

House of Hospitality

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Chapter Twelve

Summary: Contrasts the violence against strikers in Chicago at the Republic Steel Mills, egged on by the media, with the peaceful methods of dealing with strikers by law enforcement officials in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Comments on the joyful antics of the many children at the farm in the Summer, and enumerates their many unmet needs at the farm. Describes the noisy rebuilding going on at Mott Street. On the road, she reports on housing efforts in Chicago and a beautiful liturgy in St. Louis, explaining why they say Compline in New York. (DDLW #447).

1

HAVE you ever heard a man scream as he was beaten over the head by two or three policemen with clubs and cudgels? Have you ever heard the sickening sounds of blows and seen people with their arms upraised, trying to protect their faces, stumbling blindly to get away, falling and rising again to be beaten down? Did you ever see a man shot in the back, being dragged to his feet by policemen who tried to force him to stand, while his poor body crumpled, paralyzed by a bullet in the spine?

We are sickened by stories of brutality in Germany and Russia and Italy. A priest from Germany told me of one man who came to him whose back was ridged “like a washboard”, by the horrible beatings he had received at the hands of the German police in concentration camps. I shudder with horror at the thought of the tortures inflicted on Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Communists in Germany today.

And here in America last month there was a public exhibition of such brutality, that the motion picture film, taken by a Paramount photographer in a sound truck, was suppressed by the company for fear that it would cause riots and mass hysteria, it was so unutterably horrible.

I am trying to paint a picture of it for our readers because so many did not read the story of the Memorial Day “riot” in Chicago in front of the Republic Steel Mills.

Try to imagine this mass of people—men, women and children—picketing, as they have a right to do, coming up to the police line and being suddenly shot into, not by one hysterical policeman, but by many. Ten were killed and one hundred were taken to the hospital wounded. Tear gas and clubs supplied by the Republic Steel Company were used.

I am trying to picture this scene to our readers because I have witnessed these things first hand, and I know the horror of them. I was on a picket line when the “radical” squad shot into the line and pursued the fleeing picketers down the streets knocking them down, and kicking and beating them. I, too, have fled down streets to escape the brutality and vicious hatred of the “law” for those whom they consider “radical”. And by the police anyone who protests injustice, who participates in labor struggles, is considered a radical.

Two years ago I wrote an account in *The Catholic Worker* of two plain-clothesmen beating up a demonstrator. I told of the screams and the crumpling body of the man as two men who had dragged him into a hallway, beat him up against the wall aiming well directed blows at his face, smashing it to a pulp.

We protested this to the Police Commissioner and our protest was respected and acted upon.

We are repeating the protest against the Chicago massacre because the only way to stop such brutality is to arouse a storm of protest against it.

On whom shall the blame be laid for such a horrible spectacle of violence? Of course, the police and the press in many cases lay the blame on the strikers. But I have lived with these people, I have eaten with them and talked to them day after day. Many of them have never been in a strike before, many of them were marching in the picket line as in a supplicatory procession, for the first time in their lives. They even brought children on that line in Chicago.

Shall we blame only the police? Or shall we blame just Tom Girdler of the Republic Steel Company? God knows how he can sleep comfortably in his bed at night with the cries of those strikers, of their wives and children, in his ears. He may not hear them now in the heat of battle, but he will hear them, as there is a just God.

Or shall we blame the press, the pulpit and all those agencies who form public opinion, who have neglected to raise up their voices in protest at injustice and so have permitted it? In some cases the press have even instigated it so that it would come to pass. Inflammatory, hysterical headlines about mobs, about expected riots, do much to arouse the temper of the police to prepare them for just what occurred. The calm, seemingly reasonable stories of such papers as the *Herald-Tribune* and the *Times*, emphasizing the violence and the expectation of violence, do much to prepare the public to accept such violence when it comes to pass.

In that case we all are guilty inasmuch as we have not “gone to the workingman” as the Holy Father pleads and repeats. Inasmuch as we have not inclined our hearts to him, and sought to incline his to us, so that we could work together for peace instead of war, inasmuch as we have not protested such murder as was committed in Chicago—then we are guilty.

