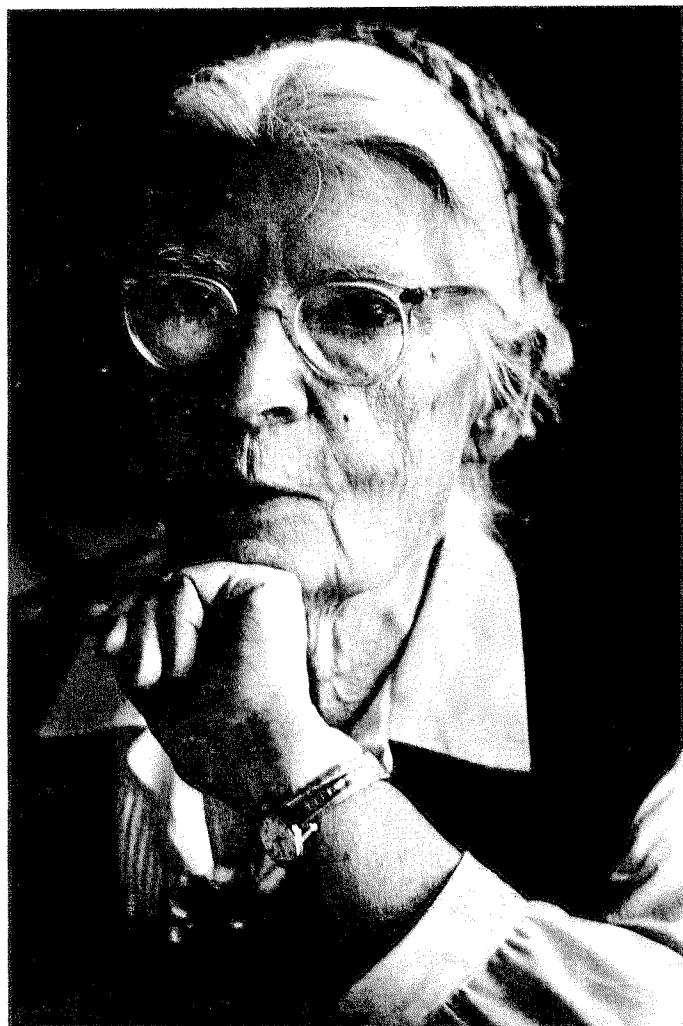




By Little and By Little

THE SELECTED WRITINGS
OF DOROTHY DAY

Edited and with an Introduction by

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urgent and selfish passion. The instinct for self-preservation made me forget everything but a frantic desire for freedom, to get away from these depths into which I had fallen.

I could get away, but what of the others? I could get away, paying no penalty, because of my friends, my background, my education, my privilege. I suffered but was not part of it. I put it from me. It was too much for me.

I think that for a long time one is stunned by such experiences. They seem to be quickly forgotten, but they leave a scar that is never healed.

The Long Loneliness

New Life

Dorothy described the event of her conversion in *From Union Square to Rome* as well as *The Long Loneliness*. The following account includes selections from both sources, as well as the story of her daughter's birth, "Having a Baby," published in the Marxist journal *The New Masses*.

I

October 1925: Every year the beaches around New York change, but so gradually, one notices the changes only year by year. The shoreline down by our little house is irregular, with many little bays and creeks wandering inland every few miles. Some years before, a pier a quarter of a mile down the beach toward the open ocean fell to ruin in a storm, with the result that the sand is washed away from our beach to be piled up on the next one. . . .

The seagulls scream over the rocks, blue and gray and dazzling white, winging their way from the wreck of the old excursion boat to the larger rocks in the water, diving with a splash into the shallow gray water for a fish. The waves, the gulls, and the cawing of the crows in the woods in back of the house are the only sounds on these fall days.

Farther up and down the beach, away from our tiny bay, the waves roll in from the ocean, crashing dull and ominous on the sands, but here by the house, except during storms, the waves are gentle and playful.

I wander every afternoon up and down the beach for miles, collecting

mussels, garlanded in seaweed, torn loose from the piers—pockets full of jingle shells which look as though they are made of mother of pearl and gunmetal. When the tide goes out these little cups of shells are left along the beach, each holding a few drops of water which serve to glorify both the shape and coloring of the shell.

The little house I have furnished very simply with a driftwood stove in one corner, plenty of books, comfortable chairs and couches, and my writing table in the window where I can look out at the water all day.

* * *

Late this afternoon the wind dropped and I sat by the open door contemplating the sunset. The waves lapped the shore, tingling among the shells and pebbles, and there was an acrid odor of smoke in the air. Down the beach the Belgians were working, loading rock into a small cart which looked like a tumbrel, drawn by a bony white horse. They stooped as though in prayer, outlined against the brilliant sky, and as I watched, the bell from the chapel over at St. Joseph's rang the Angelus. I found myself praying, praying with thanksgiving, praying with open eyes, while I watched the workers on the beach, the sunset, and listened to the sound of the waves and the scream of snowy gulls.

Later this evening the wind rose again and whistled around the house, and the noise of the sea is loud. I read now evenings until late in the night, and in my preoccupation the fire goes out, so that I have to get into bed to keep warm, clutching my books with ice-cold hands.

November: Mother sent me some of my high school books (now that I have a place of my own to keep them in) and the other day I came across these words, written on a faded slip of paper in my own writing. I do not remember writing them.

"Life would be utterly unbearable if we thought we were going nowhere, that we had nothing to look forward to. The greatest gift life can offer would be a faith in God and a hereafter. Why don't we have it? Perhaps like all gifts it must be struggled for. 'God, I believe' (or rather, 'I must believe or despair'). 'Help Thou my unbelief.' 'Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh.'"

I wrote the above lines when I felt the urgent need for faith, but there were too many people passing through my life—too many activities—too much pleasure (not happiness).

I have been passing through some years of fret and strife, beauty and

ugliness, days and even weeks of sadness and despair, but seldom has there been the quiet beauty and happiness I have now. I thought all those years that I had freedom, but now I feel that I had neither real freedom nor even a sense of what freedom meant.

And now, just as in my childhood, I am enchained, tied to one spot, unable to pick up and travel from one part of the country to another, from one job to another. I am enchained because I am going to have a baby. No matter how much I may sometimes wish to flee from my quiet existence, I cannot, nor will I be able to for several years. I have to accept my quiet and stillness, and accepting it, I rejoice in it.

For a long time, I had thought I could not bear a child. A book I read years ago in school, *Silas Marner*, expressed the sorrow of a mother bereft of her child, and it expressed, too, my sorrow at my childless state. Just a few months ago I read it again, with a longing in my heart for a baby. My home, I felt, was not a home without one. The simple joys of the kitchen and garden and beach brought sadness with them because I had not the companionship of a child. No matter how much one is loved or one loves, that love is lonely without a child. It is incomplete.

And now I know that I am going to have a baby.

From Union Square to Rome

The man I loved, with whom I entered into a common-law marriage, was an anarchist, an Englishman by descent, and a biologist. His mother and father had both come from England and he and his seven sisters were born in Asheville, North Carolina. He had attended school at the University of Georgia and of Virginia, and spent most of his time during World War I hospitalized with influenza, from which he did not recover until the war was over. When I met him he was out of uniform and had begun to get back some of the seventy-five pounds he had lost during his hospital year. His friends were mostly liberals and his sympathies were decentralist and anti-industrialist, though he loved the machine and the illusion of progress. . . .

