more war. There is desperate suffering with no prospect of relief. But we would be contributing to the misery and desperation of the world if we failed to rejoice in the sun, the moon, and the stars, in the rivers which surround this island on which we live, in the cool breezes of the bay, in what food we have and in the benefactors God sends.

The heat wave which is a misery to some is to us a joy. We remember the bitter cold of the winter, and those who have to sleep under the stars nestle into the warmth of the hot pavements.

Our greatest misery is the poverty which gnaws at our vitals, an agony to the families in our midst. And the only thing we can do about it is to appeal to you, our readers, begging your help. We are stewards, and we probably manage very badly in trying to take care of all those who come, the desperate, the dispossessed. Like St. Peter, they say, "To whom else shall we go?" and they are our brothers in Christ. They are more than that; they are Christ, appealing to you.

So please help us to keep going. Help these suffering members of the sorrowing Body of Christ.

July–August 1940

Room for Christ

It is no use saying that we are born two thousand years too late to give room to Christ. Nor will those who live at the end of the world have been born too late. Christ is always with us, always asking for room in our hearts.

But now it is with the voice of our contemporaries that He speaks, with the eyes of store clerks, factory workers, and children that he gazes; with the hands of office workers, slum dwellers, and suburban housewives that He gives. It is with the feet of soldiers and tramps that He walks, and with the heart of anyone in need that He longs for shelter. And giving shelter or food to anyone who asks for it, or needs it, is giving it to Christ.

We can do now what those who knew Him in the days of His flesh did. I am sure that the shepherds did not adore and then go away to leave Mary and her Child in the stable, but somehow found them room, even though what they had to offer might have been primitive enough. All that the friends of Christ did for Him in His lifetime, we can do. Peter's mother-in-law hastened to cook a meal for Him, and if anything in the Gospels can be inferred, it surely is that she gave the very best she had, with no thought of extravagance. Matthew made a feast for Him, inviting the whole town, so that the house was in an uproar of enjoyment, and the strait-laced Pharisees—the good people—were scandalized.

The people of Samaria, despised and isolated, were overjoyed to give Him hospitality, and for days He walked and ate and slept among them. And the loveliest of all relationships in Christ's life, after His relationship with His Mother, is His friendship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and the continual hospitality He found with them. It is a staggering thought that there were once two sisters and a brother whom Jesus looked on almost as His family and where He found a second home, where Martha got on with her work, bustling around in her house-proud way, and Mary simply sat in silence with Him.

If we hadn't got Christ's own words for it, it would seem raving lunacy to believe that if I offer a bed and food and hospitality to some man or woman or child, I am replaying the part of Lazarus or Martha or Mary, and that my guest is Christ. There is nothing to show it, perhaps. There are no halos already glowing round their heads—at least none that human eyes can see. It is not likely that I shall be vouchsafed the vision of Elizabeth of Hungary, who put the leper in her bed and later, going to tend him, saw no longer the leper's stricken face, but the face of Christ. The part of a Peter Claver, who gave a stricken Negro his bed and slept on the floor at his side, is more likely to be ours. For Peter Claver never saw anything with his bodily eyes except the exhausted black faces of the Negroes; he had only faith in Christ's own words that these people were Christ. And when on one occasion the Negroes he had induced to help him ran from the room, panic-stricken before the disgusting sight of some sickness, he was astonished. "You mustn't go," he said, and you can still hear his surprise that anyone could forget such a truth: "You mustn't leave him—it is Christ."

Some time ago I saw the death notice of a sergeant-pilot who had been killed on active service. After the usual information, a message was added which, I imagine, is likely to be imitated. It said that anyone who had ever known the dead boy would always be sure of a welcome at his parents' home. So, even now that the war is over, the father and mother will go on taking in strangers for the simple reason that they will be reminded of their dead son by the friends he made.

That is rather like the custom that existed among the first generations of Christians, when faith was a bright fire that warmed more than those

who kept it burning. In every house then, a room was kept ready for any stranger who might ask for shelter; it was even called "the stranger's room"; and this not because these people, like the parents of the dead airman, thought they could trace something of someone they loved in the stranger who used it, not because the man or woman to whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because—plain and simple and stupendous fact—he *was* Christ.

