

House Sounder, Paper Smaller, Line The Same

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Summary: In the midst of house renovation the bread line continues. Says those who oppose helping the destitute have an "atheistic attitude." Appeals for money and describes their "Little Italy" neighborhood. (DDLW #324).

Day After Day

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

The dining room and kitchen are being enlarged, and the upper floors made into dormitories so there will no longer be four rooms on a floor. There will be less privacy than ever. It is either one kind of poverty or another.

Bread Line

So far we have been able to keep up the coffee line in the front and pay the cooperative which demands cash, of course, being a true cooperative. Last year they borrowed the money themselves to keep us going. But their one rich friend has moved away, away from the neighborhood and away from the movement too. So they are flat and so are we.

Every morning still, hundreds of men, sometimes two hundred and sometimes as many as five hundred, come to us to be fed. They are the lame, the halt, the blind. Some are the unemployed, and some are the unemployable. From all over, men drift into New York for work or for food and while employment is picking up to some extent (aside from the tens of thousands of WPA workers being fired). New York will always have her street of forgotten men. Too often the attitude is “You can’t do anything with them, so why feed them?” Which is an atheist attitude, since we must see Christ in each man who comes to us. Remember Lazarus who sat at the gate, nursing his sores! The modern social worker would wonder why he didn’t go to the clinic to get fixed up and rehabilitated, but our Lord only pointed the moral that the rich man at whose gate he sat did not feed him.

These men are God’s creatures and we must feed them unquestioningly, with warmth and with hospitality. We cut down our paper this month to four pages because we cannot pay the printing bill, but people are more important than papers.

From Your Abundance

All those of our readers who can do so are on a vacation. They are visiting friends and relatives. Some of them even have enough money to go away to the country or the seashore or even to Europe, and God love them! We don’t begrudge them the joy of it. And we know that they don’t mind us reminding them of their brothers in Christ whose breakfasts must go on. We’ve got to keep buying bread and cheese and apple butter and coffee and sugar and milk. Seventy-five gallons of coffee a day is the estimate of some of the men who are keeping the work going in the morning. One of our best men has just gotten a job at \$25 a week and that is being turned in to the common fund for the bread line. Everybody who comes in leaves a little, whether it’s fifty cents or a dollar and even, though rarely now, a five-dollar bill. One of our good readers said in a letter, “We’re always glad to get an appeal to help the work along,” which was a cheering thought. We hope the rest of our readers feel the same way. We don’t mind being the unfortunate friend our Lord spoke about in the Gospel.

Praise God for the farm which is supplying us with all the potatoes, beets, carrots and cabbage which we can eat. We’ve begun the summer fast and are now doing without meat and its been long since the Mott Street house has seen butter. But we’ve got plenty of vegetables—it’s the coffee line I’m appealing for. We can’t raise coffee, sugar, canned milk, bread or the spread to put on it. So please help.

Little Italy

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

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

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

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

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