

Don Senders

- "An Over The Shoulder Glance"



The worker patients are shoveling snow today, just as they were when first we came to Brattleboro. But now we know many of these men - they have a smile or a word for us as we pass them in their work. A year of living has passed.

It has been a year of real experience for some of us. We came to serve; we expected to grow in the process. I think we have done both.

One would like, in glancing back, to see clear evidence of men whose condition he has helped. Since this is often impossible because ours is and must be a cooperative effort, one can gain gratification from smiles, from chance remarks of appreciation, from developing friendships. One comes to know the satisfaction of even the simplest job well done. One comes to know the warming happiness of service. One can be sure that insofar as his job has been done he has been of service. We have not always been able to do all that we would like to do; it is more important that we have not done all that we could do. The future holds not only new opportunity, but also the possibility of taking fuller advantage of opportunity than perhaps we have in the days past.

One is aware of the inner response to the stimuli for growth on every hand. One sees deliberate violence, notes results, examines his reaction. One is faced with unreasoned violence and is forced to examine his Christian pacifism, the practicability of his beliefs, their implications, their best application. One feels stronger for it. For a time one

is in daily contact with extreme depression, would like to help men who see no end or purpose in life, men overwhelmed by their own situation. One goes to his own faith, sees it cast in a new light, inevitably grows in understanding as he seeks to lend encouragement. Perhaps one cannot work with patients at all, but must concern himself with certain mechanical tasks necessary for their comfort or well-being. Familiarity often makes these tasks seem monotonous drudgery, but imagination sees them as very real service. "Work and Contemplation" becomes something more than the "nauseous" catch-phrase of our song, and even if these tasks seem relatively unimportant, thought suggests that perhaps their disciplining is a valuable and necessary thing. Constant problems of living together, in the group as on the job, keep one seeking for proper adjustments, for attitudes and methods which make for peace in immediate human affairs.

One still knows irritation, discontent, long days of dullness - but having known happier days of vision, days when his life was seen full view and in full perspective, he wonders if the fault lies not largely within himself. For living here seems sometimes to be an exciting thing, not a series of annoying problems, of situations we wish were different, but of opportunities, of stimuli. The crowding horizons of a limited situation move slowly wide and distant. One turns his glance again forward and looks with real anticipation toward the days ahead.