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[BELGIAN SECTION OF 32 PAGES]

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# THE SURVEY

## Free Belgium

Between the Front and the Sea

How Help Has Reached  
the Lowlands Through  
the American Red Cross

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## AMERICAN RED CROSS: BELGIUM

On January 1 the caliber of work under way was such that the Department for Belgium was raised to the status of a Red Cross Commission, corresponding to those for France and Italy.

In all its undertakings, the Red Cross has acted consistently through the Belgian agencies themselves, thus achieving two goods — the immediate help and the strengthening of those native institutions through which the new structure of social life must be built up in the only less difficult period after the war.

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## I.—The Fourth Year in Belgium

**I**N this war as in those of earlier centuries, Flanders has been the fulcrum around which has swung the fortune of all Europe. It early became, also, through the Commission for Relief in Belgium, the center of the world's concern for sufferers from this war. Yet when the American Red Cross created a Department for Belgium last September and placed it in the hands of its senior relief worker, he was commissioned to explore and organize help in a segment of the lowlands which had been all but overlooked by the American public in the last three years, and which was all but unobserved last fall, although within sound of the great battles on the British front.

A month later he sent in a field report from which these paragraphs are taken:

“Free Belgium has an extreme length of about 35 miles and an extreme width of about 15 miles. There is no square yard within this territory which cannot be reached by German shells or by bombs dropped by aeroplanes. About 90,000 Belgian civilians live within this territory at the present time. It is believed by all the authorities that this population ought to be encouraged to remain to cultivate the ground and hold together the organizations of local self-government.

“Of these 90,000 people, probably 10,000 are children under the age of fifteen. These children cannot help in maintaining the country and are constantly subject to extreme danger to life and limb. Every day some of them are killed by bursting shells or bombs. In a civilian hospital four miles from the trenches, which we visited last week, there were more than fifty civilians suffering from shell wounds or gas attacks. Many of these patients are little children. One had been totally blinded by a fragment of a bomb; another had lost one eye; one had been wounded in the abdomen; some had suffered from gas. The situation is pitiful and intolerable.

“The Belgian government has done much for the children, having removed from free Belgium some six thousand, placing them in homes and colonies in France and Switzerland. Most of them are in France, in school colonies north of Paris—some quite near Paris—but chiefly in the departments skirting the shores of the English Channel. The Belgian government has, however, about reached the limit of its resources in this work.

"The minister of the interior has asked the Red Cross for assistance in extending the facilities for evacuating additional children from Belgium. He believes that if provision could be made for six hundred young children who now live in places of special danger, a long step will have been made toward meeting the most urgent need of the moment. He would like the Red Cross to put up barracks of sufficient capacity for six hundred children, and to meet the expense of maintaining these children for one year.

"It seems to us that this is an urgently important thing. We are inclined to believe that the Red Cross could scarcely expend any of its funds in work which would more strongly appeal to the humane sentiments of the American people."

These paragraphs reveal, in brief compass, how this fragment of Belgium is set in a matrix of war. Perhaps no other body of people, in such proportion and in so many ways, know so intimately how war can disrupt the texture of family life. Some of them know it because they are fighting in it—into a fourth year—or because their men are in it, or have gone down in it. That is to know war. Some of them know it because their fathers or mothers or wives or children are separated from them these many months, across the two fronts, in the hands of the invaders. That also is to know war. Some of them know it because war has come up to their doorsteps, rumbled at their windows, and crashed through their roofs. And some know it because they are homeless and fugitive. There are households in which all these layers of experience have piled heavily, one upon another.

The paragraphs quoted illustrate also the social insight with which American help has been brought to bear, at one point after another, until it has become a heartening force and easement in the midst of a Flanders winter. With steady, rapid strokes, the American Red Cross has entered upon a program for improving conditions among the Belgian troops through providing refreshment, recreation and medical service outside the scope of the Belgian war budget. It has engineered a system of civilian stores to serve any eventuality, at points accessible by railways, canals or highways. It has aided the existing school colonies, erected a pavilion for babies at the Queen's school, broken ground for a new children's colony nearby, and thrown open an old Carthusian monastery in central France for harboring children from occupied Belgium. It has strengthened agencies for the care of the sick, the infirm and for civilian wounded from the war zone; and has instituted housing and health projects for the great companies of Belgian refugees in the adjoining French provinces.

