Looking at Life
By ERICH BRANDEIS

I wish you could have come down to the official opening and dedication of "Pete's house" two weeks ago.

It would have given you a lot of new confidence in humankind, and it would have demonstrated to you how effectively a democracy can work if only the people who live in it are democratic.

It would have also proved the truth of what Mrs. Edna M. Knox wrote me from New Castle, Pa., a few days ago, that "all well-to-do people are not heartless and bad," leaving out for this occasion the end of the sentence that "all poor people are not saints."

"Pete's house" is a $250,000 building given to the Henry St. settlement by former Gov. Herbert H. Lehman and his wife.

The house could have been called the Peter G. Lehman Memorial or some other more high-sounding name, but the donors chose to call it "Pete's house," just as they called that son of theirs Pete, that son who was killed in 1944 while serving with the 8th air force in England.

"Pete's house," as the former governor said at the dedication, is not so much a memorial to their hero son as to the under-privileged kids of New York's slums.

It has a lovely recreation hall, a library and many other features that will help the poor children of New York to grow up into better men and women and to supplement their education with better and sounder recreation facilities.

"If Peter could talk to us today," said Mr. Lehman as he turned over his gift to the settlement's officials, "he would, in his kindly heart, say that he wished Pete's house to be a center where all people of all races and creeds could meet in friendship and good will."

Perhaps I shouldn't tell you, but as Mayor O'Dwyer accepted the structure in behalf of the city of New York and spoke of the generosity of the donors, there were tears in the eyes of Mrs. Lehman, the mother, and tears, though more furtive ones, in the eyes of the father.

But there were also tears in the eyes of the more than 1,500 others who attended the ceremonies, many of them men and women of utter poverty, living in one of New York's shabbiest districts, others who had come in chauffeur-driven limousines from tree-lined Park Ave.

Mr. and Mrs. Lehman are among New York's richest families.

Yet they gave this building not as millionaires but as a father and mother who had lost a beloved son in the service of his country.

Peter Lehman, the heir to millions, had not waited to be drafted. He had enlisted voluntarily and, at the time he crashed, was on his fifty-eighth mission.

Over the doorway of the building only the two words "Pete's house" are carved in stone.

But what a suitable inscription it would be, if over the doors of the new United Nations headquarters in New York, could be carved Mr. Lehman's words:

"Here all races and all creeds meet in friendship and good will."