Forster's work took him into the city during the week, and I looked forward to his homecomings on Friday. Sometimes work was slack—he made gauges—and he spent all his time on the beach. We fished together, we walked every day for miles, we collected and studied together, and an entire new world opened up to me little by little. We did not talk much but “lived together” in the fullest sense of the phrase. I was an indefatigable

novel reader and spent those first few winters on the beach with Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Dickens. I did little real studying but I began to read the Bible again and the *Imitation of Christ*. Forster read perhaps one novel a year, and his favorite authors were D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley. When he came home, he would rush out to the garden with his flashlight to see how things were growing. Winter nights he had charts and studied the stars. His enthusiasms were such that I could not help but be fascinated by the new world of nature he opened up to me, and I shared in his joys. . . .

It was a peace, curiously enough, divided against itself. I was happy, but my very happiness made me know that there was a greater happiness to be obtained from life than any I had ever known. I began to think, to weigh things, and it was at this time that I began consciously to pray more.

The Long Loneliness

Still November: I am surprised that I am beginning to pray daily. I began because I had to. I just found myself praying. I can't get down on my knees, but I can pray while I am walking. If I get down on my knees I think, “Do I really believe? Whom am I praying to?” And a terrible doubt comes over me, and a sense of shame, and I wonder if I am praying because I am lonely, because I am unhappy.

Then I think suddenly, scornfully, “Here you are in a stupor of content. You are biological. Like a cow. Prayer with you is like the opiate of the people.” And over and over again in my mind that phrase is repeated jeeringly, “Religion is the opiate of the people.”

“But,” I reason with myself, “I am praying because I am happy, not because I am unhappy. I did not turn to God in unhappiness, in grief, in despair—to get consolation, to get something from Him.”

And encouraged that I am praying because I want to thank Him, I go on praying. No matter how dull the day, how long the walk seems, if I feel low at the beginning of the walk, the words I have been saying have insinuated themselves into my heart before I have done, so that on the trip back I neither pray nor think but am filled with exultation.

Along the beach I find it appropriate to say the *Te Deum*, which I learned in the Episcopal church. When I am working about the house, I find myself addressing the Blessed Virgin and turning toward her statue.

It is so hard to say how this delight in prayer has been growing on me

Two years ago, I was saying as I planted seeds in the garden, "I *must* believe in these seeds, that they fall into the earth and grow into flowers and radishes and beans. It is a miracle to me because I do not understand it. The very fact that they use glib technical phrases does not make it any the less a miracle, and a miracle we all accept. Then why not accept God's miracles?"

I am going to Mass now regularly on Sunday mornings.

From Union Square to Rome

Forster, the inarticulate, became garrulous only in wrath. And his wrath, he said, was caused by my absorption in the supernatural rather than the natural, the unseen rather than the seen.

He had always rebelled against the institution of the family and the tyranny of love. It was hard for me to see at such times why we were together, since he lived with me as though he were living alone and he never allowed me to forget that this was a comradeship rather than a marriage.

He worked as little as possible, he shared in all the expenses of the house, but he never spent any money if he could help it. He hated social life and fled from it, and seemed afraid of any actual contact with the world, but he was much engrossed in its concerns. He read the *Times* faithfully, and all I knew of the political and foreign situation I knew from his reading aloud at the breakfast table. . . . I had listened to Forster's bitter comments on all man-made institutions and the blundering of our fellow creatures. He loved nature with a sensuous passion and he loved birds and beasts and children because they were not men.

The very fact that his suffering and rebellion against life as man had made it was an abstract thing and had little to do with what he had suffered personally, made me respect his ideas, as ideas honestly held, so our quarrels were not acrimonious. For instance, he loved his family tenderly, but he saw and suffered keenly at what havoc a possessive family feeling sometimes wrought. He personally had not suffered want, but economic inequality was a terrible thing to him. He personally had not been in jail, but his rage at the system which confined political agitators to jail ate into him. And yet he did nothing but enclose himself into a shell, escape out on the bay with his fishing, find comfort in digging for clams or bait, or seek refuge in tending a garden. . . .

I had known Forster a long time before we contracted our common-law

relationship, and I have always felt that it was life with him that brought me natural happiness, that brought me to God.

His ardent love of creation brought me to the Creator of all things. But when I cried out to him, "How can there be no God, when there are all these beautiful things?" he turned from me uneasily and complained that I was never satisfied. We loved each other so strongly that he wanted to remain in the love of the moment; he wanted me to rest in that love. He cried out against my attitude that there would be nothing left of that love without faith. . . .

I could not see that love between man and woman was incompatible with love of God. God is the Creator, and the very fact that we were begetting a child made me have a sense that we were made in the image and likeness of God, co-creators with him. I could not protest with Sasha about "that initial agony of having to live." Because I was grateful for love, I was grateful for life, and living with Forster made me appreciate it and even reverence it still more. He had introduced me to so much that was beautiful and good that I felt I owed to him too this renewed interest in the things of the spirit.

He had all the love of the English for the outdoors in all weather. He used to insist on walks no matter how cold or rainy the day, and this dragging me away from my books, from my lethargy, into the open, into the country, made me begin to breathe. If breath is life, then I was beginning to be full of it because of him. I was filling my lungs with it, walking on the beach, resting on the pier beside him while he fished, rowing with him in the calm bay, walking through fields and woods—a new experience entirely for me, one which brought me to life and filled me with joy. . . .

It did not last all through my pregnancy, that happiness. There were conflicts because Forster did not believe in bringing children into such a world as we lived in. He still was obsessed by the war. His fear of responsibility, his dislike of having the control of others, his extreme individualism, made him feel that he of all men should not be a father.

The Long Loneliness

November Still: I am alone these days. Forster is in town all week, only coming out weekends and a few nights. I have finished the writing I was doing and feel at a loose end, thinking enviously of my friends going gaily about the city, about their work, with plenty of companionship.

The fact that I feel restless is a very good reason to stay down here and

content myself with my life as a sybaritic anchorite. For how can I be a true anchorite with such luxuries as a baby to look forward to, not to speak of the morning paper, groceries delivered at the door, a beach to walk on, and the water to feast my eyes on?

* * *

In spite of my desire for a sociable week in town, in spite of a desire to pick up and flee from my solitude, I take pleasure in thinking of the idiocy of the pleasures I would indulge in if I were there. Teas and dinners, the conversation or lack of it, dancing in a smoky crowded room when one might be walking on the beach—the dull restless cogitations which come after dissipating one's energies—these things strike me with renewed force every time I have spent days in the city. My virtuous resolutions to indulge in such pleasures no more are succeeded by a hideous depression when neither my newfound sense of religion, my family life, my work, nor my surroundings seem sufficient to console me. I think of death and am overwhelmed by the terror and the blackness of both life and death. And I long for a church near at hand where I can go and lift up my soul.

When I am feeling these things I cannot write them, and while I am writing them I write almost self-consciously, wondering if I am not exaggerating, but the mood which possessed me yesterday was real enough and during the evening I read desperately, trying to rescue myself from the wall of silence which seemed to close me in.

