

## HOUSES OF HOSPITALITY

Nor long ago those interested in the forward movement in Catholic social teaching and practice were interested to read *From Union Square to Rome*, which was Miss Dorothy Day's account of her conversion to the Church. The story ended with her safely within the fold, and all who read the story and who knew of the work that she had undertaken, were anxious to hear more of it. The American *Catholic Worker* was always interesting and enlightening, and recently have been published Peter Maurin's *Easy Essays*. But until now there was no full-length story of the work being done in New York nor of the dynamic spirit which keeps it going. Last month, however, the gap was admirably filled by *House of Hospitality*,<sup>1</sup> again by Dorothy Day; and I have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the most important books not only of this year, but since the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. A bold claim indeed, but one which I hope to substantiate in the course of the article.

What immediately puts this book in a class apart is that it is written by someone who has lived and is still living it. It is about the poorest of the poor, the destitute, about the workers and their struggles, not for prosperity, but for the right to be recognised as something more than chattels. It is written from the inside, not by a fur-coated investigator, not by a commission of statistically-minded civil servants, not by a *bien pensant* slummer, but by a woman who is one with the poor, the destitute and the outcast. In only one respect does she differ from them: she is animated always by an ideal, that Green Revolution for which

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<sup>1</sup> *House of Hospitality*. By Dorothy Day. (Sheed & Ward; 7s. 6d). All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from this book.

she and her co-workers are striving. The term Green Revolution may seem to many both disconcerting and mystifying, but it is that used by Peter Maurin, who opposes it to the Red Revolution of the Marxist and Communist and the White Revolution of Fascist, Nazi and all totalitarians. The Green Revolution is that of Christianity, whose task is to prepare the 'green pastures' for the flock of the Good Shepherd. M. Kothen has lately published a book on the work of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, which he entitles *La Révolution Verte*,<sup>2</sup> from which we borrow the following quotation from Folliet: 'Vert de la végétation, du mouvement et de la vie—eaux qui coulent, feuilles qui se dilatent—de la jeunesse et de l'espoir.' The book is prefaced by Canon Cardijn, who adds his authority and approval to the work of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin: 'Contre la dynamite naziste et soviétique, qui, après avoir détruit la Pologne, menace l'Europe et la Chrétienté, il n'y a que la dynamite de Maurin pour renverser les idoles et rendre l'optimisme conquérant aux nouveaux croisés qui ont pour mission de sauver l'Evangile. La révolution verte pourra seule vaincre la révolution rouge et blanche. Le catholicisme intégral, qui est le catholicisme tout court peut seul sauver le Christianisme et faire disparaître cette caricature du catholicisme, qui bien des catholiques de nom ont répandu dans nos pays démocratiques.'

I ask pardon for this somewhat lengthy quotation from Canon Cardijn, but I wished to show quite clearly that the founder of the J.O.C. recognises in Maurin the founder or at least the driving force of a movement as important, and with as much hope for the workers, as Jocism. Where one stresses social justice, the other stresses social charity. As Jocism has already encircled the world, so have the ideas and methods of Peter Maurin and Dorothy

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<sup>2</sup> *La Révolution Verte*. Par Robert Kothen. (Editions Ramgal; 17 frs.)

Day—at least the English-speaking world. For the *Catholic Worker* movement has in six years assumed international proportions: in England there is the *Catholic Worker*, in Canada there is the *Social Forum*, in Ceylon *Social Justice*, in Australia the *Catholic Worker*; while in the United States of America it has been in large measure responsible for the founding of the two monthlies: *The Interracial Review* and *Liturgy and Sociology*.

Thus in its beginnings it was literary, and the first thirty pages of the book relate, by way of a foreword, the inception of the paper and its subsequent progress. Journalists, they believe, should not merely report history, but make history by influencing the time in which they write. 'In other words, they should be propagandists as he (Peter Maurin) himself has always been' (p. xviii). A principle, be it said, which makes a lot depend on the integrity of the journalists concerned. Peter Maurin has a four-point programme—labour papers, round table discussions, houses of hospitality and farming communes; 'but it was getting out a labour paper which caught my imagination, popularizing the teachings of the Church in regard to social matters, bringing to the man in the street a Christian solution of unemployment, a way of rebuilding the social order' (p. xxvii). Throughout the rest of the book, which is partly a diary of day-to-day doings, and partly a journal of reflections, 'jottings written down during journeys, notes kept for my own comfort, information, clarification or publication,' the story of the paper threads its way. Sometimes it is overwhelmed by strikes, sometimes by a few weeks' sojourn on the farm at Easton, sometimes by travels from city to city, talking, arguing, indoctrinating without cease. What upholds them in their struggle is 'we heard of one man who was brought back to the faith last month through *The Catholic Worker*, and that one bit of news was enough to make us intensify our efforts,' and 'it is a little recognised fact that revolutions are started by just such seemingly insignificant acts as