One more sin, suffering Christ, worker Yourself, for You to bear. In the garden of Gethsemane You bore the sins of all the world—You took them on Yourself, the sins of those police, the sins of the Girdlers, and the Schwabs, of the Graces of this world. In committing them, whether ignorantly or of their own free will, they piled them on Your shoulders, bowed to the ground with the weight of the guilt of the world, which You assumed because You loved each of us so much. You took them on Yourself, and You died to save us all. Your Precious Blood was shed even for that policeman whose cudgel smashed again and again the skull of that poor striker, whose brains lay splattered on the undertaker’s slab.

And the sufferings of those strikers' wives and children are completing Your suffering today. Have pity on us all, Jesus of Gethsemene—on Tom Girdler, those police, the souls of the strikers, as well as on all of us who have not worked enough for “a new heaven and a new earth wherein justice dwelleth.”

2

Last week I went down to Johnstown for the special purpose of meeting Michael Sewak, Burgess of Franklin, a town which borders Johnstown and in which are four of the most important gates of the Cambria Steel plant. In Johnstown there are three. The sheriff of Cambria county is Michael Boyle, the brother of Bishop Boyle of Pittsburgh, in whose diocese the priests in the Catholic Radical Alliance are doing such good work on the labor front, in speaking, writing and aiding strikers.

Sheriff Boyle is opposed to the use of force. He does not want tear gas and guns used against the workingmen of his county. But Mayor Shields of Johnstown, a heavyjowled, sleek politician, is all for strong-arm stuff. He glories in the praise he is getting from industrialists all over the country, and he shamelessly accepts the aid of the Bethlehem Steel Company in the way of guards, police and guns, “to keep order” at the Cambria gates in Johnstown.

Sheriff Boyle and his friend Burgess Sewak were in agreement. Burgess Sewak had nine policemen, none of them armed and at their gates there was no trouble, nor any rioting. Shields has 1,400 men sworn in and they have plenty of rioting. Taxis cruised the streets with armed men. He refuses to give “protection” to C.I.O. organizers, which is one way of telling them to get out of town. An *unlawful* way.

Sheriff Boyle was the one who telegraphed Governor Earle of Pennsylvania to declare martial law in Johnstown in order to curb the activities of Shields. It was the first time that I ever saw the state troops and the strikers cheer each other, and behave like brothers. There is not much chance of rioting when men act like that towards each other. There is a much better chance that there will be a peaceful waiting and negotiating for an agreement.

It was good to talk to Burgess Sewak. He lives in a little house up on the side of a steep hill in one of the worst slums I have ever visited. Those who talk of the high wages of steel workers should visit Franklin and see the homes of the workers.

Down in the municipal building he told me about himself. He's been in office for eight years. He's worked in the steel mills for fourteen. He is married to a Catholic—he is a Greek Orthodox, and all his children are being raised Catholics. All his brothers and sisters have married Catholics and become Catholics.

“In my household we have two sets of feast days, those of the Greek Church and those of the Catholic. My wife never forgets. It sure gives a holiday aspect to our home.”

Burgess Sewak as well as Sheriff Boyle are the kind of men we need in public life in this country. We don't hear much about them in the papers, because they see that law and order is maintained, because they are maintaining human rights as above property rights,

because they are trying to prevent bloodshed instead of provoking it as Mayor Shields and the newspapers which feature him are doing. They are the unsung heroes.

But labor does not forget, and the community does not forget. Theirs is an example which other officials might well follow. Sheriff Boyle is a Catholic. Mayor Shields also calls himself one. You can choose between them.

3

I am writing this from the farming commune down in Easton, and outside my windows seven children are sliding down the hill and leaving a long streak in the yellow grass. The hill rises up over the back of the house and the old road winds around up to the farm which we own. This one at the foot of the hill we rent.