But this makes me realize that often talk is an escape from doing anything. We chatter on and on to cover our feelings and to hide from ourselves and others our own futility.

Of course, conversation is often spirited and uplifts me as some books do. It helps me to glimpse the meaning in things and jolts me out of the rut in which I have been ambling along. I am spurred on to the pursuit of knowledge by a renewed love of knowledge. And yet the trouble with these conversations is that often they are not spontaneous. Some of my liberal friends, for instance, have gatherings, Sunday afternoons or Thursday nights, and the little crowd which comes feels itself a group and the conversation often seems pompous and self-congratulatory.

This exaltation of the articulate obscures the fact that there are millions of people in this world who feel and in some way carry on courageously even though they cannot talk or reason brilliantly. This very talk may obscure everything that we know nothing of now, and who knows but that silence may lead us to it.

December: It is a sunshiny, hazy day and the boats on the bay look ghost-like and unreal. The morning sun makes each blade of grass, each dry twig, stand out and the grasses in the field next to the house do not stir. There are only the starlings to break the silence and occasionally the far-off whistle of the train. Even the waves make no sound upon the beach, for there is an offshore wind.

It was pleasant rowing about in the calm bay with Forster. The oyster boats were all out, and far on the horizon, off Sandy Hook, there was a four-masted vessel. I had the curious delusion that several huge holes had been stove in her side, through which you could see the blue sky. The other vessels seemed sailing in the air, quite indifferent to the horizon on which they should properly have been resting. Forster tried to explain to me scientific facts about mirages and atmospheric conditions, and, on the other hand, I pointed out to him how our senses can lie to us.

But it is impossible to talk to him about religion or faith. A wall immediately separates us. The very love of nature and study of her secrets which is bringing me to faith, separates him from religion.

From Union Square to Rome

II

On Wednesday I received my white ticket, which entitled me to a baby at Bellevue. So far I had been using a red one, which admitted me to the clinic each week for a cursory examination. The nurse in charge seemed very reluctant about giving out the white one. She handed it to me, saying doubtfully, "You'll probably be late. They're all being late just now. And I gave them their tickets and just because they have them they run into the hospital at all times of the night and day, thinking their time is come, and find out they were wrong."

The clinic doctors acted very much disgusted, saying, "What in the world's the matter with you women? The wards are empty." And only a week before they were saying, "Stall off this baby of yours, can't you? The beds are all taken and even the corridors are crowded."

The girl who sat next to me at the clinic that day was late the week before and I was astonished and discouraged to see her still there. She was a pretty, brown-eyed girl with sweet, full lips and a patient expression. She

was only about eighteen and it was her first baby. She said "ma'am," no matter what I said to her. She seemed to have no curiosity and made no attempt to talk to the women about her; just sat there with her hands folded in her lap, patient, waiting. She did not look very large, but she bore herself clumsily, childishly.

There was one Greek who was most debonair. She wore a turban and a huge, pink pearl necklace and earrings, a bright dress and flesh-colored stockings on still-slim legs. She made no attempt to huddle her coat around her as so many women do. She had to stand while waiting for the doctor, the place was so crowded, and she poised herself easily by the door, her head held high, her coat flung open, her full figure most graciously exposed. She rather flaunted herself, confident of her attractions. And because she was confident, she was most attractive.

When I got home that afternoon, thinking of her, I put on my ivory beads and powdered my nose. I could not walk lightly and freely, but it was easy to strut.

There was another woman who was late, a great, gay Irish wench who shouted raucously as she left the doctor's office, "The doctor sez they are tired of seeing me around and I don't blame them. I rushed over three times last week, thinking I was taken and I wasn't. They sez, 'The idea of your not knowing the pains when this is your third!' But I'm damned if I come in here again until they cart me in."

So, when I was philosophically preparing myself to hang around a month, waiting for my child to knock on the door, my pains started, twelve hours earlier than scheduled. I was in the bathtub reading a mystery novel by Agatha Christie when I felt the first pain and was thrilled, both by the novel and by the pain, and thought stubbornly to myself, "I must finish this book." And I did, before the next one struck fifteen minutes later.

"Carol!" I called. "The child will be born before tomorrow morning. I've had two pains."

"It's a false alarm," scoffed my cousin, but her knees began to tremble visibly because after all, according to all our figuring, I was due the next morning.

"Never mind. I'm going to the hospital to exchange my white ticket for Tamar Teresa"—for so I had euphoniously named her.

So Carol rushed out for a taxicab while I dressed myself haltingly, and a few minutes later we were crossing town in a Yellow, puffing on cigarettes and clutching each other as the taxi driver went over every bump in his anxiety for my welfare.

The driver breathed a sigh of relief as he left us at Bellevue, and so did

we. We sat for half an hour or so in the receiving room, my case evidently not demanding immediate attention, and watched with interest the reception of other patients. The doctor, greeting us affably, asked which of us was the maternity case, which so complimented me and amused Carol that our giggling tided us over any impatience we felt.

There was a colored woman with a tiny baby, born that morning, brought in on a stretcher. She kept sitting up, her child clutched to her bosom, yelling that she had an earache, and the doctor kept pushing her back. Carol, who suffers from the same complaint, said that she would rather have a baby than an earache, and I agreed with her.

Then there was a genial drunk, assisted in with difficulty by a cab driver and his fare, who kept insisting that he had been kicked by a large white horse. His injuries did not seem to be serious.

My turn came next, and as I was wheeled away in a chair by a pleasant old orderly with whiskey breath, Carol's attention was attracted and diverted from my ordeal by the reception of a drowned man, or one almost drowned, from whom they were trying to elicit information about his wife, whether he was living with her, their address, religion, occupation, and birthplace—information which the man was totally unable to give.

For the next hour I received all the attention Carol would have desired for me—attentions which I did not at all welcome. The nurse who ministered to me was a large, beautiful creature with marcelled hair and broad hips, which she flaunted about the small room with much grace. She was a flippant creature and talked of Douglas Fairbanks and the film she had seen that afternoon, while she wielded a long razor with abandon. . . .

Thinking of moving pictures, why didn't the hospital provide a moving picture for women having babies? And music! Surely things should be made as interesting as possible for women who are perpetuating the race. It was comforting to think of peasant women who take lunch hours to have their children in, and then put the kids under the haystack and go on working in the fields. Hellish civilization!

I had nothing at home to put the baby in, I thought suddenly. Except a bureau drawer. Carol said she would have a clothes basket. But I adore cradles. Too bad I had been unable to find one. A long time ago I saw an adorable one on the East Side in an old secondhand shop. They wanted thirty dollars, and besides, how did I know then I was going to have a baby? Still I wanted to buy it. If Sarah Bernhardt could carry a coffin around the country with her there is no reason why I couldn't carry a cradle around with me. It was a bright pink one—not painted pink, because I examined it carefully. Some kind of pink wood.