distributing literature . . . In the history of the working class movement men have gone to jail, been put to death, have been sent into exile for running a newspaper and printing literature which the government considered subversive.' Both in America and in this country the paper has been accused from time to time of heterodoxy by Catholics, and in view of this it is interesting to note that the Cardinal Archbishop of New York appointed 'a spiritual adviser for us, to be consulted on doctrinal matters only, and not on such subjects as strikes or labor in general, or legislation,' and that he said 'he would give us public approval if he thought it would not *hinder us in our work*' (italics mine).

And so the work of the paper goes on, written in the midst of serving out food to Christ's ambassadors, in restaurants, on journeys, often with appalling bills owing to the printer (which St. Joseph always seems to manage to pay off), but full of the dynamite of the Church's social message. For at the beginning of the work Maurin, who appears in the list of the staff of the paper with the title of 'Instigator,' wrote:

Catholic scholars  
 have taken the dynamite  
 of the Church;  
 they have wrapped it up  
 in nice phraseology,  
 have placed it  
 in an hermetically  
 sealed container,  
 placed the lid  
 over the container,  
 and sat on the lid.  
 It is about time  
 to take the lid off  
 and to make  
 the Catholic dynamite  
 dynamic.

*The Catholic Worker* has taken the lid off.

Growing up, first round the staff of the paper and then including those who came to seek help, are the Houses of Hospitality. Their aim is 'to bring workers and scholars together. They will provide a place for industrial workers to discuss Christian principles of organisation as set forth in the Encyclicals. They will emphasise personal action, personal responsibility in addition to political action and state responsibility. They will care for the unemployed and teach principles of co-operation and mutual aid. They will be a half-way house towards farming communes and homesteads.' In this field progress was not delayed, for now 'throughout the country there are twenty-three hospices, each one now accommodating anywhere from a few people to one hundred and fifty. There are 'cells' made up of interested readers who are personally practising voluntary poverty and the works of mercy. There are bread lines run at many of the houses, so that now about five thousand a day are fed. In New York City over a thousand come every morning to breakfast.' In England there are several Houses, two of which publish bulletins well worth reading, being M.O. with a difference.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the opportunities it provides for round-table discussions, a House of Hospitality is important as the centre of various works of mercy, both spiritual and temporal. In Catholic Action strictly so called there is a tendency towards specialisation, that is concentration of apostolic activity on the level of society in which one moves. The principle, the same which is at work in fostering native clergy in foreign lands, being that one works best on and among those with whom one has community of interests; and this place in society is not regarded as a matter of class, for this would only be widening the breach, but of function. With classes there is no underlying com-

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<sup>3</sup> *House of Hospitality News* from 61a Darlington Street East, Wigan. *The Vine and the Branches* from 129 Malden Road, N.W.5.

munity, no common bond, for they are mutually exclusive labels and, though not inevitably so, at variance the one with the other. With functions there is the unifying principle of the society in which all play their parts, the analogy with the body and still more with the Mystical Body of Christ. For the purposes of the apostolate, then, this difference of function is being emphasised: in this country one can point to the splendid work being done by the Young Christian Workers and the League of Christ the King.

But there must be some common meeting ground for all, where they can work side by side, growing in understanding and mutual charity, and this place would seem to be the House of Hospitality. If this was done we would have Maurin's ideal fulfilled: workers becoming scholars and scholars becoming workers. Some might even feel called to abandon all and live a life of voluntary poverty, helping in the work of the House; others might do it for a short period; e.g., undergraduates for part of their vacation; for others it might be a spare-time occupation. There is room for all, and there is work for all. Already both in England and in the United States the *Catholic Worker* has helped the Young Christian Workers in their early stages, by means of previous valuable publicity.