## II.—For the Belgian Troops

THE initial gift of the Red Cross was a large one—half a million francs to the Belgian Red Cross toward the cost of its great military hospital, then half completed at Wulveringham. The first visit of the American Red Cross executives in September found Dr. Depage, head of the hospital, and his associates under severe bomb and shell fire in the converted seaside hotels at La Panne. La Panne had become a barracks town and, since the British offensive of the summer of 1917, an object of persistent attack. That very evening patients, staff and American visitors had to take to shelter in dugouts on the beach. Inland at Wulveringham, laid out in wide fields like a model village, each range of barrack wards connecting with permanent brick structures housing modern operating rooms and administrative services, and with roofs and fields unmistakably marked with great red crosses, a new Ocean Hospital was coming into being, the equivalent of those serving the neighboring armies. The American grant accelerated the development of this enterprise and the transfer of the sick and wounded to Wulveringham.

As its contribution to the active field service of the Belgian army, the Red Cross has given 80,000 francs for a mobile surgical section, 90,000 francs for auto-radiological carriages. It is making further and much larger appropriations to the medical service of the Belgian army, where equipment falls short of the standards which Belgium's more prosperous allies have been able to evolve—stationary radiological installations, traction engines to serve them, demountable barracks with double walls of corrugated iron, telescope beds, gloves, tourniquets, and other precious rubber goods.

The living conditions of the Belgian soldiers are unusually difficult. They are crowded into a little strip of Flanders which in winter is a strip of mud. Many of them pass their hours of rest in low, dark and badly ventilated barracks, where, often enough, night shifts have to sleep while the day shift sits around on the edge of the bunks to eat at meal-times. When the present minister of intendance, Emile Vandervelde—the Socialist leader who was a member of the Belgian commission to the United States—began his work, most of the soldiers had but one dish apiece from which to eat their food. He has attempted to provide rude tables and additional dishes. In a few of the cantonments he has put up barracks which are used as both dining-rooms and recreation-halls; in one or two cases he has

installed baths and reading-rooms. The two American Red Cross executives who have pioneered the work in free Belgium were not without experience in the low countries; they had participated in the development of shelters and work-rooms for Belgian refugees carried on by the Rockefeller commission in Holland back in 1915. They found one of their private secretaries of that time now a private in the Belgian army. "It is not the bombs that we are afraid of," he explained to them, "or even the shells when they have the location of our quarters; it is the bitter cold, and wet feet, and no place to go. That, above everything, is what we dread."

The deputy commissioner for Belgium visited the various camps, cantonments and other living places in late December. Of the conditions found, he reported:

"The shelters are, roughly, dugouts and abris on the first line; abris and half-ruined buildings on the second line; farm buildings, old wooden barracks and new brick barracks in the rear, that is, seven or eight miles back from the trenches where the soldiers go for fifteen to thirty days after spending four days in the trenches, four days on *piquet* and eight days on *semi-repos*.

"Life in the abris and dugouts was the usual thing. They were low, crowded and dark, but warm. There was one continuous line of graves along the board walk of the Purves sector where the trenches consist of an embankment—back of the old Nieuport-Dixmude railroad. The soldiers in their dugouts lay within three or four feet of their comrades in their graves.

"I visited the terrain recovered recently by the French, now held by the Belgians, adjoining the Ypres salient, around Merckem and Bixschoote and running up to the edge of the forest of Houthulst. Here trench lines are obliterated. The entire front is a no-man's-land of shell holes, presenting an almost continuous series of craters and furrows. It is either a sea of mud or a frozen wilderness. Last Wednesday the snow of the night was over everything but lost some of its beauty when a major of engineers complained bitterly that there had been such delay in getting white clothing for his men that he lost an unnecessarily large number every day. Before we left the sector two more of his men, who had talked with us, were killed while cutting ice to let water drain away. The defenses are not infantry lines at all. They are advance posts, machine gun emplacements and batteries.

"Life on the Merchem and Bixschoote sectors is life in abris above ground: most of them German pill boxes. These sectors are especially bad, because of gas shelling. Shrapnel fire is almost continuous. And yet I heard men say: 'I'd rather be here than back in the barns.'