The pain penetrating my thoughts made me sick to my stomach. Sick *at* your stomach or sick *to* your stomach? I always used to say "sick to your stomach" but William [Forster] declares it is "sick at your stomach." Both sound very funny to me. But I'd say whatever William wanted me to. What difference did it make? But I have done so many things he wanted me to, I am tired of it. Doing without milk in my coffee, for instance, because he insists that milk spoils the taste of coffee. And using the same kind of toothpaste. Funny thing, being so intimate with a man that you feel you must use the same kind of toothpaste he does. To wake up and see his head on your pillow every morning. An awful thing to get used to anything. I mustn't get used to that baby. I don't see how I can.

Lightning! It shoots through your back, down your stomach, through your legs, and out at the end of your toes. Sometimes it takes longer to get out than others. You have to push it out then. I am not afraid of lightning now, but I used to be. I used to get up in bed and pray every time there was a thunderstorm. I was afraid to get up, but prayers didn't do any good unless you said them on your knees.

Hours passed. I thought it must be about four o'clock and found that it was two. Every five minutes the pains came, and in between I slept. As each pain began I groaned and cursed, "How long will this one last?" and then when it had swept over with the beautiful rhythm of the sea, I felt with satisfaction "it could be worse," and clutched at sleep again frantically.

Every now and then my large-hipped nurse came in to see how I was getting along. She was a sociable creature, though not so to me, and brought with her a flip young doctor and three other nurses to joke and laugh about hospital affairs. They disposed themselves on the other two beds, but my nurse sat on the foot of mine, pulling the entire bed askew with her weight. This spoiled my sleeping during the five-minute intervals, and, mindful of my grievance against her and the razor, I took advantage of the beginning of the next pain to kick her soundly in the behind. She got up with a jerk and obligingly took a seat on the next bed.

And so the night wore on. When I became bored and impatient with the steady restlessness of those waves of pain, I thought of all the other and more futile kinds of pain I would rather not have. Toothaches, ear-aches, and broken arms. I had had them all. And this is a much more satisfactory and accomplishing pain, I comforted myself.

And I thought, too, how much had been written about childbirth—no novel, it seems, is complete without at least one birth scene. I counted over the ones I had read that winter—Upton Sinclair's in *The Miracle of*

Love, Tolstoy's in *Anna Karenina*, Arnim's in *The Pastor's Wife*, Galsworthy's in *Beyond*, O'Neill's in *The Last Man*, Bennett's in *The Old Wives' Tale*, and so on.

All but one of these descriptions had been written by men, and, with the antagonism natural toward men at such a time, I resented their presumption.

"What do they know about it, the idiots," I thought. And it gave me pleasure to imagine one of them in the throes of childbirth. How they would groan and holler and rebel. And wouldn't they make everybody else miserable around them. And here I was, conducting a neat and tidy job, begun in a most businesslike manner, on the minute. But when would it end?

While I dozed and wondered and struggled, the last scene of my little drama began, much to the relief of the doctors and nurses, who were becoming impatient now that it was almost time for them to go off duty. The smirk of complacency was wiped from me. Where before there had been waves, there were now tidal waves. Earthquake and fire swept my body. My spirit was a battleground on which thousands were butchered in a most horrible manner. Through the rush and roar of the cataclysm which was all about me, I heard the murmur of the doctor and the answered murmur of the nurse at my head.

In a white blaze of thankfulness I knew that ether was forthcoming. I breathed deeply for it, mouth open and gasping like that of a baby starving for its mother's breast. Never have I known such frantic imperious desire for anything. And then the mask descended on my face and I gave myself to it, hurling myself into oblivion as quickly as possible. As I fell, fell, fell, very rhythmically, to the accompaniment of tom-toms, I heard, faint about the clamor in my ears, a peculiar squawk, I smiled as I floated dreamily and luxuriously on a sea without waves. I had handed in my white ticket and the next thing I would see would be the baby they would give me in exchange. It was the first time I had thought of the child in a long, long time.

* * *

Tamar Teresa's nose is twisted slightly to one side. She sleeps with the placidity of a Mona Lisa, so that you cannot see the amazing blue of her eyes, which are strangely blank and occasionally, ludicrously crossed. What little hair she has is auburn and her eyebrows are golden. Her complexion is a rich tan. Her ten fingers and toes are of satisfactory length and

slenderness and I reflect that she will be a dancer when she grows up, which future will relieve her of the necessity for learning reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Her long upper lip, which resembles that of an Irish policeman, may interfere with her beauty, but with such posy hands as she has already, nothing will interfere with her grace.

Just now I must say she is a lazy little hog, mouthing around my nice full breast and too lazy to tug for food. What do you want, little bird? That it should run into your mouth, I suppose. But no, you must work for your provender already.

She is only four days old but already she has the bad habit of feeling bright and desirous of play at four o'clock in the morning. Pretending that I am a bone and she is a puppy dog, she worries at me fussily, tossing her head and grunting. Of course, some mothers will tell you this is because she has air on her stomach and that I should hold her upright until a loud gulp indicates that she is ready to begin feeding again. But though I hold her up as required, I still think the child's play instinct is highly developed.

Other times she will pause a long time, her mouth relaxed, then look at me slyly, trying to tickle me with her tiny, red tongue. Occasionally she pretends to lose me and with a loud wail of protest grabs hold once more to start feeding furiously. It is fun to see her little jaw working and the hollow that appears in her baby throat as she swallows.

Sitting up in bed, I glance alternately at my beautiful flat stomach and out the window at tugboats and barges and the wide path of the early-morning sun on the East River. Whistles are blowing cheerily, and there are some men singing on the wharf below. The restless water is colored lavender and gold and the enchanting sky is a sentimental blue and pink. And gulls wheeling, warm gray and white against the magic of the water and the sky. Sparrows chirp on the windowsill, the baby sputters as she gets too big a mouthful, and pauses, then, a moment to look around her with satisfaction. Everybody is complacent, everybody is satisfied and everybody is happy.

The New Masses, June 1928

Our child was born in March at the end of a harsh winter. In December I had to come in from the country and take a little apartment in town. It was good to be there, close to friends, close to a church where I could

stop and pray. I read the *Imitation of Christ* a great deal. I knew that I was going to have my child baptized a Catholic, cost what it may. I knew that I was not going to have her floundering through many years as I had done, doubting and hesitating, undisciplined and amoral. I felt it was the greatest thing I could do for my child. For myself, I prayed for the gift of faith. I was sure, yet not sure. I postponed the day of decision.

A woman does not want to be alone at such a time. Even the most hardened, the most irreverent, is awed by the stupendous fact of creation. Becoming a Catholic would mean facing life alone, and I clung to family life. It was hard to contemplate giving up a mate in order that my child and I could become members of the Church. Forster would have nothing to do with religion or with me if I embraced it. So I waited.

Those last months of waiting I was too happy to know the unrest of indecision. The days were slow in passing, but week by week the time came nearer. I spent some time in writing, but in general I felt inactive, incapable of going to meetings, of seeing many people, of taking up the threads of my past life.

And then the little one was born, and with her birth the spring was upon us. My joy was so great that I sat up in the bed in the hospital and wrote an article for *The New Masses* about my child, wanting to share my joy with the world. I was glad to write it for a workers' magazine because it was a joy all women know, no matter what their grief at poverty, unemployment, and class war.

* * *

When Tamar Teresa—for that is what I named her—was six weeks old and I was still very weak, we went down to the country. It was April and though it was still cold, it was definitely spring.

