smoking his strange-smelling cigarettes; Haig, the German, pondered over Christopher Dawson's latest book; Peter, the Frenchman, plotted his propaganda; Jimmie Raksi, our little Hungarian boy from the reformatory, played with the kitten, having just virtuously attended his Catechism class; Margaret, our Lithuanian, curled her hair in preparation for Sunday, and the rest of us, English, Irish and American, listened to a symphony orchestra play Beethoven.

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I have been reading a lot of Ozanam lately. He started his religious Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul after the "history conferences" had been carried on for about a year. One of his companions confessed himself to be tired of the "eternal controversies".

The difficulty with Ozanam's group was evidently just the opposite of our main difficulty. Dorothy has been married for the past six months and she and Tom are only in the office a

few hours a day. They are both mainly interested in propaganda, the getting out of a paper and pamphlets, and are not much interested in the works of mercy or houses of hospitality except as propaganda centers, with a careful weeding out going on all the time so that only those who agree with us and work****with us are kept.

Ozanam's group discarded the propaganda and kept only to the charitable work so that indoctrination did not *go* hand in hand with charity. We feel that the two must go together since we are trying to change the social order. We have to change the social order so that men will have a chance to become men.

Following Peter's ideas, we are trying to make the workers into scholars and the scholars workers. So we take whoever comes to us as sent by God and do not believe in picking and choosing. If we start eliminating then there is no end to it. Everyone wishes to eliminate someone else. In a group of people living together more or less in community, grievances always pile up which change from day to day and from month to month. Even if we had only picked "intellectuals", young students and propagandists, there would be dissensions and grave differences of opinion. Tom and Dorothy are more at home with the scholars and wish to concentrate more on propaganda. As it is, most of the money is spent on food and shelter and not much is left for the paper and for pamphlets.

But Peter and I feel that the work is more important than the talking and writing about the work. It has always been through the performance of the works of mercy that love is expressed, that people are converted, that the masses are reached.

"Charity should never look behind but always ahead, because the number of her past good deeds is always small, whereas the present and future miseries which she must solace are infinite," Ozanam wrote.

"The faith, the charity of the first ages, they are not too much for our age. Evils equally great must have an equal remedy. The earth has gone cold, and it is for us Catholics to reanimate the vital heat which is being extinguished, to recommence the era of the martyrs. For to be a martyr is a thing within the reach of all Christians. It is to give our lives for God and for our brothers. . . .

"The race of man in our days seems to me like the reveller of whom the Gospel speaks. It, too, has fallen among thieves who stole away its treasure of faith and love. The priests and the Levites have passed and this time, as they were true priests and Levites, they approached and longed to heal the sufferer. But in its delirium it knew them not and repulsed them. In our turn, feeble Samaritans, profane and of little faith though we be, we dare, nevertheless, to accost this great invalid. Perhaps it will not be affrighted at us, so let us try to probe its wounds and to pour oil into them, to whisper in its ears words of consolation and peace, and then, when its eyes re-open, we will put it back into the hands of those whom God has constituted the guardians and physicians of souls.

"When we Catholics reminded these straying brethren of the marvels of Christianity, they used one and all to retort: 'You are right if you speak of the past; Christianity in other times did wonders, but today it is dead. And indeed, you who boast of your Catholicism, what do you do? Where are the works which prove your faith and would make us respect and admit it?' They were justified; this reproach was only too well deserved. Well, then, to work! Let

our acts square with our faith. And what were we to do in order to be genuine Catholics if not that which is most pleasing to the eyes of God? Let us then help our neighbor as Jesus Christ did, and put our faith under the protection of charity. . . .”

In season and out of season, he pleaded for “the annihilation of the political spirit in the interests of the social spirit.”

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June 1934

“I said ‘Hail Marys’ all the while I was picking flowers,” Teresa told me this morning when she came in with a bouquet of purple clover, daisies and buttercups to put in front of her much-loved statue of the Child King.

We are in our little house on the beach where I am taking an enforced, and oh, how welcome, vacation because of Teresa’s illness. She is all better now, but after three weeks in the hospital and four weeks in what she calls a “convalescent home” I did not dare bring her back to the city. So here we are, all happy and solitary.