It would be foolish to pretend that it is always easy to remember this. If everyone were holy and handsome, with "alter Christus" shining in neon lighting from them, it would be easy to see Christ in everyone. If Mary had appeared in Bethlehem clothed, as St. John says, with the sun, a crown of twelve stars on her head, and the moon under her feet, then people would have fought to make room for her. But that was not God's way for her, nor is it Christ's way for Himself, now when He is disguised under every type of humanity that treads the earth.

To see how far one realizes this, it is a good thing to ask honestly what you would do, or have done, when a beggar asked at your house for food. Would you—or did you—give it on an old cracked plate, thinking that was good enough? Do you think that Martha and Mary thought that the old and chipped dish was good enough for their guest?

In Christ's human life, there were always a few who made up for the neglect of the crowd. The shepherds did it; their hurrying to the crib atoned for the people who would flee from Christ. The wise men did it; their journey across the world made up for those who refused to stir one hand's breadth from the routine of their lives to go to Christ. Even the gifts the wise men brought have in themselves an obscure recompense and atonement for what would follow later in this Child's life. For they brought gold, the king's emblem, to make up for the crown of thorns that He would wear; they offered incense, the symbol of praise, to make up for the mockery and the spitting; they gave Him myrrh, to heal and soothe, and He was wounded from head to foot and no one bathed His wounds. The women at the foot of the Cross did it too, making up for the crowd who stood by and sneered.

We can do it too, exactly as they did. We are not born too late. We do it by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with.

All this can be proved, if proof is needed, by the doctrines of the Church. We can talk about Christ's Mystical Body, about the vine and the branches, about the Communion of Saints. But Christ Himself has proved it for us, and no one has to go further than that. For He said that a glass

46 47

of water given to a beggar was given to Him. He made heaven hinge on the way we act toward Him in His disguise of commonplace, frail, ordinary humanity.

Did you give Me clothes when I was hungry?
Did you give Me to drink when I was thirsty?
Did you give Me clothes when My own were all rags?
Did you come to see Me when I was sick, or in prison or in trouble?

And to those who say, aghast, that they never had a chance to do such a thing, that they lived two thousand years too late, He will say again what they had the chance of knowing all their lives, that if these things were done for the very least of His brethren they were done to Him.

For a total Christian, the goad of duty is not needed—always prodding one to perform this or that good deed. Is it not a duty to help Christ, it is a privilege. Is it likely that Martha and Mary sat back and considered that they had done all that was expected of them—is it likely that Peter's mother-in-law grudgingly served the chicken she had meant to keep till Sunday because she thought it was her "duty"? She did it gladly; she would have served ten chickens if she had had them.

If that is the way they gave hospitality to Christ, it is certain that that is the way it should still be given. Not for the sake of humanity. Not because it might be Christ who stays with us, comes to see us, takes up our time. Not because these people remind us of Christ, as those soldiers and airmen remind the parents of their son, but because they *are* Christ, asking us to find room for Him, exactly as He did at the first Christmas.

December 1945

Love Is the Measure

We confess to being fools and wish that we were more so. In the face of the approaching atom bomb test (and discussion of widespread radioactivity is giving people more and more of an excuse to get away from the philosophy of personalism and the doctrine of free will); in the face of an approaching maritime strike; in the face of bread shortages and housing shortages; in the face of the passing of the draft extension, teen-agers included, we face the situation that there is nothing we can do for people

except to love them. If the maritime strike goes on there will be no shipping of food or medicine or clothes to Europe or the Far East, so there is nothing to do again but to love. We continue in our fourteenth year of feeding our brothers and sisters, clothing them and sheltering them, and the more we do it, the more we realize that the most important thing is to love. There are several families with us, destitute families, destitute to an unbelievable extent, and there, too, is nothing to do but to love. What I mean is that there is no chance of rehabilitation, no chance, so far as we see, of changing them; certainly no chance of adjusting them to this abominable world about them—and who wants them adjusted, anyway?

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words—we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world.

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God—please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend.

June 1946

The Scandal of the Works of Mercy

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are: to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

The Corporal Works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.

