

**“East Side Street Vendors,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1893.**

“We take everything in sight,” said a Russian fish vendor to a reporter for the *New York Times* yesterday, at Essex and Hester Streets. “What difference does it make if we take up the street with our carts? There is nobody in this neighborhood but Russians, and I am sure none of them complain.” This vendor was one of the many who obstruct the streets in the old Seventh Ward, making Ludlow, Suffolk, Hester, and Canal Streets almost impassible for pedestrians. The claim of the vendor that Russians and Polanders in the neighborhood did not complain was evidently true. The streets thereabout swarm with people with pushcarts and stands. Early in the morning the people start out to buy food for the day. The street stands are piled high with food, but it is food that would make the average citizen turn his nose high in the air.

A bread stand first attracted the reporter’s attention. “The bread,” said the woman attendant, “is called Polish bread.” It is made up of huge loaves as black as tar. Next to the bread stand was a fish stand, attended by two stalwart Rumanians. Every time the Rumanians handled a fish they made movements which threw fish scales and slime on the loaves of bread on the next stand. This they did not seem to mind; neither did they notice the horrible stench that came from the putrid fish. A little way from the fish stand was another pushcart, on which were pieces of fresh meat and dead fowl. A huge swarm of great blue flies buzzed about and laid their eggs on the meat, which was already alive with the larvae of insects. Another stand had cheese for sale. A slatternly young woman, who had a scarcity of clothing and who was tending the stand, called it *kase*. It did not require a microscope to detect the mites, for they were large and lively. The reporter got to the windward of the stand and received such a shock from the powerful odor thrown out that he almost had a spasm. Phew, how that cheese did smell! Yet, in spite of the fact that the cheese was a reeking mass of rottenness and alive with worms, the long whiskered descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah on the East Side would put their fingers in it and then suck them with great and evident relish.

Nearby was a soda fountain, from which a dirty boy, about fifteen years of age, was drawing a turbid liquor which he called “Jewish beer.” This was drunk by the vendors with great gusto and smacking of lips. After the vendors had swallowed their beer the attendant would give the tumblers a hurried rinse in a pail of water which looked as if it had been used to mop out a cow stable. Then the glass, dirty and foul, would be ready for the next customer for “Jewish beer.”

A writer might go on for a week reciting the abominations of these people and still have much to tell. One of their greatest faults is that they have an utter disregard for law. There is a certain hour when they are required to set out their garbage and ash cans, but they pay no attention to that. The ash cart comes along and takes what is in sight, and perhaps five minutes later some of these people will empty pail after pail of household ashes and garbage into the middle of the street. If they are arrested for this or any other offense, hundreds of their compatriots and coreligionists follow them to the courts and stand ready to swear in their favor. Filthy persons and clothing reeking with vermin are seen on every side. Many of these people are afflicted with diseases of the skin. Children are covered with sores, and hundreds of them are nearly blind with sore eyes. There is hardly a person among the whole crowd of street vendors who has not sores underneath the finger nails and between the fingers. Some time ago the city government decided to help these people to keep clean. Asphalt pavements were laid in the district with the hope that

the streets would be kept cleaner, but they are now a sight to behold, being filthier than the old block pavement ever was.

The neighborhood where these people live is absolutely impassable for wheeled vehicles other than their pushcarts. If a truck driver tries to get through where their pushcarts are standing, they apply to him all kinds of vile and indecent epithets. The driver is fortunate if he gets out of the street without being hit with a stone or having a putrid fish or piece of meat thrown in his face. This neighborhood, peopled almost entirely by the people who claim to have been driven from Poland and Russia, is the eyesore of New York and perhaps the filthiest place on the western continent. It is impossible for a Christian to live there because he will be driven out, either by blows or the dirt and stench. Cleanliness is an unknown quantity to these people. They cannot be lifted up to a higher plane because they do not want to be. If the cholera should ever get among these people, they would scatter its germs as a sower does grain.