We dine on clams and eels and baked sand shark, and on dock weed of which there are still some tender leaves remaining, and we till the soil to plant flowers, and gather shells, mount seaweed, wade and row and endure sunburn and offer up constant thanksgiving for the beauties all around us.

Today the bay is rough with a constant sound of water, and since the bay is enclosed it is the sound of waterfalls rather than the sound of the surf.

We cannot go to Mass in the morning because the nearest church is five miles away and the chapel up in the village is only open on Saturday nights and Sundays We strove to get permission to go to a near-by chapel where there is daily Mass for a community of Sisters but the permission was not given, so we content our selves with morning prayers, led by Teresa who learned lots of new ones up at her convalescent home in Palenville which is run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

“The way you learn new prayers,” Teresa told me, “is just****to say them over night and morning every day for a while. I like learning new ones so you must teach me some.

Her favorite just now is an ejaculatory prayer, which she says comes to her mind often during the day. “By thy holy pitrinity and by thy Immaculate Conception, purify my body and sanctify my soul.”

I gather that the peculiar word in the first paragraph means ‘maternity’ and I try to change the prayer for her but she is fond of it the way it is. She is only eight, but quite set in her ways, and if a Sister says a thing, it is so, regardless of what my opinion may be.

The “new” prayer we are learning now is the Song of the Three Children, very fitting to say down here on the beach where there is not only sand and sea, but field and woodland; where there is not only the odor of sweet ass and clover, but the salt smell of seaweed and the pleasant odor of decaying sea life.

There is much to do every day. We have to watch the tide, for when it is out, Smiddy will be going down to dig bait and clams and we must accompany him.

Smiddy lives on the beach in a little old shanty eight feet square, just big enough for a narrow cot and an oil stove. It is a place built by one of the neighbors to put fishing tackle and lobster traps in, but no sooner was it built than Smiddy's tent, in which he had lived for some years, was washed away by an unusually high tide and he moved into the shack to take possession from that day to this. Seven years have passed and now it is Smiddy's shack, and he repays the neighbors for allowing him to squat by gifts of clams and fish.

When he needs a haircut, he goes up to the barber with clams. When he wants groceries, he exchanges fish for them. Long years ago he captained a barge, but his young wife died and since then he has been a beachcomber and he has never worked as the neighbors mean the word. Nor had he ever wanted to work except at his clamming and fishing until the WPA came to the island. Then he tried to get a job, and has been indignant ever since at his failure.

Smiddy has known Teresa ever since she was six weeks old and he it was who contributed the lobsters—two dozens of them, trapped by himself—for her baptismal feast. He has always let her help him skin eels, clean fish and dig bait, though she was more of an obstruction than a help when she was one and two years old. He is quite at home with her now as she picks up the footlong sand worms and black fat clams “to save his back”, he says gratefully.

Did I say we were solitary? There is always Smiddy and there are also two Communist children who live up the road and who come down to swim. Teresa has known little Mike since she was two and he three. Even then he was an adventurous youth and, pretending he was a doctor, syringed out her ear by pouring sand in it through a funnel. The little girl, Bunty, is five and she and Teresa have fun playing house and Michael feels out of it, and tries to lord it over them.

They stayed to supper one night last week when they were down on the beach and Michael carried on a long aggrieved monologue:

“I'm going to take a boat and go rowing pretty soon.

Wish there was a Russian boat out there—I'd row right out and get on it. If it caught on fire, I'd row right out there and put that fire out, I would. If you want to be a sailor, the Russian boats are the only ones to sail on. The American sailors never get anything to eat and when they go to sleep they just have bunks so small that they have to hang their feet out the port holes. But the Russian sailors eat right with the captain, and they have parlors to sleep in and to read in. I'm going to be a sailor when I grow up and sail right off to Russia and work there. And you can't come.”

Michael puts over his propaganda, and in little ways Teresa puts over hers. She tells Bunty not to take the Lord's name in vain, but Bunty doesn't know what she is talking about. She tries to tell her the story of the Nativity, bringing out her Christmas creche, but to Bunty it is a Christmas story, no more.

