

A DOMINICAN NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

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THE Pasternak affair of last autumn tended to throw into obscurity the awards of the other Nobel Prizes for 1958. Normally, it is 'peace' rather than 'literature' which attracts the notice of the press and the other organs of publicity. But this time the roles were reversed, and it was 'literature' which offered a rich store of acceptable copy by providing a significant chapter in the development of something that really interests us more than peace, namely the 'cold war'. After all, one could hardly grudge the journalists their excitement that at long last the U.S.S.R. had dropped practically its first point in the 'world propaganda' competition with the West, even if maturer reflection could not but see this as only adding a deeper shade to the personal tragedy of Dr Zhivago's creator.

That Boris Pasternak, then, should eclipse *Père Pire* in the press as a whole is understandable enough. What is surprising is that the award of such a widely prized honour to a priest should have raised so little attention in our Catholic press. After all, even bears—or so the apocryphal story runs—can hit the headlines simply by eating nuns on the way to Mass. Yet, at the time of writing, only the briefest notice has been taken of this award, only the baldest details of *Père Pire's* life and work given.

To give an explanation of this silence would be easy enough. It would have to be in terms of ignorance; an ignorance, I hasten to add since my present intention is far from being a criticism of the Catholic press, which is shared by all of us, *Père Pire's* own Dominican brethren in England not excluded. What is more interesting and to the point is to see that the very nature of *Père Pire's* work made that ignorance practically inevitable. His is a work, after all, precisely for the ignored, for those whom we in Western Europe have conspired for some thirteen years or so now to thrust out of our sight and to forget. What more natural, then, that this work itself should be ignored and not allowed to impinge upon our attention? And yet, if we did but once allow our uneasy defences to drop and the wretchedness of the refugees who remain stranded in Europe to come home to our hearts, what

wonders might not follow? The history and achievement of Père Pire stand as a symbol of that hope.

For, as is made clear over and over again in the publications issued by his movement,¹ there was a time when Père Pire himself was as 'ignorant' as the most of us in this matter. A precise date, in fact, can be given both when the existence of the refugees impinged upon him, and for the beginning of his labours on their behalf. Until February 27th, 1949, Henri-Dominique Pire's life had been typical of that of many intelligent French-speaking Dominican friars of our days: a doctorate in theology in Rome, a course in social and political sciences at Louvain followed by ten years in the Studium of his own Province, Notre-Dame de Sarte at Huy in Belgium, teaching moral theology and sociology, a period interrupted by the War and an honourable career in the Resistance, and accompanied throughout its course by work in the field for family-groups, hungry children and young people.

It was, indeed, in the course of this last activity that Père Pire was launched out from an active and useful but comparatively hidden way of life shared by so many of his confrères into the venture which has brought him fame and a Nobel Prize. For on that fateful date in February 1949 there took place a meeting of a group of some thirty young people in Père Pire's charge at which an invited speaker was to give a talk on 'Refugees'. This speaker was a young American, Edward Squadrille, a U.N.R.R.A. worker, who simply described the work he was doing among refugees in the Austrian Tirol. The effect was electrifying. Père Pire describes it as follows:

'I myself had never heard of the Displaced Persons before, let alone know something of their lives. We were horrified to discover that there should be so many unfortunate people living in Austria and Germany, and by the time Edward Faust-Squadrille had finished speaking, everyone was eager to do something—without knowing what could be done. Unaware of what lay before me, I left a few weeks later for Austria. Meanwhile everyone present at the talk had asked the speaker for the name and address of a refugee, and each had written without knowing what would come of it. To our great astonishment the replies were in

¹ For all the quotations and most of the information which follows I am greatly indebted to the publications and texts supplied by A.D.P.

our hands a few days later. All of them were in similar vein: "Who gave you our address? Dare we believe that there exists on this earth someone really interested in us?" Thus was born, without our being aware of it, our system of god-parents (sponsors). The psychological traits of the refugees established themselves from the outset as compounded of a distrust of everyone and a need for love. . . . Everything went very quickly after that. By the end of 1949 some 1,000 persons in France and Belgium were in active correspondence with 1,000 East European refugee families living in Austria.'