Mary, Helena, Catherine, Christina, Annie, Eleanor and Teresa are the seven children, and the first five of them are some of Julia Porcell's charges from Harlem. They don't live there any more, their new home is on Forty-third Street, we believe, but Julia follows them around through the years. They have been her special friends for three years now, ever since we had quarters up in Harlem. The family have been on relief for some years, and the mother has been in the hospital for a good part of the past year. So they need lots of milk and sunlight and fresh air. The mother and the other four children are coming down later, and probably the father too.

This farm is ideal for us with its big barns, where the children are camping out. The boys have one barn—Ray, Bill, Mike, Donald and any other company who comes along. There are five more of us besides the children sleeping in the other barn. And the two bedrooms at the farmhouse are filled too. Altogether there are about thirty-eight people down here this week-end and about thirty are here for some weeks.

Every morning a crowd of us go down to Mass in Easton and after Mass I stay in the Easton office for letters and writing until noon. The afternoon is spent in more reading and writing and looking after the children.

It is a happy place, this farm, with its bright sunny days, the heavy odor of milkweed blossoms coming in through the windows and the daisies studding the fields. Every night we have black raspberry shortcake, and there is all the cherry jam you can eat. Rosie doesn't give quite enough milk to go around—she's down to twelve quarts a day now. Mollie will soon be giving us more.

(Annie, the little monkey, is climbing on a ladder from the barn, so I'll cut this short and take the children up the hill to hunt for salamanders in the spring. In spite of strikes and brutality, controversy and war, this world is filled with joy and beauty and the children bring it to us anew and help us to enjoy it through their eyes.)

4

While I am trying to write this on a hot August day, the Mott Street house is being torn down around us, and put together again. The story which began last January, telling of the threat of eviction because ours is an old style tenement, conflicting with fire laws, has now reached a climax. It is not the unhappy climax of an eviction. The house is being made over to conform with the law. Which means that partitions are being torn down, some doors blocked up, walls knocked out and all sorts of strange asbestos block and sheets of wire lath are being put up. As we go up and downstairs the banisters are being taken down and steel railings put up. The air is filled with the dust of plaster and old wood and the women go about with their heads covered to protect them from the dirt. The din, which begins at eight, is terrific. The entire backyard is filled with sand piles and heaps of refuse. There is only a footpath through. The families in the front house go about their business of eating, sleeping, cleaning, and so do we. It looks as though the house were being bombarded, and sounds like it too. It is hard to think.

The dining room and kitchen are being enlarged, and the upper floors made into dormitories so there will be no longer four rooms on a floor. There will be less privacy than ever.

We love our neighborhood. There is not a beauty parlor in it and not a news stand for blocks. Each street is like a little Italian village, and on these hot nights there is music and dancing in the street and everybody stays up until after twelve, because the houses are so hot and airless. The babies are sleeping in their carriages and two-year-olds toddle around the curbstones; the playgrounds keep open till late. It's a good walk to the river, North River, or East River, and sometimes we walk down to the Battery to rest our eyes, short-sighted with living in canyons of tenements, by the long fresh view over the Bay.

In the daytime, markets are the most beautiful places in the world. Glorious color strikes the eye and the appeal to sight and taste makes one forget the offense to smell. There are fish markets with their eels, snails, blue-black mussels with the seaweed clinging to them, little clams and octopuses and all kinds of fish.

There are fresh figs, fresh almonds, melons, peaches and plums—every kind of fruit is heaped on the push carts, even Concord grapes with their first hint of the autumn to come.

Housewives go by with their shopping bags, hucksters sing their wares, music stores blare with song, children dodge to and fro between the stands, beggars edge through the crowd with hat outstretched, and leisurely storekeepers sit by their wares enjoying the sun. There are even some good smells in the air—smells of spaghetti, ravioli, olive oil and roasts, coming from the little restaurants on all sides.

And two streets away is the Bowery with its stark hunger and colorless misery.

5

“You be the father and your name is Patrick, and I'm the mother.”

“And we have so many children!”

“Yes, six have to sleep in this bed, and we’ll let two come into bed with us. Then it won’t be so crowded.”

“Come on, children, you can’t play any more, it’s time for bed. And don’t take so long about undressing. Father, are you going to bed?”

“No, I been sleeping all day.”