When Peter Maurin talked about the necessity of practicing the Works of Mercy, he meant all of them. He envisioned Houses of Hospitality in poor parishes in every city of the country, where these precepts of Our Lord could be put into effect. He pointed out that we have turned to state responsibility through home relief, social legislation, and social security, that we no longer practice personal responsibility, but are repeating the words of the first murderer, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The Works of Mercy are a wonderful stimulus to our growth in faith as well as love. Our faith is taxed to the utmost and so grows through this strain put upon it. It is pruned again and again, and springs up bearing much fruit. For anyone starting to live literally the words of the Fathers of the Church—"The bread you retain belongs to the hungry, the dress you lock up is the property of the naked"; "What is superfluous for one's need is to be regarded as plunder if one retains it for one's self"—there is always a trial ahead. "Our faith, more precious than gold, must be tried as though by fire."

Here is a letter we received today: "I took a gentleman seemingly in need of spiritual and temporal guidance into my home on a Sunday afternoon. Let him have a nap on my bed, went through the want ads with him, made coffee and sandwiches for him, and when he left, I found my wallet had gone also."

I can only say that the saints would only bow their heads and not try to understand or judge. They received no thanks—well, then, God had to repay them. They forbore to judge, and it was as though they took off their cloak besides their coat to give away. This is expecting heroic charity, of course. But these things happen for our discouragement, for our testing. We are sowing the seed of love, and we are not living in the harvest time. We must love to the point of folly, and we are indeed fools, as Our Lord Himself was who died for such a one as this. We lay down our lives, too, when we have performed so painfully thankless an act, for our correspondent is poor in this world's goods. It is agony to go through such bitter experiences, because we all want to love, we desire with a great longing to love our fellows, and our hearts are often crushed at such rejections. But, as a Carmelite nun said to me last week, "It is the crushed heart which is the soft heart, the tender heart."

Such an experience is crueler than that of our young men in Baltimore who were arrested for running a disorderly house, i.e., our St. Anthony's House of Hospitality, and who spent a few nights in jail. Such an experience is even crueler than that which happened to one of our men here in New York who was attacked (for his pacifism) by a maniac with a knife. Actually to shed one's blood is a less bitter experience.

Well, our friend has suffered from his experience and it is part of the

so many doing from the Municipal Lodging House around the corner. And when such thoughts come on warm spring days when the children are playing in the park, and it is good to be out on the city streets, we know that we are only deceiving ourselves, for we are only dreaming of a form of luxury. What we want is the warm sun, and rest, and time to think and read, and freedom from the people who press in on us from early morning until late at night. No, it is not simple, this business of poverty.

"Precarity," or precariousness, is an essential element in true voluntary poverty, a saintly priest from Martinique has written us. "True poverty is rare," he writes. "Nowadays religious communities are good, I am sure, but they are mistaken about poverty. They accept, admit, poverty on principle, but everything must be good and strong, buildings must be fireproof. Precarity is everywhere rejected, and precarity is an essential element of poverty. This has been forgotten. Here in our monastery we want precarity in everything except the church. These last days our refectory was near collapsing. We have put several supplementary beams in place and thus it will last maybe two or three years more. Someday it will fall on our heads and that will be funny. Precarity enables us better to help the poor. When a community is always building, enlarging, and embellishing, there is nothing left over for the poor. We have no right to do so as long as there are slums and breadlines somewhere."

Over and over again in the history of the Church the saints have emphasized poverty. Every religious community, begun in poverty and incredible hardship, but with a joyful acceptance of hardship by the rank-and-file priests, brothers, monks, or nuns who gave their youth and energy to good works, soon began to "thrive." Property was extended until holdings and buildings accumulated; and although there was still individual poverty in the community, there was corporate wealth. It is hard to remain poor.

One way to keep poor is not to accept money which is the result of defrauding the poor. Here is a story of St. Ignatius of Sardinia, a Capuchin recently canonized. Ignatius used to go out from his monastery with a sack to beg from the people of the town, but he would never go to a merchant who had built up his fortune by defrauding the poor. Franchino, the rich man, fumed every time the saint passed his door. His concern, however, was not the loss of the opportunity to give alms, but fear of public opinion. He complained at the friary, whereupon the Father Guardian ordered St. Ignatius to beg from the merchant the next time he went out.

"Very well," said Ignatius obediently. "If you wish it, Father, I will go, but I would not have the Capuchins dine on the blood of the poor."