"The life of the soldier on the farms and in half-destroyed villages is the problem of the long dark winter nights without light or fire.

"I found near Gyveringchove two hundred and forty men sleeping in two barns. Fires in other places had compelled a strict order against any fires in these sleeping quarters. Petrol had given out and there were no lamps. Candles were impossible. The village was a mile or two away and the intervening roads were almost knee deep in mud. The barn buildings were old, with wide cracks in the siding through which the wind whistled. After four o'clock what was there for the soldier to do? When he did not wade to the village for a little fire and light in the *estaminet*, he crawled into his blankets on the soggy straw or hard boards to keep warm. And sometimes on the bitter nights, these men in these two barns had not slept at all, but were running up and down all night to keep warm. As I heard a soldier sing as he went along with a bucket of water, an officer said: 'That is the spirit of the men almost all the time. They keep their spirits up.'

"At Reninghe, less than four miles from the German guns, I found a company of engineers billeted in farm buildings and abris. We had dinner in a shed, and I spent some time in a pig-pen where four men slept, the only part of a barn that was intact. These men had a fire. I was told repeatedly of places where there would be one stove for four barracks and where men would be moved from one barrack to the other to give all a chance at the fire.

"All this would present a strong indictment against the Belgian government and the allies if there were not the other side. Fully half the army is now in the new brick barracks the government has been struggling for against obstacles presented by scarcity of building materials and lack of money. These barracks are in groups of four, each accommodating fifty men, and each with a fifth barrack used for a dining hall, place of recreation, kitchen and canteen."

### Rest and Recreation

IN COOPERATION with a governmental committee made up of the minister of war, the minister of intendance, and the minister of sciences and arts, the American Red Cross is embarking on a project for erecting recreation and eating huts and double tents in the army zone, equipping them with dishes, baths, moving pictures and reading rooms. The men themselves will make the tables and furniture. A million francs are available for beginning this work.

In addition the Red Cross has given 60,000 francs to the Livres des Soldats Belges, which sends out books to soldiers in the field. For example, three hundred bakers are working in one place. In addition to fiction in French, Flemish and English, a little library of professional books for bakers has been asked for and given.

Young men on *repos* have asked frequently in the past for books on medicine, law, engineering and other professional subjects. As one said: "I stopped in the second year of my engineering course; I must not die intellectually." It has not been possible heretofore to buy any books over six francs in price. Now all these demands for technical books are met and the libraries are made adequate in all the camps through the American Red Cross. It is also assisting in a modest way the Belgian society which sends the little extras which are so much prized by all soldiers in the field, and especially by the Belgian soldiers because of their small pay—lower, it is said, than that of any other army in the field, in some instances as low as seven cents a day.

The Red Cross is helping to maintain a reading room and recreation center in conjunction with an existing canteen at La Panne, and has given a barrack for a canteen to be opened by Abbé François, a Belgian army chaplain, in a small town between Dunkirk and Calais. This is a section to which Belgian troops, when not on active duty at the front, are sent back for rest, drill, etc. Such money as they have had been exploited by the small shopkeepers of the vicinity, who charge fifteen cents (75 centimes) apiece for eggs, and proportionate prices for other simple necessities.

As the homes of many of the men lie in occupied Belgium, they have not been able to visit them during the war, and they hear from their people infrequently. The families of others are living under refugee conditions in France. There are several thousand Belgian soldiers who have never had a day of real rest since their mobilization, for the simple reason that they have had no money to spend and no place to go. The American Red Cross has made the first of several grants to the Foyer du Soldat Belge, which gives them ten days' rest in Paris with some pocket money, food, lodging and friendly direction in seeing the sights of the city. The moral hazards of thus using a great capital as the leave-city are of course present; but the situation of the Belgian army, with its home country in enemy hands, is exceptional, and the Belgian authorities feel that it is an investment that is worth the risk. Many of their soldiers are country-bred youths who from boyhood have looked forward to a trip to Paris, who are compelled to serve under rough conditions in the open all the year, and who respond to this sort of a change as to nothing else. It is held that from the standpoint of sexual disease, it is safer for the men to take *repos* in Paris under the guidance of a society like the Foyer du Soldat Belge, than in some of the smaller towns without such supervision.