“Well, you better sit up all night than come to bed after and wake the children up. Then they’d all start crying.”

“Come on, time to get up and have breakfast, lazy. My, what a crowded house.”

The days rush by, breakfast, supper, and bed. Tragedies, accidents, sickness, all greeted with equanimity. For it is the children, playing dolls outside the door while I write. Teresa, Eleanor and little Dorothy, the latter two from Harlem, one a Catholic and the other not. They are about the same size and age, the three of them, and there is never a dull moment. There are dolls and puppies and cats and books, and to see the three of them sitting in a row on the couch reading is a sweet sight. This is the first summer with us for these little colored girls, but we hope they come every summer and grow up with us as some of the boys from Charles Street have for the past three summers.

During the summer we have had about fifty children with us for longer or shorter periods. A few got homesick and had to be taken back to the city. Many of them stayed for two weeks or a month. We never had less than ten at a time and most of the time there were fifteen. And when I think of the catastrophes that happen to Teresa’s families of dolls, I thank the Blessed Mother for her care of all these children during the summer. Eddie got sick once from eating green apples; Charlie, an eighteen-year-old, cut his head diving, there were a few cases of poison ivy and a few cut fingers. The worst was that of little Mickie, the bad boy of the crowd, who sliced his own hand good and plenty while he was trying to put his bedmate’s Sunday clothes through the corn chopper.

Oh, the happiness of having space this year on the farm! The rented farm which adjoins the thirty acre farm we own, has a four room house and two barns and a chicken coop. The little boys with one of the men to watch after them, have had one of the barns, and plenty of floor space for extra guests who didn’t mind doing without beds. The women’s barn (which is also big enough to hold a kitchen and dining room), had the disadvantage that it leaks like a sieve, and during a week of rain such as this last, beds have been shifted to every position till we felt we were on rafts in mid-ocean. Usually we woke up with our feet in a puddle of water. In the house, the kitchen and the three bedrooms were always filled. All summer we had two invalids with us and the vitality of the children seemed to bring health to them too.

We can do without beds and sleep on the floor, we can sleep in wet beds; we can do with most primitive washing and toilet facilities; but with space there is a sense of luxury.

We are all praying to St. Joseph to get this farm for us in some way. It costs four thousand dollars, a huge sum, but it is certainly worth it. And what to us is an unbelievably large sum, should seem like nothing to our patron. Surely you can see, St. Joseph, that we need this place, so can’t you remind somebody who has an abundance to buy it for us?

During these two months, Mary Johnson has made 1,500 beds, let us figure, and served 4,500 meals. She gives this service to us—the family she has adopted out of the loving kindness of her heart. Donald has washed dishes after 4,500 servings, Stephen Johnson working in town during the summer has contributed four-fifths of his salary; a deaf girl working at housework for five dollars a week, leaves us a dollar every week to help out; seamen from the seven seas whom we fed last winter, have contributed from twelve ships to help out; one seaman turned over \$150 on his return from a voyage; one young fellow supporting a family contributed his lunch money for a good part of the summer.

All these workers giving abundantly of their talents, energies and earnings, and giving at such a sacrifice, surely will bring the graces of God down on the work.

We are sure that if it is His good pleasure, we are going to get this farm. We certainly need it, and He has not failed us yet. There were plenty of rosaries said with that intention and the prayers of little children are most potent of all.

All during the summer there were priest visitors at the farm. Father Joseph Woods from Portsmouth Priory was with us for two weeks, and Father Palmer from Long Island was with us still another two weeks. We certainly wouldn't be without priests to offer up Mass if we had a chapel. We had to spend the money we had set aside for a chapel this year, realizing that Temples of the Holy Ghost were more important than temples made with hands. So this is another thing we need. And while we are about it, there is money for building. Two married couples on the farm now and little houses (two rooms would be sufficient) needed for them by spring. Father Lallemand says we compliment God by expecting great things from Him, so we're listing these wants. And there's the printing bill, over a thousand dollars by now; and the grocery bills, about five hundred.