The merchant received Ignatius with great flattery and gave him generous alms, asking him to come again in the future. But hardly had Ignatius left the house with his sack on his shoulder when drops of blood began oozing from the sack. They trickled down on Franchino's doorstep and ran down through the street to the monastery. Everywhere Ignatius went, a trickle of blood followed him. When he arrived at the friary, he laid the sack at the Father Guardian's feet. "What is this?" gasped the Guardian. "This," St. Ignatius said, "is the blood of the poor."

This story appeared in the last column written by a great Catholic layman, a worker for social justice, F. P. Kenkel, editor of *Social Justice Review* in St. Louis (and always a friend of Peter Maurin's).

Mr. Kenkel's last comment was that the universal crisis in the world today was created by love of money. "The Far East and the Near East [and he might have said all Africa and Latin America also] together constitute a great sack from which blood is oozing. The flow will not stop as long as our interests in those people are dominated largely by financial and economic considerations."

Voluntary poverty, Peter Maurin would say, is the answer. Through voluntary poverty we will have the means to help our brothers. We cannot even see our brothers in need without first stripping ourselves. It is the only way we have of showing our love.

May 1952

Little by Little

Poverty is a strange and elusive thing. I have tried to write about it, its joys and its sorrows, for twenty years now; I could probably write about it for another twenty years without conveying what I feel about it as well as I would like. I condemn poverty and I advocate it; poverty is simple and complex at once; it is a social phenomenon and a personal matter. It is a paradox.

St. Francis was "the little poor man" and none was more joyful than he; yet Francis began with tears, with fear and trembling, hiding in a cave from his irate father. He had expropriated some of his father's goods (which he considered his rightful inheritance) in order to repair a church and rectory where he meant to live. It was only later that he came to love Lady Poverty. He took it little by little; it seemed to grow on him. Perhaps kissing the

leper was the great step that freed him not only from fastidiousness and a fear of disease but from attachment to worldly goods as well.

Sometimes it takes but one step. We would like to think so. And yet the older I get, the more I see that life is made up of many steps, and they are very small affairs, not giant strides. I have "kissed a leper," not once but twice—consciously—and I cannot say I am much the better for it.

The first time was early one morning on the steps of Precious Blood Church. A woman with cancer of the face was begging (beggars are allowed only in the slums) and when I gave her money (no sacrifice on my part but merely passing on alms which someone had given me) she tried to kiss my hand. The only thing I could do was kiss her dirty old face with the gaping hole in it where an eye and a nose had been. It sounds like a heroic deed but it was not. One gets used to ugliness so quickly. What we avert our eyes from one day is easily borne the next when we have learned a little more about love. Nurses know this, and so do mothers.

Another time I was refusing a bed to a drunken prostitute with a huge, toothless, rouged mouth, a nightmare of a mouth. She had been raising a disturbance in the house. I kept remembering how St. Therese said that when you had to refuse anyone anything, you could at least do it so that the person went away a bit happier. I had to deny her a bed but when that woman asked me to kiss her, I did, and it was a loathsome thing, the way she did it. It was scarcely a mark of normal human affection.

We suffer these things and they fade from memory. But daily, hourly, to give up our own possessions and especially to subordinate our own impulses and wishes to others—these are hard, hard things; and I don't think they ever get any easier.

You can strip yourself, you can be stripped, but still you will reach out like an octopus to seek your own comfort, your untroubled time, your ease, your refreshment. It may mean books or music—the gratification of the inner senses—or it may mean food and drink, coffee and cigarettes. The one kind of giving up is not easier than the other.

How does property fit in? people ask. It was Eric Gill who said that property is "proper" to man. And St. Thomas Aquinas said that a certain amount of goods is necessary to lead a good life. Recent popes have written at length that justice, rather than charity, should be sought for the worker. Unions are still fighting for better wages and hours, and it is a futile fight with the price of living going up steadily. They are fighting for partial gains and every strike means sacrifice to make them, and still the situation in the long run is not bettered. There may be talk of better standards of living, every worker with his car and owning his own home, but still this comfort

depends on a wage, a boss, a war. Our whole modern economy is based on preparations for war, and that is one of the great modern arguments for poverty. If the comfort one has gained has resulted in the deaths of thousands in Korea and other parts of the world, then that comfort will have to be atoned for. The argument now is that there is no civilian population, that all are involved in the war (misnamed "defense") effort. If you work in a textile mill making cloth or in a factory making dungarees or blankets, your work is still tied up with war. If you raise food or irrigate the land to raise food you may be feeding troops or liberating others to serve as troops. If you ride a bus you are paying taxes. Whatever you buy is taxed, so that you are, in effect, helping to support the state's preparations for war exactly to the extent of your attachment to worldly things of whatever kind.