Every morning while Teresa napped on the sunny porch, well swathed in soft woolen blankets, I went down to the beach and brought up driftwood, enough to last until next morning. . . . Sometimes in the afternoon I put her in her carriage and went out along the woods, watching, almost feeling the buds bursting through their warm coats. Song sparrows, woodpeckers, hawks, crows, robins, nuthatches, and of course laughing gulls made the air gay with their clamor. Starlings chattered all day in the branches of the old pine in front of the porch. We collected azalea buds, dogwood, sassafras, and apple tree branches to decorate the room. . . .

Supper was always early and the baby comfortably tucked away before it was dark. Then, tired with all the activities that so rejoiced and filled my days, I sat in the dusk in a stupor of contentment. . . .

Yet always, those deep moments of happiness gave way to a feeling of struggle, of a long silent fight to be gone through. There had been the physical struggle, the mortal combat almost, of giving birth to a child, and now there was coming the struggle for my own soul. I knew Teresa would be baptized, and I knew the rending it would cause in human relations around me. I was to be torn and agonized again and I was all for putting off the hard day.

Then, one afternoon, as I wheeled her in her little carriage along the road which led down to St. Joseph's Home, a former estate of Charles Schwab which had been given to the Sisters of Charity, I met a Sister who was on her way to visit a neighbor of mine.

That estate had been one of my stumbling blocks. I could never pass it without thinking of Schwab's career as head of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, of his work in breaking the Homestead strike, of how he refused to recognize unions of workers. I could not but feel that this was tainted money which the Sisters had accepted. It was money which belonged to the workers. . . .

But I was emboldened by a sense of compulsion to speak to the Sister who was hurrying by me, to ask her how to go about having a baby baptized. I had a warm feeling as I approached her, a feeling that whatever the errors of Charlie Schwab, Sister Aloysia had had no part in them, in her simplicity and poverty.

She was very matter-of-fact. She seemed to take things for granted, and was not surprised that a mother of a new baby would stop her in this casual fashion and ask her so stupendous a question. She knew of me by reputation—indeed all the neighborhood knew that we and our friends were either Communist or anarchist in sympathies. But those same dear Catholic neighbors who heard sermons excoriating “the fiendish and foul machinations of the Communists” were kindly people who came to use our telephone and bring us a pie now and then, who played with us on the beach and offered us lifts to the village in their cars. Sister Aloysia, too, had no fear, only a neighborly interest in us all.

She took me under her protection immediately. She did not make little of my difficulties, nor did she think for a minute that they were insurmountable. There was a hard row to hoe in front of us, was her attitude, but we could get through it. She would hang on to that long, formidable-looking rosary of hers, hang on to it like an anchor, and together we would ride out the gale of opposition and controversy. All we had to do was depend on prayer.

And as for practical details, we would just go ahead as though it were very simple. Did I have any Catholic relatives?

Yes, there was Cousin Grace. She was married and she and her husband could be reached, though I had not seen them or any relatives for years.

All right then, she herself, Sister Aloysia, would get in touch with the parish priest in Tottenville, a young man, very obliging. He had been coming down to offer up Mass at the Home and she could see him after breakfast the next morning.

Somehow or other, with the irregularities of her parents not being Catholic, Teresa's baptism did not take place until late June. Sister Aloysia in her anxiety that all should go well dropped in every day to see if I were persisting in my determination. She also was quite frank in her anxiety for the baby's welfare. One morning she came rushing up on the porch—“She's not dead yet?” she wanted to know, and then praised God that the baby was living and also struggling toward her baptism. Sister was sure that the powers of darkness were struggling hard for my little one—“He's greedy for souls,” she said, meaning the devil, and in this case I had more confidence and hope than she because I assured her that Christ must be even more so.

But Sister Aloysia did not neglect me in her anxiety for the baby. “You must be a Catholic yourself,” she kept telling me. She had no reticence. She speculated rather volubly at times on the various reasons why she thought I was holding back. She brought me pious literature to read, saccharine stories of the saints, back numbers of pious magazines.

But I was in a state of dull content—not in a state to be mentally stimulated. I was too happy with my child. What faith I had I held on to stubbornly. The need for patience emphasized in the writings of the saints consoled me on the slow road I was traveling. I would put all my affairs in the hands of God and wait.

Three times a week, Sister Aloysia came to give me a catechism lesson which I dutifully tried to learn. But she insisted that I recite word for word, with the repetition of the question that was in the book. If I had not learned my lesson, she rebuked me. “And you think you are intelligent!” she would say witheringly. “What is the definition of grace—actual grace and sanctifying grace? My fourth-grade pupils know more than you do.”

I hadn't a doubt but that they did. I struggled on day by day, learning without question. I made up my mind to accept what I did not understand, trusting light to come, as it sometimes did, in a blinding flash of exultation and realization.

She used to bring me vegetables from the garden of the Home, and I used to give her fish and clams. Once I gave her stamps and a dollar to send a present to a little niece, and she was touchingly grateful. It made me suddenly realize that in spite of Charlie Schwab and his estate, the Sisters lived in complete poverty, owning nothing, holding all things in common.

She never came into the house directly, but used to peer in the window or back door with a sepulchral whisper, "Is he here?" as though it were the devil himself she was inquiring after. And if Forster was there, he used to slam out of the other door to show his displeasure, greeting her through clenched teeth. I didn't blame him, nor did I blame her. She would probably have regarded any husband so, no matter how Catholic, how exemplary. She knew little of the world of men.

Finally the great day arrived and was a thing of the past. Teresa was baptized, she had become a member of the Mystical Body of Christ. I didn't know anything of the Mystical Body, or I might have felt disturbed at being separated from her.

But I clutched her close to me and all that summer as I nursed her and bent over that tiny round face at my breast, I was filled with a deep happiness that nothing could spoil. But the obstacles to my becoming a Catholic were there, shadows in the background of my life.

I had become convinced that I would become a Catholic, and yet I felt I was betraying the class to which I belonged, the workers, the poor of the world with whom Christ spent His life. . . .

Some few times I could get up to the village to Mass on Sunday, when I could leave the baby in trusted hands. But usually the gloom that descended on the household, the scarcely voiced opposition, kept me from Mass. There were some feast days when I could slip off in the middle of the week and go to the little chapel on the Sisters' grounds. There were "visits" I could make, unknown to others. I was committed, by the advice of a priest I had consulted, to the plan of waiting, trying to hold the family together. But I felt all along that when I took the irrevocable step it would mean that Teresa and I would be alone, and I did not want to be alone. I did not want to give up human love when it was dearest and tenderest.

During the month of August many of my friends, including my sister, went to Boston to picket in protest against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, which was drawing near. They were all arrested again and again.

Throughout the nation and the world, the papers featured the struggle for the lives of these two men. Radicals from all over the country gathered in Boston. It was an epic struggle, a tragedy. One felt a sense of impending

doom. These men were Catholics, inasmuch as they were Italians. Catholics by tradition, but they had rejected the Church.

While enjoying the fresh breeze, the feel of salt water against the flesh, the keen delight of living, the knowledge that these men were soon to pass from this physical earth, were soon to become dust, without consciousness, struck me like a physical blow. They were here now; in a few days they would be no more. They had become figures beloved by the workers. Their letters, the warm moving story of their lives, had been told. Everyone knew Dante, Sacco's young son. Everyone suffered with the young wife who clung with bitter passion to her husband. And Vanzetti, with his large view, his sense of peace at his fate, was even closer to us all.

