

News from Town and Country

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Homey descriptions of life on Mott Street: Christmas gifts received, their needs, a priest who joined the bread line and a wild new year's eve. At the farm, an ice storm creates some adventure and with January comes the peak of winter. Asks prayers for the new year. (DDLW #330).

We thank all our readers and friends for their help in the past month,—for the continued support of the coffee line in the morning, for the Christmas presents which ranged from canned goods to scarves, plum cake, a bottle of wine from a seaman brought straight from Italy, many Christmas cards, some of which we are framing and some of which we are giving to nuns who make things with them, and some of which go to the Giogas children who vacation with us every year. We thank them, all our generous friends, and pray God to bless them all. May the Holy Family hold them close during the coming year.

We beg those correspondents who have not received replies to their letters to excuse the delay which was caused not only by the happiness of the Christmas season, but by the grief of illnesses and death in our midst. There are several sick among us now so that we have fixed up one room as an infirmary. Old John (there are so many Johns around we thus designate this one sea captain with us) is resting in bed right now with asthma which has been pretty bad. We need a rug for the floor and a floor lamp and a low table for the bedside, but some kind friend will supply them during the month we know. Also we need another oil stove and shades for the windows. So much money goes for food it is hard to spend it for other things especially since some of our readers have these things put away in their attic and are happy to contribute them.

The Line

By now the line is stretching sometimes all around the corner and down to Mulberry Street, along the two blocks long. A lot of the men are without sweaters and overcoats. Twice this month priests joined the line, one a younger man from Duluth now studying at the Catholic University, and the other a Jesuit from Brooklyn. The Jesuit's story was an interesting one. He was once in the Navy and when he was ashore in the Island of Malta he suddenly had a great light. He realized that God meant everything and that nothing else mattered. When he got back to New York he got a shore job nights and started going to Francis Xavier High School at the age of twenty-six. While there he decided to be a Jesuit. He had been to see us before to talk about the Catholic theatre and wanted to see our line in the morning. So on this occasion he came over right after his five-thirty Mass and joined the line. He had had no breakfast, and his coat and muffler hid him. He stood there, he said, for forty-five minutes before

he reached the warmth and shelter of the store and the comforting coffee. We didn't even recognize him when serving him.

On another occasion he stayed to supper, and when he asked in general what he could do to help us, Kate Smith said she wanted a crib for the front store window and Beatrice said she wanted a carpet for her bedroom floor. So now Kate has the crib and Beatrice, whose room I share, has a bright green carpet which formerly graced a sacristy.

New Year's Eve

Celebration around Mott Street is a barbaric affair. Your life is not safe on the street. Last year at this time we were coming home from the strike headquarters of the seamen over on the west side and just got in the door when the clock struck twelve. Immediately the furies were unleashed. From every window milk bottles, electric light bulbs, bags of ashes and garbage were hurled into the street with wild cries intermingling with the crash of broken glass. It sounded like a revolutionary skirmish, the housewives taking part. Police on their beats took refuge in doorways. No one dared venture out for an hour. I thought of the freedom and disorder which are America and I thought too of bread and circuses. Let the people vent themselves in these senseless ways so that their energies may not be spent on more serious revolt.

The Country

This year Teresa and Beatrice and I went down to the farm for New Year's and it was a quiet night of nine hours sleep, an awakening in a stone cold house, and the delightful smell of wood fires being kindled. Getting to Mass was perilous with the roads and windshield encrusted with ice. Sunday it was impossible and we stayed home. You could not set foot out of doors that day at all. The lower farm did not venture to the upper farm, but Bill Evans sharpened himself a stick and like an Alpine climber made his way down the icy hill. John, he said, had put on a fine act the night before. Coming down from the chicken coop with a pail of eggs in one hand and a lantern in the other, he slid and fell and coasted on the base of his spine all the way down to the kitchen door. It was the house which stopped him. Otherwise he would have gone on down the hill. He balanced himself perfectly and didn't break an egg.

The hero of the exploit himself coasted down to our farmhouse later in the day with a fine rooster for lunch which we roasted in the oven with a good sage dressing. We rewarded him with hot chocolate for which he has a weakness.

The rooster we should have eaten but didn't is a pugnacious creature who attacks all who pass. Getting into the truck the other day I felt a tug at my coat and as I turned the game cock leaped off his feet, feathers all ruffled, and struck at me.

He has Professor Lavallo intimidated and he puts on boxing matches with young Arthur, nine years old, winter resident at the farm.

This month the farm manager is sick with a cold but the rest of the farm thrives. The horse Jim stands glossy and warm with his heavy winter coat, and gets restive at his inactivity during these icy days. He likes to snake down logs from the woods, John says. The cows too are captive, and the goat, expecting kids, smiles pleasantly in her stall, her beard wagging amiably when you go to her with an ear of corn or a bit of salt. Only the chickens are free. When the door of the coop is opened, they skid down the yard, their feathers ruffled, cackling wildly. It is a mirthful sight.

January

January we think of as a bright snowy month, with the sunny promise that the peak of winter has been reached. When we slide off into February with its foggy mild days, we feel we are on the way to spring. And as for March,—we shall start planting radishes then, snow or no snow. We have reached the peak of the winter and we are facing another year. We ask our readers to pray for us that it be a good year, good with either the successes or failures that await us, and that if we fall into mistakes we will not persist in them. It is the will of God that we all want, and we beg him to show us it.