The merchant counting his profit in pennies, the millionaire with his efficiency experts, have learned how to amass wealth. By following their example—and profiting by the war boom—there is no necessity for anyone to be poor nowadays. So they say.

But the fact remains that every House of Hospitality is full. There is a breadline outside our door, every day, twice a day, two or three hundred strong. Families write us pitifully for help. This is not poverty; this is destitution.

In front of me as I write is Fritz Eichenberg's picture of St. Vincent de Paul. He holds a chubby child in his arms and a thin pale child is clinging to him. Yes, the poor are always going to be with us—Our Lord told us that—and there will always be a need for our sharing, for stripping ourselves to help others. It will always be a lifetime job.

But I am sure that God did not intend that there be so many poor. The class structure is of *our* making and by *our* consent, not His, and we must do what we can to change it. So we are urging revolutionary change.

So many sins against the poor cry out to high heaven! One of the most deadly sins is to deprive the laborer of his hire. There is another: to instill in him paltry desires so compulsive that he is willing to sell his liberty and his honor to satisfy them. We are all guilty of concupiscence, but newspapers, radios, television, and battalions of advertising men (woe to that generation!) deliberately stimulate our desires, the satisfaction of which so often means the degradation of the family.

Because of these factors of modern life, the only way we can write about poverty is in terms of ourselves, our own personal responsibility. The message we have been given is the Cross.

We have seen the depths of the faithlessness and stubbornness of the

human soul—we are surrounded by sin and failure—and it is a mark of our faith in Christ that we continue to hope, to write, to appeal and beg for help for our work. And we pray also for an increase in the love of poverty, which goes with love of our brothers and sisters.

April 1953

The Pearl of Great Price

Jacques Maritain, speaking at a Catholic Worker meeting a few years ago, urged us to read the Gospels. Therese of Lisieux, the little saint of our day, carried it next to her heart. Even if we read only the Gospel for Sunday, several times, God sends us a special message for our need.

I thought of that a few Sundays ago as I read the parable about the lost sheep. Certainly the men around the Bowery are lost sheep. They are our brothers in Jesus; He died for each of them. What respect we should feel for them!

When we began the Catholic Worker, we first thought of it as a headquarters for the paper, a place for round-table discussions, for learning crafts, for studying ways of building up a new social order. But God has made it much more than all this. He has made it a place for the poor. They come early in the morning from their beds in cheap flophouses, from the benches in the park across the street, from the holes and corners of the city. They are the most destitute, the most abandoned.

It is easy for people to see Jesus in the children of the slums, and institutions and schools are built to help them. That is a vocation in itself. But these abandoned men are looked upon as hopeless. "No good will come of it." We are contributing to laziness. We are feeding people who won't work. These are the accusations made. God help us, we give them so little: bread and coffee in the morning, soup and bread at noon. Two scant meals.

We are a family of forty or fifty at the Catholic Worker. We keep emphasizing that. But we are also a House of Hospitality. So many come that it is impossible to give personal attention to each one; we can only give what we have, in the name of Jesus. Thank God for directing our vocation. We did not choose this work. He sent it to us. We will always, please God, be clambering around the rocks and briars, the barrenness, the fruitlessness of city life, in search of lost sheep.

We are told to put on Christ and we think of Him in His private life, His life of work, His public life, His teaching and His suffering life. But we do not think enough of His life as a little child, as a baby. His helplessness, His powerlessness. We have to be content to be in that state too. Not to be able to do anything, to accomplish anything.

One thing children certainly accomplish, and that is that they love and wonder at the people and the universe around them. They live in the midst of squalor and confusion and see it not. They see people at the moment and love them and admire them. They forgive and they go on loving. They may look on the most vicious person, and if he is at that moment good and kind and doing something which they can be interested in or admire, there they are, pouring out their hearts to him.

Oh yes, I can write with authority. I have my own little grandchildren with me right now, and they see only the beauty and the joy of the Catholic Worker and its activities. There is no criticism in their minds and hearts of others around them.