The Red Cross is furthermore backing a canteen at the Gare



du Nord for Belgian soldiers coming to Paris or passing through. This was formerly supported by English donors who can no longer maintain this service for Belgian troops as well as for their own. The Red Cross also contributes to the *Congé du Soldat Belge*, which has been supported by the subscriptions of Belgian, Italian and French trades-unionists. The *Congé du Soldat Belge* is one of the small societies which has been able to live up to its ideal because it is small. It has been taking ten men at a time on *repos* in Paris and treating them, not like soldiers in a barrack but like visiting kin. The American Red Cross has sought to expand the numbers reached without changing the spirit and nature of the work. It now takes fifty men at a time, or one hundred and fifty a month, out of the mud and snow of the Flanders winter and gives them rest, diversion and friendly personal attention in Paris. As one of the Red Cross workers remarked: "In a world of militarism, this little society of comrades, with its ideals of personal service, internationalism and brotherhood, is a beam of light."

#### For a Government in Exile

IN THIS connection, the industrious use to which certain Belgian troops have put their leave time should be set down. They have spent from two to three weeks at farm labor in the French countryside, in conjunction with a special service instituted by the Belgian minister of agriculture.

A force of one hundred, its personnel ever changing, were so employed last summer. Invalided soldiers have likewise been mustered into this farm work. The Red Cross has itself started a fund which serves as a connecting link between military and civil life. Belgian soldiers, wounded and discharged from service, are forbidden by law to wear the uniform. Generally they left their civilian clothes behind them in occupied Belgium; this fund can now be drawn on for a new outfit, to help them face the problem of making a fresh start. The Red Cross is also making a monthly grant to the *Familles des Soldats Belges*, which looks after the families of soldiers who for any reason are in acute distress, and which is another of the projects of the indefatigable Emile Vandervelde.

In thus helping to provide recreation barracks, dining halls, baths and rest rooms at the front, and in the munitions centers at the rear where thousands of mobilized Belgians are employed at low pay; in providing canteens for soldiers on *repos*, and in making it possible for them to have ten days rest leave each year in some place away from the army; in strengthening the medical service and supplying needed forms of hospital apparatus; and, in general, in seeking to

improve conditions among the troops, the American Red Cross is sharing in activities which might normally be a charge upon the nation. The Belgian government, however, is itself an exile, with all of its customary revenues cut off, and it is managing on borrowed money, the use of which is limited by the creditor powers to the most rigid military expenditures.

The assistance which the American Red Cross gives along less conventional lines not only makes for health and morale, but is first-hand evidence, reaching the men in the ranks, of how America feels toward Belgium. Such evidence is especially well-timed because of certain prejudices circulating in recent months, and charges of Belgian inactivity, charges made at a time when, as the Red Cross men bear witness, the Belgians have been straining every nerve to meet the threatened German offensive. One of the leaders of the Belgian army was quoted recently as saying: "It seems hard to have kept the faith and have given up our country, to have given up our families and stand ready with our lives, to spurn every attempt to make a separate peace, and then to be accused of being shirkers, cowards and traitors." The Belgians have had a casualty roll mounting up each month into the thousands, and have been rendering important service in holding their sector of the front.

"I believe the Belgian army," concludes the report quoted, "to be made up of as loyal, courageous and devoted men as can be found in any army. Nor must one great burden which they bear be forgotten: for over three long years they have not seen their homes—not only that, they have had to know every hour that their wives and children were in the grip of the Germans, under-nourished, and with only a line between them and starvation. They have had to go on in the dark and cold and danger with no news at all from the other side or with only a line at intervals of months. Three times in this trip men said: 'I have not heard from home since I left at the beginning of the war.' If ever the psychological factor were involved, it is here. If ever a bit of warmth and cheer were needed it is with this little army of 200,000 men which will not be driven out from the last little corner of the kingdom."

### III.—For Civilians Under Fire

THE French, English and Belgian armies occupy adjoining sectors in that corner of free Belgium which lies between the German armies and the channel coast, with Calais probably still the objective of any great German drive, as it was in the battles of Ypres. On the other hand, free Belgium lies directly behind the allied armies, in their campaigns to turn the extreme left of the western front.

