

THIS IS JUST THE SIMPLE STORY OF POOR WOLFE LUSTIG

Dorothy Day

New York Call Sunday, February 25, 1917, page 3

WHERE THE DOOR TO LIFE IS CLOSING

Wolfe Lustig – it's a husky sounding name. But the man is a rattling bag of bones. Day and night he lies in his bed and wonders why God doesn't kill him quick. For the first time in weeks, he propped himself up in bed yesterday to have his picture taken. Look at it.

Pauline, the eldest child, is six. Jakie comes next. He's four. Little Maurice, with the schmoochy face, is three and the cuddly baby with the big dark eyes was sentenced to life only five months ago. Her name is Yetta.

Lustig was operated upon two years ago. He doesn't know why. But he does know that the operation didn't turn out right and he has been in bed ever since.

His Wife – Sick Too! His wife is sick, too, but she has to drag herself around and rub him with alcohol and make beef tea. Her face is puffed with neuralgia. The cold, stale air of the room is maddening. Daily, she goes out to peek at the push carts, hoping vaguely that prices have fallen. She comes in and her face and her heart hurt.

The United Hebrew Charities pay her rent, \$10.50 a month. She receives \$4 a week to feed and clothe the six of them. Of course, Yetta, the youngest, has not yet reached the age when she demands cabbage and potatoes and other unreasonable nutritious necessities; Mrs. Lustig nurses her. But when things don't go around, Mrs. Lustig goes without and the baby suffers too.

You can't see in the picture the horrible decayed teeth of the children and the scrawny legs. You can't see the empty cupboard on the other side of the room. You can't see the single bed where the mother keeps her brood of four warm. If you could peer behind the sick figures in the picture you might perhaps see the pot of broth boiling feebly on the stove.

Poverty, Always Poverty

Four dollars per week. And Mrs. Lustig has to buy medicine, and alcohol – alcohol is dear, too – and food and clothes for them all. Four dollars a week and bread and butter and potatoes and meat are all out of the reach of the housewife. The gas bill and fuel for the little stove make a hole in the four dollars.

Wolfe Lustig lives at 328 Henry Street. As yet the mayor's committee of investigation, which has reported that the East Side is prosperous, contrary to report, has not visited the sick man.

Mrs. Dora Schonsky lives down the street at 302 Henry. She hesitates to let you in if you knock on her door because she is ashamed of her ragged state. With a blanket clutched around her and her five children tied up in various rags, which are warm, if restrictive, she consented to be interviewed yesterday afternoon. Malte, Michael, Eva, Becky and Silly, 9, 8, 6, 4 and 2 respectively, stood around and giggled at the visitor.

The Two-Room Life

The seven live in two rooms, for which they pay \$6.50 a month. For the last two weeks, Mr. Schonsky, who is a housepainter, has been out of work. She couldn't explain how they were living, to the reporter who spoke English. Both she and her husband spoke Yiddish. There was no fire, no food and no light in the two barren rooms. And Silly, the little 2-year-old, wailed.

Morris Brotman, at 300 Broome Street, is supporting a wife and five children, all under ten years, on \$12 a week. He works nights in a Jewish bath and Friday morning when he came home from work at 9 o'clock, he found that his wife while out to do her Sabbath shopping had been arrested.

Arrest is a Puzzle

Mrs. Brotman said that she had been standing around with another woman discussing prices on the foods they were going to buy when, at the accusation of a pushcart peddler, she had been arrested. Her husband had to pay a dollar fine to get her out of the Essex Market court and the dollar made quite a hole in her husband's salary. She couldn't explain why she had been hauled away by the policemen. She was vehement in her protestations that she had done nothing.

The Lustigs, the Schonskys and the Brotmans are only three out of the thousands that are

Wedged by the pressure of Trade's hand

Against an inward opening door

That pressure tightens evermore.