

HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY

We have received a report of the work that is being done in the House of Hospitality at Wigan and it is so remarkable, even in its brief report form, and so practical an application of Our Lord's teaching that we reproduce it in full.

IT is now a year since the Wigan House of Hospitality started its work. In that time we have made many mistakes, and have learnt much. In this report we are attempting to give some idea of the work, the difficulties, the needs, and the spirit.

Houses of Hospitality, though bearing much resemblance to other expressions of the Church's care to apply the Corporal Works of Mercy, are something peculiar to our times, and work in a way which, though modern, is nevertheless the essential Christian way.

The first House of Hospitality was opened in New York, and there are now several in various towns of the United States. In Canada there are several more under the name of Friendship Houses. This Wigan House is the first in England, and is inspired by the New York one.

The spirit is that of the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew*, Chapters v, vi, and vii). It is an attempt to accept the face meaning of the words of Christ and to have Faith in His promises.

In particular, the following words of Christ apply with great force to the House of Hospitality:

“Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him
that would borrow turn not away . . . ”

That is the spirit of the House, as far as possible. To enable the staff to apply these Divine words in a literal spirit, other words of Christ may also be quoted as the ideal before the House workers:

“Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on . . . be not solicitous, saying What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed; seek you therefore first the Kingdom of God and all these shall be added to you . . . ”

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With this spirit the House endeavours to apply the Sermon on the Mount literally. Those who come seeking help are not regarded as applicants or cases; they are human beings. Even more than that, they are regarded as Ambassadors of God and the Staff endeavours to see Christ in every one of them. “. . . What you do to these, my poor ones, you do unto Me.”

The Staff of the House exists to serve those in need, to serve them in every possible way, and to regard nothing as being too good for them.

In all the work, material relief, though playing a great part, is not the main objective, for the House exists to meet the most serious needs, and they are spiritual. It is part of the work, and the hardest part, to combat that spirit of materialism that is so rampant to-day.

This spirit, with its worship of material wealth, its regard for clothes and rank, is a dangerous element in our society and its influence is to be felt in every walk of life. Poor men will miss Mass because they cannot wear good clothes or put their penny in the plate; because their neighbours might think ill of them. Men and women look with a patronising pity on their neighbours who have to accept “charity.” The rich ignore and pass by carelessly those in need, secure in the knowledge that the State will look after them.

In the House we meet all these forms of materialism, and many more. We endeavour to meet some by showing in our lives, to some extent at least, that clothes and money are not essential, and by treating all, poor, ragged, tramps and rich alike, as our personal friends. We try to shock the rich into realising their brotherhood with the poor, and the essential Christian duty of helping the poor out of their surplus. Further we endeavour to correct, in a little way, the impersonalism and ruthless efficiency of the State organisations by the personal care and love of Christianity.

All this implies a great variety and amount of work. This is so.

There seems to be no limit to the queries and needs brought to the House. Rent and unemployment assistance are the more common queries; clothes and nourishing foods the more common needs.

But the variety is unlimited. Need for invalid chairs, for books to read while ill, for bedding (and for beds), for

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railways fares, for help to pay rent and rates, for prayer books, for shoes for the children (or they cannot go to school). Advice on matrimonial disputes, or safeguarding a child's faith, and many others.

What do we need? Clothes, food, boots and shoes, and practically every human requirement—or the money to buy them.

After a year of finding our feet we have a certain amount of work to record, which is little, yet has kept the Staff well occupied. Now our Staff shows signs of increasing—so does the work; we can find work for a much larger staff than we are likely to have for a long time.

In the past year we have:

Distributed some 1,500 articles of clothing.

Supplied some 525 meals.

Provided some 160 nights' shelter.

Dealt with over 2,000 inquiries (mainly rent and U.A.B.).

Here is the summary of a recent week:

Sixty people in, asking for clothes (we were able to supply about half of these requests).

A bed supplied to a family with seven children, the elder children of both sexes sleeping together.

Help for one case from the Prisoners' Aid Society.

One case of a man endeavouring to place his child in an orphanage.

One query about the Court Missioner.

Seven Unemployment Assistance Board cases.

One Court of Referees case.

One rent case.

In addition, various secretarial work done for local Catholic organisations.

From the very nature of the work statistical reports do not give an adequate picture; few questions are completed with one visit, often several visits and much work is required before the question is settled.

What can you do?

If you have the vocation, you can join our staff.

If you wish to help, you can give some of your spare time.

You can send us food and clothes and our other needs.

You can send us money to purchase our needs.

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We are trying to follow in the footsteps of all the social Saints, St. Francis, St. John Bosco, St. Antonino, and of such men as Frederic Ozanam. By imitating them we are trying to imitate Christ. Our only rules are: To love all who come in, be they deserving poor or not, and to endeavour never to say no. With your material help we can live up to the second; with your prayers we have some chance of living up to the first.

In the name of Christ, help the poor whom Christ loves, and in whom Christ lives. Help Christ by helping His poor.

For the Staff:

R. P. WALSH, MOLLY WALSH, MARY POWER, TED DONNELLY, JOHN ASPINAL, JOHN LANNON.

For the Committee:

REV. FR. GREENHOUS, *Chairman*.

REV. FR. RIMMER, *Treasurer*.

R. P. WALSH, *Secretary*.

THE HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY, 16 Darlington Street,
Wigan.

Being ourselves personally acquainted with this splendid work, we recommend it wholeheartedly to the notice of our readers.