The day they died, the papers had headlines as large as those which proclaimed the outbreak of war. All the nation mourned. All the nation, that is, that is made up of the poor, the worker, the trade unionist—those who felt most keenly the sense of solidarity—that very sense of solidarity which made me gradually understand the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ whereby we are the members one of another.

Forster was stricken over the tragedy. He had always been more an anarchist than anything else in his philosophy, and so was closer to these two men than to Communist friends. He did not eat for days. He sat around the house in a stupor of misery, sickened by the cruelty of life and of men. He had always taken refuge in nature as being more kindly, more beautiful and peaceful than the world of men. Now he could not even escape through nature, as he tried to escape so many problems in life.

During the time he was home he spent days and even nights out on the water fishing, so that for weeks I saw little of him. He stupefied himself in his passion for the water, sitting out on the bay in his boat. When he began to recover, he submerged himself in maritime biology, collecting, reading only scientific books, and paying no attention to what went on around him. Only the baby interested him. She was his delight. Which made it, of course, the harder to contemplate the cruel blow I was going to strike him when I became a Catholic.

From Union Square to Rome

We both suffered in body as well as in soul and mind. He would not talk about the faith and relapsed into complete silence if I tried to bring up the subject. The point of my bringing it up was that I could not become a Catholic and continue living with him, because he was averse to any ceremony before officials of either Church or State. He was an anarchist

and an atheist, and he did not intend to be a liar or a hypocrite. He was a creature of utter sincerity, and however illogical and bad-tempered about it all, I loved him. It was killing me to think of leaving him.

Fall nights we read a great deal. Sometimes he went out to dig bait if there was a low tide and the moon was up. He stayed out late on the pier fishing, and came in smelling of seaweed and salt air; getting into bed, cold with the chill November, he held me close to him in silence. I loved him in every way, as a wife, as a mother even. I loved him for all he knew and pitied him for all he didn't know. I loved him for the odds and ends I had to fish out of his sweater pockets and for the sand and shells he brought in with his fishing. I loved his lean cold body as he got into bed smelling of the sea, and I loved his integrity and stubborn pride.

It ended by my being ill the next summer. I became so oppressed I could not breathe and I awoke in the night choking. I was weak and listless and one doctor told me my trouble was probably thyroid. I went to the Cornell clinic for a metabolism test and they said my condition was a nervous one. By winter the tension had become so great that an explosion occurred and we separated again. When he returned, as he always had, I would not let him in the house; my heart was breaking with my own determination to make an end, once and for all, to the torture we were undergoing.

The next day I went to Tottenville alone, leaving Tamar with my sister, and there, with Sister Aloysia as my godparent, I too was baptized conditionally, since I had already been baptized in the Episcopal Church. I made my first confession right afterward, and looked forward the next morning to receiving Communion.

I had no particular joy in partaking of these three sacraments, Baptism, Penance, and Holy Eucharist. I proceeded about my own active participation in them grimly, coldly, making acts of faith, and certainly with no consolation whatsoever. One part of my mind stood at one side and kept saying, "What are you doing? Are you sure of yourself? What kind of an affectation is this? What act is this you are going through? Are you trying to induce emotion, induce faith, partake of an opiate, the opiate of the people?" I felt like a hypocrite if I got down on my knees, and shuddered at the thought of anyone seeing me.

At my first Communion I went up to the Communion rail at the Sanctus bell instead of at the "Domine, non sum dignus," and had to kneel there all alone through the Consecration, through the Pater Noster, through the Agnus Dei—and I had thought I knew the Mass so well! But I felt it fitting that I be humiliated by this ignorance, by this precipitance.

I speak of the misery of leaving one love. But there was another love

too, the life I had led in the radical movement. That very winter I was writing a series of articles, interviews with the workers, with the unemployed. I was working with the Anti-Imperialist League, a Communist affiliate, that was bringing aid and comfort to the enemy, General Sandino's forces in Nicaragua. I was just as much against capitalism and imperialism as ever, and here I was going over to the opposition, because of course the Church was lined up with property, with the wealthy, with the state, with capitalism, with all the forces of reaction. This I had been taught to think and this I still think to a great extent. . . . But I wanted to be poor, chaste, and obedient. I wanted to die in order to live, to put off the old man and put on Christ. I loved, in other words, and like all women in love, I wanted to be united in my love. Why should not Forster be jealous? Any man who did not participate in this love would, of course, realize my infidelity, my adultery. In the eyes of God, any turning toward creatures to the exclusion of Him is adultery, and so it is termed over and over again in Scripture.

I loved the Church for Christ made visible. Not for itself, because it was so often a scandal to me. Romano Guardini said that the Church is the Cross on which Christ was crucified; one could not separate Christ from His Cross, and one must live in a state of permanent dissatisfaction with the Church. . . .

Not long afterward a priest wanted me to write a story of my conversion, telling how the social teaching of the Church had led me to embrace Catholicism. But I knew nothing of the social teaching of the Church at that time. I had never heard of the encyclicals. I felt that the Church was the Church of the poor, that St. Patrick's had been built from the pennies of servant girls, that it cared for the emigrant, it established hospitals, orphanages, day nurseries, houses of the Good Shepherd, homes for the aged, but at the same time, I felt that it did not set its face against a social order which made so much charity in the present sense of the word necessary. I felt that charity was a word to choke over. Who wanted charity? And it was not just human pride, but a strong sense of man's dignity and worth and what was due to him in justice, that made me resent, rather than feel proud of, so mighty a sum total of Catholic institutions. . . .

It was an age-old battle, the war of the classes, that stirred in me when I thought of the Sacco-Vanzetti case in Boston. Where were the Catholic voices crying out for these men? How I longed to make a synthesis reconciling body and soul, this world and the next.

Where had been the priests to go out to such men as Francisco Ferrer in Spain, pursuing them as the Good Shepherd did His lost sheep, leaving

the ninety and nine of their good parishioners to seek out that which was lost, bind up that which was bruised? No wonder there was such a strong conflict going on in my mind and heart.

I never regretted for one minute the step which I had taken in becoming a Catholic, but I repeat that for a year there was little joy for me as the struggle continued.

* * *

A year later my Confirmation was a joyous affair. I went one Sunday afternoon on the feast of Pentecost to the Convent of the Holy Souls on Eighty-fifth Street near Third Avenue. There, in company with a large group of adults, to the sweet singing of the nuns, I received the sacrament of Confirmation. I took the name of Maria Teresa.

The Long Loneliness

Peasant of the Pavements

I

In the fall of 1932 I had been writing articles for *America* and *The Commonwealth*, and the first week in December I went to Washington, D.C., to cover the Hunger March of the Unemployed Councils and the Farmer's Convention. Both were Communist-led.

If the journalists and the police of Washington had been coached in their parts, they could not have staged a better drama, from the Communist standpoint, than they did in the events of that week.