Thus there came into being without anyone realizing it and without help the movement known as the Aid to Displaced Persons (A.D.P.). Père Pire marks out four stages in its development. At first, it was limited to the system of Sponsorships, the beginning of which we have just seen and which has continued to expand so that today there are some 15,000 such relationships between D.P. families and families or individuals in some twenty-four countries of the West, notably Belgium, France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Italy and Germany.

How does this Sponsorship scheme work? To begin with, it is necessary to consider who these D.P.s are. The end of the '39-'45 war left in West Germany, Austria and Italy some eight million refugees from behind the Iron Curtain. These were able to acquire for themselves, through the issue of an identity card by the United Nations, the status of 'citizens of the world'. Many of them have by now either returned to their homelands or emigrated to other countries. But in 1949 there still remained a 'hard core' of some 300,000 consisting of those ineligible for emigration: the aged, the sick (especially the tubercular), the disabled, etc. According to Père Pire, these lie stranded between two curtains, the Iron Curtain and the 'Curtain of Western Egoism'. Citizens of the world, living in cramped army encampments, they are shut away both from their old homelands and from a Europe that does not want them.

From this it is easy to see that the primary aim of Sponsorship is to make the refugees feel that someone does care for them. 'Dare we believe that there exists on this earth someone really interested in us?' The formula, indeed, for the Sponsor is: 'a little time, packages, money and much love'. This love and its expres-

sion the Sponsor must make as constructive as possible. Père Pire gives a few examples:

'A Sponsor pays for a typewriter for a widow, a mother with young children, who is in this way given the chance of doing a little work at home. Another pays for hospital treatment for a sick person, or pays for a bicycle for a worker who has to walk a long way to work. Another ensures a final year of study for a student of music who unfortunately is ineligible for a grant—the world of refugees, like ours, has its categories. . . .'

After a year's work along these lines the A.D.P. blossomed forth into its second stage, the Homes for Aged Refugees. The first of these was opened at Huy on September 2nd, 1950, to be followed by three others, also in Belgium. These are permitted to exist only on condition that the entire upkeep and care of the old people is the responsibility of the A.D.P.: it is expressly forbidden to ask for help from the central or local governments, from social insurance or public assistance. The Homes mark the first step forward from the Sponsorship idea. Sponsorship was, and is, invaluable; but it leaves the refugee *in situ*. Some start must be made with getting him out of the camps and, to some extent at any rate, 'settled'. But where to begin? Père Pire decided to start with the old people. At first, he tells us, he dreamed of 'giving them back a fatherland'. Nine years' experience, however, has taught him that this was an impossible ideal. 'The only thing we have been able to give our aged friends is the opportunity of dreaming of their mother-country with minds that have been relieved of pressing problems.'

The success of this work for a special class naturally spurred the A.D.P. on to seek a means of settling refugees on a larger scale. The method adopted, marking the third stage in the Aid's development, is what is known as the European Village. The foundation stone of the first of these was laid at Aix-la-Chapelle in Germany on May 6th, 1956. Others followed in swift succession at Bregenz (Austria), Augsburg, Berchem-Ste-Agathe (Belgium); the foundation stone of the fifth, the 'Albert Schweitzer Village', was laid at Spiesen in the Saar on September 21st, 1958; while two more, one to be called the 'Anna Frank Village', are being actively planned at the moment.

Each of these villages consists of some twenty simple but permanent dwellings, for the most part individual, as if to stress

for the families that occupy them that here at last, after so many years of communal barrack-room life, they have a home which they can call their very own. The villages themselves, however, do not stand in isolation as self-contained communities. On the contrary, they are sited contiguous with population-centres where the refugees can find work suited to their capabilities—remember that the 'hard core' contains a large proportion of sick, especially T.B. sufferers, and disabled. Work, indeed, is one of the main principles of the European Village scheme. For too many years the refugees have been lying idle in the camps enslaved to a régime of the gift-parcel. Coming to a Village means that they must learn once more the austere joy of earning one's own daily bread.