My daughter, too, was raised among the poor and most abandoned of human beings. She was only seven when the Catholic Worker started, and now she has a daughter of seven and four others besides.

It is good to be able to write with authority about the family, about poverty in our day—the involuntary poverty which all families must endure—about insecurity and unemployment. A few years ago, visiting my daughter, I was lying awake at 2 a.m., worrying because David had just lost his job and Tamar was about to have her fifth child. The former boss, who also owned the house they lived in, had come bearing oranges for the children and to tell them to move at once. What a strange juxtaposition of gestures! And I was torn between wrath and the necessity to train oneself in loving one's enemies, hating the sin but loving the sinner.

But then I thought, "Thank God I have this suffering of joblessness and insecurity and homelessness together with others. This day, for the sake of the family, there are so many compromises. But we must learn to accept this hardest of all sufferings, the suffering of those nearest and dearest to us. Thank God for this training in suffering." Accepting this made it easier at the time to go back to sleep. Since then there has been more of the same. Thank God for everything.

The fundamental means of the Catholic Worker are voluntary poverty and manual labor, a spirit of detachment from all things, a sense of the

primacy of the spiritual, which makes the rest easy. "His praise should be ever in our mouth."

The reason for our existence is to praise God, to love Him and serve Him, and we can do this only by loving our brothers. "All men are brothers." This is the great truth that makes us realize God. Great crimes, it is true, have been committed in the name of human brotherhood; that may serve to obscure the truth, but we must keep on saying it. We must keep on saying it because Love is the reason for our existence. It is what we all live for, whether we are the hanger-on in Times Square or the most pious member of a community. We are seeking what we think to be the good for us. If we don't know any better, often it is because radio, newspapers, press and pulpit have neglected so to inform us. We love what is presented to us to love, and God is not much presented. It is as hard to see Jesus in the respectable Christian today as in the man on the Bowery. And so "the masses have been lost to the Church."

We who live in this country cannot be as poor as those who go out to other countries. This is so rich a country that luxury has developed at the expense of necessities, and even the destitute partake of the luxury. We are the rich country of the world, like Dives at the feast. We must try hard, we must study to be poor like Lazarus at the gate, who was taken into Abraham's bosom. The Gospel doesn't tell us anything about Lazarus' virtues. He just sat there and let the dogs lick his sores. He would be classed by any social worker of today as a mental case. But again, poverty, and in this case destitution, like hospitality, is so esteemed by God, it is something to be sought after, worked for, the pearl of great price.

July–August 1953

The Insulted and the Injured

Last week, stopping to browse as I passed a secondhand bookstore on Fourth Avenue, I came across a battered old copy of Dostoevsky's *The Insulted and Injured,* a story which I had not read for many years. It was only twenty-five cents. I got it, and started reading it that very evening.

It is the story of a young author—it might be Dostoevsky himself—of the success of his first book, and of how he read it aloud to his foster father. The father said, "It's simply a little story, but it wrings your heart. What's happening all around you grows easier to understand and to remember, and you learn that the most downtrodden, humblest man is a man, too, and a brother." I thought as I read those words, "That is why *I* write."

And that is why I set down the story I am going to tell now, the story of Felicia.

* * *

She came into St. Joseph's House one afternoon to see if we had any extra clothes. She needed a coat for herself and some things for her children. We had known her for several years. Felicia is twenty-two, a tall Puerto Rican colored girl; she would be very pretty if it were not for two front teeth missing. Her husband is also twenty-two. She had to grow up in a hurry, for she had her first baby, out of wedlock, when she was fourteen. At the hospital she lied about her age, and when she came out, friends took her in with her baby. For the first two years she was able to keep him; then she lost her job and had to board him out. It was not until after she was married and had two more children that she was able to get him back.

By the time we met her, she'd been through a lot. Not long after she had the second baby, her husband lost a couple of fingers in the machine shop where he was working, and his mother agreed to take him in and the baby, too. But not Felicia. The woman had never wanted the marriage, and her house was already filled with eight people. Eight in four rooms. Felicia slept in the hall. That was when we first knew her. She was pregnant again, so she came to Peter Maurin Farm for a while. Then her husband got better and found another job, and they took a two-room apartment on Eldridge Street. It was hideous, scabrous. The plaster was falling off the walls; the toilets, located in the halls, were continually out of order, and the stairs smelled of rats and cats. The apartment she has now, she has told us, is much better. Her oldest child is seven. The others are one and a half and two and a half, and both are walking. You can see Felicia has some sense of dignity, now that she is a householder, with a place of her own.