And I am saddened as I hear the little conversations, to think of the generation of children growing up to whom religion means nothing, to whom the name of God is but an expletive, and to whom in the case of many workers' children, the social ideals of the Communists mean

something definite, something to be worked for, striven for and sacrificed for, with all the budding idealism of their natures.

Teresa will stay down here on the beach for the rest of the summer with some friends who have rented the bungalow and have children of their own. They not only take care of her, but also pay rent for the place, and the money comes in very handy. I would sell the little place if I could—we need the money so badly, but it is impossible to sell property nowadays. I had paid \$2,250 for the house and lot which is twenty by seventy feet, ten years ago, but it will be impossible ever to get anything like that for it. However, renting it in the summer brings us money which we sorely need. Last summer we rented it for ten dollars a week. That and the twenty-five dollars a week I earned at a few odd jobs tided us over those first months when the work was being launched. I do feel strongly that we must put everything we have into the work in embracing voluntary poverty for ourselves. It is only when we do this that we can expect God to provide for us. If we do everything we can ourselves, He will supplement our efforts. This is one of the fundamental points of our work in stressing personal responsibility before state responsibility. It is only when we have used all our material resources that we feel it permissible to call upon the state for aid, that in good conscience we can demand and expect help from the state.

6

A few weeks ago, I went over to St. Zita's to see a Sister there and the woman who answered the door took it for granted that I came to beg for shelter. The same morning I dropped into the armory on Fourteenth Street, where lunches are being served to unemployed women, and there they again motioned for me to go into the waiting room, thinking that I had come for food. These incidents are significant. After all, my heels are not run down—my clothes are neat—I am sure I looked averagely comfortable and well cared for—and yet it was taken for granted that because I dropped into these places, I needed help. It just shows how many girls and women, who to the average eye, look as though they came from comfortable surroundings, are really homeless and destitute.

You see them in the waiting rooms of all the department stores. To all appearances they are waiting to meet their friends, to go on a shopping tour—to a matinee, or to a nicely served lunch in the store restaurant. But in reality they are looking for work (you can see the worn newspapers they leave behind with the help wanted page well-thumbed), and they have nowhere to go, nowhere to rest but in these public places—and no good hot lunch to look forward to. The stores are thronged with women buying dainty underwear which they could easily do without—compacts for one dollar, when the cosmetics in Woolworth's are just as good—and mingling with these protected women, and often indistinguishable from them, are these sad ones, these desolate ones, with no homes, no jobs, and never enough food in their stomachs.

The printer called up this morning wanting to know affably when we were going to finish paying our bill (one hundred thirty dollars still to go). We told him he had better get busy and pray for it right hard.

A huckster goes by selling potatoes twenty pounds for a quarter. We stop to buy them for lunch. Margaret, whose baby is due any minute now, sits in a rocking chair in the back yard and meditates on the petunias blooming there, so the editors are cooks and the circulation manager is dishwasher.

We have often thought of the joys connected with poverty that the respectably comfortable people do not have. Living and working as we do in this store, which opens on the street in front and a back yard in the rear, we are much more in the open air than we would be if we had swanky offices somewhere. (Somebody who belonged to an anti-Jew organization came in once last year and offered us swell offices and we all but threw him out of the window). In the morning and evening we can have meals in the yard, though of course we are in danger of having people shake their rugs or mops over us. We try to train them not to, but it is hard. In the evening after Benediction, the Italian, Polish, German and Irish neighbors gather on their front steps and chat and drink beer, homemade and not so strong as that you get in the beer gardens.

These hot nights all the fire hydrants are turned on like geysers and the street is cooled off somewhat, and not far away there is a pier down by the East River where you can sit and watch the moon come up.

Neighbors are neighborly and always ready to extend a helping hand. In fact, most of the furniture and clothing which comes into the office to be redistributed comes from the poor. They give what they can, they offer themselves and their time.

And in all these people and the things they do for us and for each other, we find the love of God working through the love of one's neighbor. "I will arise, and will go about the city. In the streets and the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth." And, indeed, here is where you find Him, in the person of His poor.

Summer is a hard time for us, however. Priests and laymen who can afford to, write and send us their contributions to keep us going, from all over the country. But in the summer they are away on retreat, or giving

retreats, or on vacations, so we are never sure of the whereabouts of our friends. We do not know whether the paper reaches them, with appeals, or whether it sits idly in its envelope waiting for the reader's return.