At the present moment we feel like the Israelites, crying out to the Lord in the Wilderness. And we are sure that He will hear us.

We've been reading the Old Testament a great deal this summer; and when we pray importunately for these material needs, because we have a very large and hungry family of about a hundred, we are reminded of the words of Moses. When Pharaoh, tired of the disasters which were overtaking him, and yet greedy, told Moses to take his people and get out, only leaving the herds behind him, Moses refused. "There shall not a hoof remain of them," he said, "for they are necessary for the service of the Lord Our God."

And I do indeed feel that all these things I have been mentioning "are necessary for the service of the Lord Our God", so we shall continue to pray for them.

6

Chicago—Fall 1937. I must keep a more careful record of places and persons even if it means sitting up in bed writing after an 18-hour day.

For instance, there is this place, so many details of which I do not want to forget but will unless I write them down.

It is the first rectory I've ever stayed at and it is a great privilege to be here. The door bell rings day and night, its parlors are cluttered up with people, everyone works from dawn till way after dark, and everyone is very happy.

We are on the South Side in an uneven neighborhood which has good and bad houses, but mostly slums. Around on Michigan Avenue, the houses are beautiful, but, across the street, are some little houses so awful that it is hard to believe temples of the Holy Ghost are housed there.

The pastor pointed out one house which some children had pushed over on themselves, and he had waited hours while the fire department extricated them, to baptize them. Neither child was hurt badly, strangely enough.

Father and I were walking around the neighborhood looking for a little house for another House of Hospitality for his side of town.

"I cried when I got home that day," he said. "I don't know what was the matter with me. I never do that."

It is a joy to be with such priests as these. They are all so gay and the pastor is like an older brother.

He used to be a missionary in the Philippines and as we sit over a good breakfast of liver sausage and toast and fruit and coffee he tells me of living conditions there.

"At first we were allowed three dollars a month to live on. All we had was rice and leaves most of the time.

"Later when I had three sisters come out for teaching, we were allowed ten dollars. You couldn't buy anything. Money wasn't much good. When some of our kind friends sent us clothes, we could exchange them for food, fish and chickens. Sometimes we had grasshoppers, locusts, they were cooked first in salt and water and then served with a little vinegar and lard. They were delicious. We liked it. They eat dogs there, too, and they say that they are very good but I never ate any. We never had any bread until I began to bake some. We just had rice, and to keep our teeth in chewing habit, we had water buffalo meat. Fresh it was tough, but dried it was worse. And sugar cane to chew on too. Between the meat and the grasshoppers, I preferred the grasshoppers.

"My bread was very good. We used a five gallon can as the oven, putting the coals and charcoal in the bottom and making an oven on top. We put the bread in an empty sardine tin. I sent some to the sisters and they said it was better than theirs. But I didn't have much time for gardening or baking. I had to go on horseback and on rafts, in all directions, to reach my people.

"During the war about twenty-eight of us Germans were arrested and shipped back to the United States—I don't know what for. All of us were confined to a fo'castle (there were six priests among us) and it was terribly hot. When they shut off the ventilating system to rest the machinery, some of them fainted. There we were for weeks. We had beans seventy-eight times. Yes, it was a hard life."

The house here is big and the pastor gave me his room because it is the only one with a private bath. The windows look out on a gnarled ailanthus tree, which grows so well in city

back yards. There are some shrubs in the tiny back yard, but the grass is trampled down by the police dog and the puppy, a mongrel called Valentine, whom Father says Martin de Porres sent him for a pet. The police dog is a watch dog, not a pet, but the little cur wags his whole hind end and is a friend of all. I can see why Father never ate dog meat.

The rooms are large, but the furniture is very poor and the rugs worn down to the nap. When they need any “new” furniture they go buy it at the Catholic Salvage Bureau around the corner. Fortunately for them there are no ill-advised though loving parishioners to smother them in gifts such as oriental rugs.