* * *

She talked on and on the other afternoon, and finally stayed for supper. We had meatballs and spaghetti; afterward she got sick and could scarcely walk home. "Food doesn't seem to do me any good," she said. "I feel so heavy after eating I can't walk."

'But your husband's been looking after the children all afternoon," I tested. "You'd better be getting home."

t turned out that, on the contrary, the seven-year-old was the baby-er. "And her gas and electricity are turned off," somebody exclaimed. ıere's an oil stove in the house—that's all the heat they have."

\ghast, we packed her off home, sending someone with her to carry her kage of clothes. I had asked whether there was anything else she needed. : did not mention food or money or more clothes, but she looked tfully at the radio which was playing in the room. She told me diffidently t if ever an extra one came in she'd love to have it. "You gotta stay in house so much with the kids," she exclaimed. "I'd like to help my band. He gets only thirty-five a week as a messenger, and I wish I could rk. But there are no nurseries to take the babies—at least not until they three years old. Tony's all right—he goes to school."

Later in the week, someone gave us a radio, and one cold sunny morning brought it over to her. She and the children were keeping warm in the itor's flat. The janitress didn't mind two extra kids; she had twelve of own, eight of them still living at home. Since a lot of those were in ool, it wasn't too crowded with a half-dozen kids running through the :hen and living room. Every now and then one of them would fall asleep the floor or bed—there were beds all over the place—and the others uld play around them. Maybe they didn't make much noise because they n't eat too much. But the poor are like that. Always room, always ıugh for one more—everyone just takes a little less.

The children stayed downstairs while we went up to her apartment, ing the radio. We had forgotten that Felicia had no electricity, but here in we saw the generosity of the janitress. Her husband had put an ension wire up the air shaft from his own apartment to Felicia's kitchen; h a double socket we were able to connect the set and see that it played. We sat down to talk a little, and in the quiet of her bare little apartment told me the history of her furniture.

'How I got this place," she began, "it was this way. You know people ı't like to rent to Puerto Ricans. So we have to hunt and hunt to find a ce to live. This house has Italians and Jews, and we're the first Puerto ans. The place is all run-down—as you can see—and nobody cares ıut anything as long as the rent is paid. Each apartment brings in twenty-ht dollars a month. There are four on a floor and seven floors to the ıse, walk-up. I'm lucky I'm on the third floor with the kids. Well, there s a woman living in the building, and when I was over at Eldridge Street that two-room place she told me about this place. We were desperate.

The water was frozen, the toilet was stopped up, so we had to move. She said, 'There's an empty place in the house where I live, where some friends of mine moved out. It has my furniture in it. If you buy the furniture you can get the apartment. Twenty-three dollars a week.'

"My husband was getting thirty-five a week, and here we were going to have to pay twenty-three. Well, we have to move, that's all. So we signed a paper—that was last June—and moved in. From June to December 17 we paid her twenty-three dollars a week. And she paid the rent."

Felicia got up from the chair by the kitchen table (that table and four chairs were the only furniture in the room), and fetched a box from the kitchen shelf, full of papers and odds and ends. She began sorting through them. "These are my receipts for the statue of the Blessed Mother—you pay every week until you pay thirteen dollars and thirty-four cents and it takes twenty-five weeks. A store down on Chambers Street. And here are the receipts for the rent."

We began to look at them together. This, I thought, is how the poor exploit the poor. One set of immigrants exploiting the newest set of immigrants!

"I got sick in December," Felicia went on. She was coughing as she spoke. "Manuel had to stay home from work to take care of me and the children, so he didn't get any pay. She changed it then, this woman. She said I could pay her ten dollars a week for the furniture and then pay my own rent to the landlord when he came around. Now that is the way we do it. And here are those receipts." She tumbled more pieces of paper out on the table. They were all dated seven days apart; each testified to the fact that Felicia was paying ten dollars a week on the scrubby set of furnishings I saw around me.