Thus Houses are envisaged as having a dual role: first, in their work, which is to help all who are in need of help, whether by advice, food, clothing, lodging, and so on, helping in homes where the mother is ill, visiting lonely people and a hundred and one other acts of charity which demand personal attention and personal responsibility. This work is a reaction against that impersonal charity whether of the State or of semi-official organisation which too often look on the unfortunates whom our social system has injured as impersonal 'cases,' and which has made the word charity to stink in the nostrils of the poor. The words of our Lord are addressed personally to each one of us: *you did this, you did that for Me; not 'I was naked and*

you paid an institution to clothe me,' 'I was hungry and you subscribed to a soup kitchen.' The work of Houses of Hospitality is to bring back to people the sense of how they are personally responsible for social injustices, and of how they are to meet the demands made on them by what has been termed 'reparative justice' *personally*. Secondly, they will be an ideal meeting ground for all sections of the community who, once they have entered the door of the House, will cease to be lawyer, navy, stock-broker, tram-driver and labour manager, and will be members of the Mystical Body of Christ engaged in works of charity, thereby foreshadowing that unity for which we are working, the harmony of all in the charity of Christ. That the work done in New York cares for souls as well as bodies, I may illustrate by the one incident in the book which brought a smile to my lips: 'Mass at eight. Drunken Michael McCarthy to breakfast with two black eyes. Read aloud to him St. Teresa's vision of hell.' (The whole book is like that, full of little incidents which not only tell one about Houses of Hospitality, but much, too, about Dorothy Day. Up to this I have restrained myself from quoting, but there is another paragraph which I feel cannot be left out. 'Last night the liturgical group of the Champions sang Vespers and Compline. They sang and sang, and could not stop. The truckmen at the garage at the back of the house, the police in the station house across the street, were overwhelmed with plain chant. Tina, our Trotskyite friend, came in to say that "yodelling is an indispensable part of every movement."')

The works of mercy, expressing the love of God through love for one's neighbour, is the one thing they are positive that our Lord wants them to do. 'We are liable to make mistakes in the paper, not being theologians or philosophers, nor experts in the line of economics and sociology; but we can make no mistake in feeding God's hungry ones.

'And now there are four farming communes . . . As

Peter says, "there is no unemployment on the land." As St. Thomas said, "A certain amount of goods is necessary for a man to lead a good life." On the land there is the possibility of ownership. There is the possibility for a man to raise his own food. There is room for the family on the land. In our endeavour to de-proletarianize the worker, as Pius XI advised in his encyclical *Forty Years After*, we have advocated not only de-centralized industry, co-operatives, the ownership by the workers of the means of production, but also the land movement.' Those who advocate a return to the land, who stress the need for a sane balance between industry and agriculture, are often (except in wartime) dubbed escapists and accused of deserting, and at the same time warned of the futility of trying to put the clock back. In some few cases this croaking is justified, but not with the American *Catholic Worker* group. They have faced up to this accusation and answered it, answered it particularly by their realist approach to the problem. 'We oppose the misuse of private property. The Holy Father says that "as many as possible of the workers should become owners," and how else in many cases except by developing the co-operative ideal? While we are upholding co-operatives as part of the Christian social order, we are upholding at the same time unions, as organisations of workers wherein they can be indoctrinated and taught to rebuild the social order. While we stress the back-to-the-land movement so that the worker may be "deproletarianized" we are not going to leave the city to the Communist.'

That is a brief survey of the subjects which are discussed in this book; and it should be noted that they are not discussed academically. Is it strikes, then there is a first-hand account of the sit-down strikes in the car factories at Flint, Michigan, and of the seamen's strike—during this strike a thousand seamen were fed every day. Is it unions, the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. come under review as well as the A.C.T.U. (Association of Catholic Trade Unionists), which



is another offspring of the *Worker* movement. Is it farming communes, there are pages of description of the difficulties and the joys of the work on the farm at Easton. Is it trust in God, then read: 'If our surroundings are cold, desolate and dirty with the dirt of poverty which is so hard to combat, it is the more suited to us. Our debts are now one thousand five hundred and thirty dollars. We are most completely dependent on God . . . We have never been so badly off as now. And I am beginning to feel better and better, praise God.'

What I have said about this book makes it seem depressing, and I insist that it *is* depressing. And for a very good reason which is not peculiar to the United States, but is common to the whole world: 'When I contemplate civilization which offers us silk stockings and playgrounds and ice boxes in return for the love of God, I begin to long for a good class war, with the civiliziers lined up to be liquidated.' It is a book to trouble consciences if only the right people would read it; and it is a book for those whose consciences are troubled, but who feel all suggestions they have heard so far are impractical.

'So we come back to Peter Maurin's fundamental ideas. "Reach the people through voluntary poverty (going without the luxuries in order to have the essentials) and through the works of mercy (mutual aid and a philosophy of labour)." It is hard for us ourselves to become simple enough to grasp and live with these ideas. It is hard for us, and hard for our readers and friends throughout the country. We are still not considered respectable, we still are combatted and condemned as "radicals." "We are fools for Christ's sake . . . we are weak . . . we are without honour . . . we are made as the refuse of this world, the off-scouring of all, even until now." And following St. Paul, I am certainly praying that we continue so, because this is, indeed, "the downward path which leads to salvation."'

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