While we were looking for a place this afternoon we passed little ramshackle frame houses all bent and reeling, and the front yards were planted with lettuce, radishes, golden glow and iris, and even some rows of corn. On one street, here in the heart of the slums, there was an apple tree in bloom and a parrot out in a bush in the front yard. Wish we could find a place on that street, but there is great difficulty in finding any place around here, it is so congested. There are often several families, and sometimes dozens of families living in one house. Many of the worst buildings have been torn down and there is no new housing to take their place.

7

At St. Louis. Three of us from the St. Louis group started out before five one morning (it was the octave of the Ascension) to go to the Convent of the Precious Blood at O’Fallon, Missouri, for High Mass at six. We had time to recite Lauds as we sped along at sixty miles an hour, and the nuns, novices, postulants and aspirants were just starting Prime when we arrived.

In the chapel, surrounded by noble trees and lawns, were the robed women, and the beauty within completed the beauty without. I never heard Mass sung so, with such clear, pure and hearty singing, not the thin, attenuated singing one is accustomed to associate with women’s voices and Gregorian chant.

Purity was a positive virtue there in that chapel. There was strength, joy and love strong as death there.

I thought too, how there at this liturgical center, they had most truly made the Mass the crown of the day. The morning took its rightful place, its emphasis. Matins, Lauds, Prime, led up to the Mass, followed by Terce and Sext and then the great work of the day was done—surely as perfectly as it is ever done in this imperfect world. The rest of the day is relatively unimportant and declines to nightfall when God’s creatures sleep.

8

While I was at the convent I thought of how we said Compline at Mott Street.

When Margaret beats on a pan lid at 6 p.m. that means supper and the redoubled beating means that Peter Maurin is downstairs holding up the eating by a discussion. He is probably in the middle of making a point.

When the pot lid resounds at seven, that means Compline and we are sorry to say that the gong has to be supplemented by one of the dish washers poking his head in various rooms where more discussions are going on to shout, "All set!"

We are always trying to explain why we say Compline instead of the rosary.

The two great commandments are to love God and to love our brothers. When we are praying the official prayers of the Church, uniting in praise, we are loving God. And because we are praying together, we are loving each other. Some may say this doesn't follow. Margaret may have just had an argument with John about money for carrots; Joe Smolko may have just accused Texas of getting out of washing the dishes; John Cort and Bill Callahan may have been combating each other over what is a just war. But just the same, we know that when we are united together in the community room in this evening prayer, we are conscious of a Christian solidarity. As members of the Church, we are united to the whole Church. We are united with Christ Himself who is head of the Mystical Body. We may not do it very well, our poor efforts may be feeble, our hearts may not be right, but the will is there, and united with Him we partake of His merits. He is the only one who can pray right, and we are praying with Him so our prayer is effective. Then too, we are united with each other, and we benefit by all the merits and graces of our brethren. We lift each other up. "Two are better than one, for if one falls the other lifts him up." "A brother who is helped by his brother is like a strong city."

The great cry of Peguy's life was a cry for solidarity. "We must be saved together," he said. "We must come to God together. Together we must all return to our Father's house. What would God say to us if some of us came to Him without the others?"

9

After the long services at the convent Father Hellriegel was our host at breakfast and it was a hearty meal, as it should be after such hearty singing. We sat long at the table.

Father Hellriegel, the chaplain of the Convent, is a mountain of strength and energy and has that happiness of one who does well what God wants him to do.

After being up since four-thirty, we ate heartily of bacon and eggs, home-made bread and butter, and there were sausages, cheese and green topped onions on the table, of which Father ate ten before I could get the plate and take half a dozen myself.

Speaking to the nuns was a great pleasure and they are all going to pray for *The Catholic Worker*. Such a power house supplies us with the energy we need for our work.

The students at the high school were farmers' sons and daughters and it was good to talk to them too. We will have there one more C.W. group, I hope.

So many places covered this trip and so many different audiences. In St. Louis I spoke before our own group twice, before several high schools; before one group of workers in an enameling plant and before six hundred steel workers.

The last crowd were just organized by the C.I.O. in Granite City, Illinois, and, though the town allows no Negroes after dark, white and colored were in the same hall, in the same union; this is something which the C.I.O. has achieved which the A.F. of L. failed to do.