In the front room there were a dresser and two overstuffed chairs and a davenport bed that another tenant had given her. There was a crib they had bought at a secondhand store; an icebox, the old-fashioned kind into which you put a cake of ice, when you have the money to buy it; and a combination coal-and-gas stove. However, the gas was turned off, the coal stove was full of holes, and the pipe to the chimney in back had fallen away.

I didn't look in the two bedrooms, but there was space for little more than the beds. They were in the rear, off the kitchen, and got air and a little light from an airshaft. Windows looked out on other windows; only by peering out and looking far up to the sky, four stories above, could one tell whether it was raining or the sun was shining. The rear room could be closed off from the other three and a door led into the hall, so, since there

were toilets in the hall, one could rent such a room to another tenant. My first home in Manhattan, when I worked on the East Side for the New York *Call*, had been just such a rear room. But there it was warm; I had a white-covered featherbed and there was always the good smell of cooking in the house. Here there was no fire to cook by.

I sat there with Felicia at her kitchen table and pondered the slips before me. For seven months she had put out $92 a month for rent and payment on the furniture. Since then she had paid $40 a month to the avaricious widow and $28 to the landlord, $68 in all, instead of $92—a generous reduction indeed!

"But this is terrible," I told her, frowning over the arithmetic.

"The furniture was pretty good when we moved in," Felicia explained, trying to account for the way she had been exploited and taken in. "It looked wonderful. You can't imagine how good it looked after Eldridge Street."

Well, perhaps it did. Having lived in Italian slums for many years, I knew how the housewives scrubbed and cleaned, and how they made everything shine with elbow grease and detergents. But Felicia had neither elbow grease nor money for soaps and cleansers. She probably wasn't very efficient about keeping a place up. After all, she was still young, and she had not had much experience, either.

"How much longer are you supposed to keep on paying?" I asked her, thinking of the papers she said she and her husband had signed. Probably it was all quite legal.

"We'll be finished a year from this June."

I gasped. Over a thousand dollars paid for junk; and nothing would be left of it by the time it was paid for. Enough money for a down payment, almost, on a house in the country.

While we were looking over the receipts, the gas and electric bill fell out. It was for $38.64. And how would that ever be paid? I thought of a remark which Louis Murphy, head of the Detroit House of Hospitality, was very fond of making. "It's expensive to be poor."

For some time as we talked I had been looking at an object hanging on the wall by the useless stove. Suddenly I saw what it was: a nylon shopping bag, the kind that bears heavy loads of groceries for shopping mothers without ripping at the seams or giving way in the handles. Oh, the irony of that shopping bag—and no money with which to go shopping, and no stove to cook on, either. No wonder she was sick, little Felicia, after eating meatballs and spaghetti on an empty stomach. She might well have felt heavy.

Never mind, Felicia, I thought to myself as I went home. Spring is here, and you won't have to heat that apartment, or live with the smell of oil stoves. Soon a hot sun will be pouring into the dank canyons of the New York streets; the park benches will be crowded; and the children after the long winter can drink in the bright sunlight and fresh air.

Walking across the park, I saw the sycamore trees turning golden green and the buds bursting. Green veils the bushes around the housing projects people can't afford to live in. Even the grass is brightening and starting up from the brown city soil. The earth is alive, the trees are alive again. Oh, mysterious life and beauty of a tree!

Out in the woods of Staten Island (still a nickel on the ferry) there are birches, and beeches with their round gray bolls, the willows yellow-twigged, the pines bright green, the maples rosy even on a gray day. There is green moss in the swamps, and the spring peepers have started their haunting call. Skunk cabbages in all their glory of striped green and maroon have started up from the marshes and line the little brook at the foot of Peter Maurin Farm. Oh love, oh joy, oh spring, stirring in the heart. Things can't be so bad, if the sun shines. Oh, if you, Felicia, could be there. The ground is soft now, there is good dirt for the children to dig in, and plenty of room for them to leap like the young goats on the farm next door. But in the country there are no houses for you, nor jobs for your husband. In the city there are houses—shelter, such as they are—and there is human warmth, but the pavements are as hard as the greed of men, and there is no clean dirt for children, only men's filth. The country now is oh, joyfulness, and the city where Felicia lives is woe, woe and want. Never mind, Felicia, God is not mocked. He is our Father, and all men are brothers, so lift up your heart. It will not always be this way.

Loaves and Fishes