Drama was what the Communist leaders of the march wanted, and drama, even melodrama, was what they got. They weren't presenting their petitions to Congress with any hope of immediately obtaining the cash bonuses and unemployment relief they demanded. (Nevertheless, five years later unemployment insurance became part of Social Security legislation.) They were presenting pictorially the plight of the workers of America, not only to the countless small towns and large cities through which they passed, not only to the Congress, but through the press to the entire world. And in addition they were demonstrating to the proletariat.

They were saying, "Come, submit yourselves to our discipline—place yourselves in our hands, you union workers, you unemployed, and we will show you how a scant 3,000 of you, unarmed, can terrorize authorities and make them submit to at least some of your demands!"

It does not matter that the victory won was only that of marching to the Capitol. To those unarmed marchers who for two days and two cold nights in December lived and slept on an asphalt highway with no water, no fires, no sanitary facilities, with the scantiest of food, surrounded by hysteria in the shape of machine guns and tear-gas bombs in the hands of a worn and fretted police force, egged on by a bunch of ghouls in the shape of newspaper men and photographers—to these marchers, the victory was a real one. They had achieved their purpose.

The papers did their best to make a riot out of it and failed. They merely presented to public view the Communist leaders who could carry through successfully a planned and disciplined demonstration. And the Washingtonians who lined the streets by the thousands to watch the procession laughed tolerantly at the songs and slogans, and said admiringly, "They sure have got gumption, standing up against the police that way."

* * *

I watched that ragged horde and thought to myself, "These are Christ's poor. He was one of them. He was a man like other men, and He chose His friends amongst the ordinary workers. These men feel they have been betrayed by Christianity. Men are not Christian today. If they were, this sight would not be possible. Far dearer in the sight of God perhaps are these hungry ragged ones, than all those smug, well-fed Christians who sit in their homes, cowering in fear of the Communist menace."

I felt that they were my people, that I was part of them. I had worked for them and with them in the past, and now I was a Catholic and so could not be a Communist. I could not join this united front of protest, and I wanted to.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was the next day, and I went out to the National Shrine and assisted at Solemn High Mass there. And the prayer that I offered up was that some way would be shown me, some way would be opened up for me to work for the poor and the oppressed.

And when I returned to New York, I found Peter Maurin—Peter the French peasant, whose spirit and ideas will dominate the rest of this book as they will dominate the rest of my life.

House of Hospitality

II

When I walked into my apartment, I found waiting for me a short, stocky man in his mid-fifties, as ragged and rugged as any of the marchers I had left. I like people to look their part, and if they are workers, to look like workers, and if they are peasants to look like peasants. I like to see the shape of a man's hands, the strength of his neck and shoulders.

This man introduced himself briefly: "I am Peter Maurin." He pronounced it Maw-rin, with the accent on the first syllable, deliberately anglicizing the word. "George Shuster, editor of *The Commonwealth*, told me to look you up. Also, a red-headed Irish Communist in Union Square told me to see you. He says we think alike."

How to describe Peter and the effect he had on me? Certainly I knew at once that he was French. It was difficult to become accustomed to his accent, which he kept although he had already been twenty years in America. He was intensely alive, on the alert, even when silent, engaged in reading or in thought. When he talked, the tilt of his head, his animated expression, the warm glow in his eyes, the gestures of his hands, his shoulders, his whole body, compelled your attention. I remember several things about that first meeting, characteristics of Peter that were to impress themselves more and more on me during the year that followed. He spoke in terms of ideas, rather than personalities, and he stressed the importance of theory. As people gathered around us in the movement which sprang up, this attribute stood out. While others were always analyzing, talking about one another, using one another's lives and attitudes to illustrate ideas, Peter was always impersonal, delicately scrupulous never to talk about others, never to make a derogatory remark.

"Lenin said, 'There can be no revolution without a theory of revolution,' so I am trying to give the theory of a green revolution," he said.

He delighted in the title of agitator. Though he spoke in terms of ideas, and men of ideas, he made these ideas dynamic by coloring them in his own way: "I knew a man who . . ." or "Péguy's mother mended chairs in Notre Dame Cathedral . . ."

The nearest he came to being critical with me was to tell me that my education lacked Catholic background. He began to give it to me by talking about the history of the Church, by going even further back into time and speaking of the prophets of Israel as well as the Fathers of the Church. His

friends were Jews, Protestants, agnostics, as well as Catholics, and he found a common ground with all in what he termed the Thomistic Doctrine of the Common Good. He ignored differences to stress concordance. He did not use such terms as "ecumenical," though he was not afraid of the unusual word (agronomic universities were part of his program), but he thought in terms of our common humanity, of our life here today. He stressed the need of building a new society within the shell of the old—that telling phrase from the preamble to the I.W.W. constitution, "a society in which it is easier for people to be good," he added with a touching simplicity, knowing that when people are good, they are happy.

He was a man of tremendous ambition, in spite of his simplicity, or perhaps because of it. He wanted to make a new synthesis, as St. Thomas had done in the Middle Ages, and he wanted to enlist the aid of a group of people in doing this. He was no more afraid of the non-Catholic approach to problems than St. Thomas was of the Aristotelian.

With all his knowledge, he was no isolated scholar. It was the state of the world which filled him with these vast desires. Man was placed here with talents, to play his part, and on every side he saw the children of this world wiser in their generation than the children of light. They built enormous industrial plants, bridges, pipelines, skyscrapers, with imagination and vision they made their blueprints, and with reckless and daredevil financing made them actual in steel and concrete. Wheels turned and engines throbbed and the great pulse of the mechanical and physical world beat strong and steady while men's pulses sickened and grew weaker and died. Man fed himself into the machine.

Peter rejoiced to see men do great things and dream great dreams. He wanted them to stretch out their arms to their brothers, because he knew that the surest way to find God, to find the good, was through one's brothers. Peter wanted this striving to result in a better physical life in which all men would be able to fulfill themselves, develop their capacities for love and worship, expressed in all the arts. He wanted them to be able to produce what was needed in the way of homes, food, clothing, so that there was enough of these necessities for everyone. A synthesis of "cult, culture, and cultivation," he called it, as he tried to give me the long view, the vision.

It was hard for me to understand what he meant, thinking as I always had in terms of cities and the immediate need of men for their weekly paycheck. Now I can see clearly what he was talking about, but I am faced with the problem of making others see it. I can well recognize the fact

that, people being as they are, Peter's program is impossible. But it would become actual, given a people changed in heart and mind, so that they would observe the new commandment of love, or desire to.

Peter made you feel a sense of his mission as soon as you met him. He did not begin by tearing down, or by painting so intense a picture of misery and injustice that you burned to change the world. Instead, he aroused in you a sense of your own capacities for work, for accomplishment. He made you feel that you and all men had great and generous hearts with which to love God. If you once recognized this fact in yourself you would expect and find it in others. "The art of human contacts," Peter called it happily. But it was seeing Christ in others, loving the Christ you saw in others. Greater than this, it was having faith in the Christ in others without being able to see Him. Blessed is he that believes without seeing.

Although Peter came to me with sheaves of writing in every pocket, which he either read aloud or pressed upon me to read and study, he had not begun to write till late in life. All his writing, even his letters to me, were in phrased sentences, broken up to look like free verse. He used this device to compel attention, to make for more reflective reading, but also because some of his writings had a swing, a rhythm like verse. He liked to consider himself a troubadour of Christ, singing solutions to the world's ills, insinuating them into men's ears with catchy phrases.

