

Views and News

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Summary: Contrasts ugliness (a street fight) and beauty (a recitation of the psalms at the house by a friend). Mentions visitors, a birth, a death, and a day of recollection. (DDLW #370).

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On my way to the printers this morning I thought of the monk in the desert who measured the distances by decades of the rosary. We are four decades from the pressroom down on Pearl street. You can walk down Mott, across Canal, down through Chinatown, past Chatham Square, along the Bowery, which has now become Park Row, and down Pearl street a few doors to the printer.

Chatham Square is a rough spot, day or night. A few weeks ago some of us witnessed the beginning of what looked like an ugly fight. A white man smashed a bottle on the edge of an ash can and started to go for a Negro with this crude and deadly weapon. I was afraid I was going to have to be peacemaker for a moment, but the colored man escaped. There were no police in sight.

I thought how John Griffen once pointed out that men who were wolves in the Bowery were as lambs in the CW houses. Given halfway decent surroundings and a sense of community and men can begin to see Christ in each other instead of the devil.

Beauty on Mott St.

Ugliness and beauty. Last Wednesday night Margaret Gage, an old friend of the work, came to give us a dramatic interpretation of the psalms. She pointed out that one is used to hearing them chanted and sung but not recited as religious poetry. She recited three series, groups of psalms composed by David as a shepherd, as king, and as a man of prayer. The store was packed and the kitchen behind the store was crowded too, with the men from the kitchen who had come down late.

Comments the next day were interesting. One boy said, "She is a great actress." The dishwasher said, "Nothing artificial, it was real!" The cook "Makes you feel as though you knew David." A seaman, "You never know what you are going to get at the CW, but it was great stuff." Casual laborer, "I needed that." Bookkeeper, "Think I'll read the Bible."

But to all the fifty or so who heard her, it was beauty, down there next to the Bowery, on Mott street, in a crowded, hot, smelly little store, filled with the worker-scholar, lame, halt and blind that makes up the CW. A Bishop Next === Bishop McGrath of Newfoundland, lately of China, is speaking next Wednesday. He has been down several times and participated in discussions, so we feel as though we knew him already. He said he had heard so much of us in China that he had to look us up here.

And speaking of notables our good friend Don Luigi Sturzo has been in town for the last month and we were in touch with him several times. We did not wish to disclose his stopping place, exile as he is, and ill as he is. Besides, as former leader of the Popular Party of Italy, and lifelong opponent of Mussolini, he has enemies. Now he is in a warmer climate, and if any of our friends wish to write him we will gladly forward any letters.

Sowing Time

This has been a busy month with blessings and catastrophes of all kinds heaped upon us. There was a birth and a death. Old Mrs. Daley died the same day the baby was born. She had been our guest for the past six months and she was old and weary and ill. We buried her in Calvary and the requiem Mass was at Transfiguration Church. There were troubles in the way of court cases—the trouble in Baltimore (see Jon’s letter on the letter page), and another court case when one of our friends got into difficulties. There were dozens of visitors (at once) many a time, and sometimes the little office in the rear house was so packed with seminarians on Christmas vacation that none could move and people literally burst in and out of the room.

Quiet Interval

There was a peaceful few days at the farm just before New Years and New Years eve. I spent a day of recollection with Sister Peter Claver at the Immaculate Conception Retreat House for Negroes at Gillette, New Jersey.

The purpose of this column is to tuck in news at the last minute and usually important news, too. And here is an important notice. Will those who paid for crib sets and did not receive them get in touch with us immediately. We will either refund the money or send on a set for next year. Some of the mail disappeared (these tragedies happen among us), and we have already heard of four sets not yet delivered. We are terribly sorry and ashamed and beg your forgiveness for our failures, and beg your prayers for this coming year.