For the poor there are no vacations. There may be Sunday picnics, but even those mean carfare and lunches for the whole family. Labor troubles continue unabated. This afternoon in this neighborhood there is going to be an anti-war baby parade, with all the mothers decking their carriages in placards and marching down Second Avenue.

Women and children are used because it is believed that the police will hesitate to attack them as they have been attacking the unemployed demonstrators in other parts of the city.

They are being used to further another kind of war—class war—but they do not recognize that. They feel they are doing right in taking, their babies and demonstrating against war.

8

A heavy heat continues to hang over the city. When I hurry out at seven o'clock there is a haze over the river a few blocks down, sparkling in the sun, but no sign of the thundershowers that have been promised for the last five days.

It is pleasant before Mass to sit and meditate early in the morning in the little Italian Church down on Twelfth Street. On the left hand side the open windows look out on fire escapes and roofs, green-edged with plants. Close to the church window there is corn growing in a tub, tomato plants, basil and other pots of herbs which are fragrant if you crush them between your fingers. People are leaning out of their windows already, trying to get a breath of air.

Inside the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians, the two Italian girls sing the Mass with joyous natural voices, trilling through the Kyrie Eleison. The priest, weighed down with his heavy robes, moves with intent stillness through the sacrifice of the Mass.

I love this church of the Salesian Fathers. It is indeed what a church should be, the center of the community. Every morning at the seven and eight o'clock Masses, both of which are sung, there is a goodly gathering of people, not just devout old ladies and old men, but many young ones too.

Before and after Mass there is always a priest hearing confessions.

Every evening from five o'clock on to past nine, people dropping in, before supper, on their way home from market, from work, from play on the streets—everyone is living on the streets these hot days. There is a crowd at the recitation of the rosary and Benediction. The whole congregation sings the hymns and litanies. And even those priests who are not on duty are there somewhere in evidence. The church is their dearest home, and they evidently love to be contemplating the Humanity of Christ, present there in the Tabernacle.

Every afternoon the pastor has arranged that a shower be rigged up to the fire hydrant out in front of the church from three to six, so that the children of the neighborhood can bathe these hot summer days. When I dropped in to Benediction the other night the shower was still going, and a little baby of two was wandering up and down the gutter which had miraculously become a speeding brook, wetting her shoes and socks, and occasionally all the rest of her as she sat down now and again.

In addition to a parish school, the church cooperates with the Keating Day Nursery across the street, where the various associations have their communion breakfasts and many meetings. There is a regular settlement there and activities are always going on, winter and summer. There is also a camp, where the children are sent for a few weeks in the summer.

9

Father LaFarge paid a call on Peter Maurin at our new branch headquarters up in Harlem. There has been no money to turn on the electricity, nor yet money for candles, so Peter receives callers who come in the evening in the dark, or, rather, with just the light of the street outside. Father LaFarge said that all he could see in the encircling gloom was Peter's forefinger, motioning in the air as he was making points.

The work in Harlem continues apace. There are street meetings three times a week on different corners up and down Lenox Avenue, which go on well into the night and small hours of the morning.

Mr. Hergenhen is the commissar, and he and Peter live on soup a good deal of the time. They have to beg for their food, or for money to buy it. I picked up Peter's prayer book the other day, a little red pamphlet printed at the Monastery of the Precious Blood out in Brooklyn, and on one of the fly leaves was listed some of his needs. "Food, stencils, paper, pamphlets, etc." He didn't need to jot them down to remember them. Maybe it was a little reminder for Our Lord.

Vegetable soup—that's Peter's old standby. So yesterday, Sunday, when he came down to spend the day at the office on Fifteenth Street, we made a huge kettle of soup the like of which he had never seen before. It was a cold beet borscht (can it be that we are being influenced by Moscow, or is it just the East Side?) made from a can of beets, a chopped-up cucumber, green-topped onions, hard-boiled egg, potatoes and sour cream. All mixed together, a little dill chopped up on top, and made good and cold in the icebox (no cooking at all needed)—it was a delicious feed for a hot day. We had enough to have it for breakfast, dinner and supper.