I had been confined in a bus for eight hours; I was anxious for quiet, for a cup of coffee. I was anxious to greet my child and Tessa and John [Dorothy's brother and sister-in-law]. In fact, had it not been for Tessa, with her unfailing hospitality, her ready attention to guests, I might not have met Peter at all. For my brother was a conventional American and Peter often gave the impression of being a dangerous and unbalanced radical when he began "indoctrinating" someone who was unprepared. I speak as the conventional American myself, in spite of years in the radical movement. Peter was the most persistent soul in the world, and he was looking for apostles to share his work. When he read the articles I had written in *America*, *The Commonweal*, and *The Sign*, he was convinced that I was the one who was to work with him. Before he knew me well, he went about comparing me to a Catherine of Siena who would move mountains and have influence on governments, temporal and spiritual. He was a man of enthusiasm and always saw great talents in people.

When he came back the next day, for we did not share ideas at length that first night, he began at once on what he called my education. "Indoctrination" was his word. He not only wished to give me a Catholic outline

of history—but he also wished to repeat over and over again his program of action: round-table discussions, houses of hospitality, and agronomic universities. We were to popularize this program for immediate needs, which in itself would be the seed for a long-range program, a green revolution, by publishing a paper for the man in the street.

Since I came from a newspaper family, with my two older brothers working on newspapers at that time, and my father still a writer though no longer an editor, I could see the need for such a paper as Peter described.

But how were we going to start it?

Peter did not pretend to be practical along these lines. "I enunciate the principles," he declared grandly.

"But where do we get the money?" I asked him, clinging to the "we," though he was making clear his role as theorist.

"In the history of the saints, capital was raised by prayer. God sends you what you need when you need it. You will be able to pay the printer. Just read the lives of the saints."

St. Francis de Sales scattered leaflets like any radical. St. John of God sold newspapers on the streets. We didn't have to do things on a big scale, Peter made it clear.

I had been reading the life of Rose Hawthorne not long before, how she started what has since become a chain of cancer hospitals in a four-room tenement apartment such as the one I was living in. Why not start a newspaper in the same way? I began to look on our kitchen as an editorial office, my brother as an assistant to write heads and to help with mechanical makeup. Tamar and I could go out to sell papers on the streets! . . .

Finding that I could have twenty-five hundred copies of an eight-page tabloid printed for twenty-five dollars by the Paulist Press, I decided to use two small checks I had just received for articles for the first printing bill, rather than for the rent or gas or electric. We would sell the paper, I decided, for a cent a copy, to make it so cheap that anyone could afford to buy.

Peter had his own ideas as to what was to be in that paper. When the first issue came out the following May Day with articles about labor, strikes, unemployment, factual accounts, columns, features, in addition to half a dozen of Peter's "Easy Essays," as John named them, he protested.

"Everybody's paper is nobody's paper," he said. And I realized that in his simplicity, in his lofty concept of his mission, he wanted nothing but his own essays to be printed, over and over, and broadcast throughout the

country. He knew that he had a message. His confidence looked like conceit and vanity to the unknowing. He had a message, and he was filled with the glow of it, night and day. He lived for the work he was called to do, and the days were not long enough for research in the library, for the round-table discussions which took place wherever he happened to be, whether in coffee shop, on street corners, public squares, streetcar or bus.

It was amazing how little we understood each other at first. But Peter was patient. He wanted to call the paper *The Catholic Radical*, but with my Communist background, I insisted on calling it *The Catholic Worker*. Peter said, "Man proposes, but woman disposes." It was always with humor, never with bitterness or malice, that we differed.

I did not fully realize why this was until much later, when I finally could pin him down to talking about himself. He was a Frenchman; I was an American. He was a man twenty years older than I and infinitely wiser. He was a man; I was a woman. We looked at things differently. He was a peasant; I was a city product. He knew the soil; I, the city. When he spoke of workers, he spoke of men who worked at agriculture, building, at tools and machines which were the extension of the hand of man. When I spoke of workers, I thought of factories, the machine, and man the proletariat and slum dweller, and so often the unemployed. . . .

Peter saw only the land movement as the cure for unemployment and irresponsibility, and the works of mercy as the work at hand, ignoring the immediate needs of the workers in the unions, their conflicts and demands. I comforted myself by saying, "Men are more single-minded. They are the pure of heart." But I continued to think in terms of unions and strikes as an immediate means of bettering the social order. I could not blind myself to the conflict between us, the conflict that would continue between one or another who came to join in the movement later. When Peter said, "Everybody's paper is nobody's paper," when he protested the coverage of strike news, or the introduction of the personal element into the work by feature story, he was envisaging a sheet carrying nothing but his own phrased writings, regrouped, rewritten principles to apply to whatever situation came up, local, federal, or world crisis. He had lived alone for so long, had for so long been a single apostle, that he did not realize how grim the struggle was going to be. . . .

When I was afterward accused of class-war tactics, I retorted with St. Augustine: "The bottle always smells of the liquor it once held." But I did not feel the criticism just.

Peter used to say when we covered strikes and joined picket lines,

"Strikes don't strike me." Yet he took the occasion to come out on the picket line to distribute leaflets upon which some single point was made. "To change the hearts and minds of men," he said. "To give them vision—the vision of a society where it is easier for men to be good."

The Long Loneliness

III

We loved him dearly, this Peter of ours, and revered him as a saint, but we neglected him, too. He asked nothing for himself, so he got nothing.

When we all lived together under one roof in the houses of hospitality, he seldom had a room of his own. Returning from trips around the country, he never knew whether there would be a bed for him. The younger editors had their own desks and were jealous of their privacy. But Peter not only had no place to lay his head but had no place for his books and papers—aside from his capacious pockets. He had no chair, no place at table, no corner that was particularly his. He was a pilgrim and a stranger on earth, using the things of this world as though he used them not, availing himself of only what he needed and discarding all excess baggage. I think of him walking down the street slowly, leisurely, deep in thought, his hands clasped behind him. He paid no attention to traffic lights; I suppose he put his faith in his guardian angel. . . .

Someone once described me in an interview as "authoritative." Later, listening to a tape recording of a talk I had given on the plight of agricultural workers, I had to admit that I did sound didactic. Since then, I have tried to be more gentle in my approach to others, so as not to make them feel that I am resentful of their comfort when I speak of the misery of the needy and the groaning of the poor. But if I *am* didactic it is because Peter Maurin was my teacher, because he gave me principles to live by and lessons to study, and because I am so convinced of the rightness of his proposals.

"How can you be so sure?" Mike Wallace once asked me in a television interview. He spoke with wonder rather than irritation, because he felt my confidence was rooted in religion. I told him that unless I felt sure I would not speak at all. If I were ever visited by doubts—either religious ones or doubts about my vocation in this movement—I would accept it as a temptation, as a great suffering that I must share with so much of the world today.

Even then, deep within, I would be sure; even though I said to myself, "I believe because I want to believe, I hope because I want to hope, I love because I want to love." These very desires would be regarded by God as He regarded those of Daniel, who was called a man of desires, and whom He rewarded.

Loaves and Fishes

DAY AFTER DAY