Clearly the planting of the Villages is no easy task. Difficulties arise on all sides. There is the initial opposition and distrust of their new neighbours on the part of the native inhabitants of the surroundings—somewhat comparable this with the bad feeling that sometimes arises in England against foreign workers. On occasion, this has been quite considerable, and it is a measure of Père Pire's determination and tact that it has usually been dispersed in so short a time. There is also the difficulty experienced by the refugees themselves when they first enter on this new way of life:

'After the selection has been completed, the refugees show up. They are then facing a difficult time: they have to reconstruct their lives. For if we do this for them, then there will be no change from their life in the camps; the same spirit will preside over all their action—or rather, inaction. . . . The refugees have to dive in and try to swim. We do no swimming, but stay on the bank, encouraging them, advising them, assisting them in all sorts of ways. Obviously the first year is a very difficult one. Their bodily, mental and spiritual powers have all become to some extent atrophied through disuse: a fresh start has to be made. . . . Above all they must realize that they have to make a living by the sweat of their brows: this is the law of normal life. They must forget the life of the camps, the dependence on gifts distributed by various national and confessional organizations, for this induced in them the mentality of the beggar. . . .'

In a word, the European Villages are, as Père Pire says, an attempt at complete human reintegration. The refugees are being helped to help themselves and through this to recover self-confidence. In the Villages they retain their own cultural traditions

but at the same time by their work they are being absorbed into the economic and social life of the Western Europe which is now their home. They are no longer an outcast group, but a minority honourably included in the life of the countries where they live.

And perhaps this experiment in human reintegration goes further still, and applies not only to the refugees but also to the Europe which is invited to give them a home. Père Pire when surveying the course of his work in A.D.P. sometimes adds to the three stages of Sponsorship, the Homes for the Aged and the European Villages, a fourth which he calls a crusade for a 'Europe of the Heart'. This would seem to be not a distinct new concrete form of help for the refugee, but rather a new spirit to be mobilized in favour of all such help. And this spirit is something which must be created, not this time in the refugees, but in us Europeans ourselves. It is *we* too who need human reintegration. We are fond nowadays of thinking in terms of Europe: we attach the label freely to all sorts of meetings and congresses; we have institutions which presuppose a unity already acquired. 'Everything', says Père Pire, 'is dressed in "Europe" sauce.' But in reality all this represents an aspiration only. The unity will only become real when all that divides us disappears, when the barriers of prejudice, distrust and suspicion are broken down, and when at last we really put our hearts into some common task in a spirit of completely disinterested love. The existence of the 'hard core' offers us Europeans the opportunity of just such a common and truly human task.

It is these deeper possibilities which make Père Pire's work so significant, so much a work of peace. Others besides himself and his helpers have laboured and are labouring for the refugee cause. But only he has done that important thing: caught the imagination as a preliminary to capturing the heart. This fame which has brought him—and not these others—the Nobel Prize may be no more than a happy accident; but it is precisely as a happy accident that the Prize itself will be most valued by him and those others who genuinely share his charity and ideals: its award draws attention to the thing to be done and enables more imaginations to be caught, more hearts to be captured.

In the unforgettable last scene of Pasternak's great novel, Gordon and Dudorov sit quietly on a summer evening talking

of their dead friend, Zhivago; and as they sit it seemed to them 'that on that very evening the future had become almost tangible in the streets below, and that they had themselves entered that future and would, from now on, be part of it. They felt a peaceful joy for this holy city and for the whole land. . . .' How legitimate a dream or anticipation of the future this might be in the context of Moscow in 1948 is not really our concern. It is more to the point for us to consider how far the achievements of men and women like Père Pire may not also be an anticipation, and to ask ourselves what we are doing to co-operate in bringing about that possible future of peaceful joy for Europe and the whole world which these achievements forecast.

IN MEMORY OF BERNARD KELLY

Like Dante's a memory of God
Seemed to me your mind's music; though
Withdrawn, unheard in the clamour; its beauty
Bound by the London streets. By humility
The power of this poet was imprisoned. O Word,
Re-maker of man, may this stammerer
Speak now, the seed unfold at last,
And love find all its words.

K.F.