Some sudden turn of events may send a final stream of Belgian refugees back across the French border, or, may throw open new areas of what is now occupied Belgium, releasing a civilian population now dependent upon the Belgian Relief Commission. In the latter event, if the Dutch boundary region is recovered at the same time, the commission's stores would be available for direct shipment to the liberated areas; otherwise they would be dependent at the outset on army stores, on Red Cross supplies, and on the food-stuffs gathered regularly by the ministry of the interior for the provisioning of free Belgium. The government sells to the communes, which in turn sell to the local merchants, and these in turn to the people. In the present state of the world market and with its meager shipping facilities, the government has not had much success in getting stocks ahead; and in any case, there would be distress and emergent need in the period of struggle and transition. Only by having supplies where they may be brought in rapidly, can great suffering and perhaps starvation be prevented, and here it is in preparing for eventualities that the American Red Cross is playing an increasing part.

Early in the fall of 1917, twenty barrack warehouses, each twenty by one hundred feet, were contracted for. Nine of these have been erected by army labor on sites given by the Belgian government, adjacent not only to rail lines but to the highways and canals which gridiron this region. Arrangements were made with the Friends' Ambulance Unit, a branch of the British Red Cross with headquarters at Dunkirk, by which, in addition to the three camions placed in their garage by the American Red Cross, their entire fleet of fifteen motor trucks would be at the service of the latter in case of emergency. In addition, the Paris headquarters of the American Red Cross can in two days' time place from twenty-five to fifty loaded cars in the Belgian area, ready for quick service. Negotiations have been under way for the purchase of canal boats which can be filled

with stores and sent through the system of waterways that interlace this region.

Food, clothing, blankets, underwear, etc., to the value of 2,000,000 francs are being purchased by the Red Cross for its Belgian Commission, in addition to its great general stores in France which can be drawn on. With the marked increase of shelling and bombing, the Belgian war zone has become more and more precarious as a storage district, and the greater part even of its Belgian stores will be kept securely in warehouses in France from which they can be rapidly transported when occasion demands.

Conditions which are bad for warehouses are worse for homes. Free Belgium is practically an armed camp, with operations going forward among the friendly forces such as make normal life difficult at best. Children who have fallen under the wheels of heavy camions find their way to the cot beds of the civil hospitals. But the households of the people suffer in common with military objectives. This has been true since the beginning of the war, but since the thrust and counter-thrust at Nieuport in the spring of 1917, and the contest for the Paeschendaele ridge in the fall, free Belgium has been not only an armed camp but a battleground. It has been fought over—in the air. The shell fire and bombing, both inland and along the coast, have exceeded anything undergone in the past. While the months in which the American Red Cross has been operating in Belgium have been those of the fourth year of the war, they have been months in which new situations have developed. Institutions have had to make quick shifts toward safety, and families have been put in jeopardy. The tenacity with which simple folk have to the last clung to their homes along the firing-lines is not a new thing. The farmer's wife who went through a gate cut on the canvas barrier that camouflaged a military road nead Poperinghe, and milked the cows pastured on the side next the enemy, is only an exceptional illustration of the common trait. The experience on all fronts is that, as some people leave a threatened district, their places are taken by those from still nearer the trenches, whose places may in turn be taken by people whose homes are in the hands of the enemy. The folk of the fire move only so far as the frying pan; those of the frying pan, to the hot hearthstones where the sparks fall, and only those of the hearth back to the protection of the chimney corner.

The people who continue to live in free Belgium are the people of the margin. All who live here, in varying degree live close in; and it is entirely understandable that with the whole country gone, except this small corner, the government, making shift in its deserted summer resort near Havre, should both countenance and encourage

this sturdy persistence of the countryfolk of the two remaining arrondissements. Their ditches and hop-poles and stacked wheat, quite beyond the needed crops for which they stand, are so many markers of Belgium's claims to her own.

As the allied soldier sees this strip of front, there are first of all the sand of the dunes about La Panne and Nieuport, which you have to handle in bags in order to build a dug-out or a hut no bigger than a child's snow fort. Then there is the low ground back of Furnes, some of it under water, and all so soggy you cannot dig a trench; you have to build it up on top of the ground. Finally, the land slowly rises until you come to the ridges and marshes along Paeschendaele, where trench warfare of the continuous sort has been abandoned, and some of the most serious fighting of the western offensive and of the war has been carried on from shell crater to shell crater. But to the civilian Belgian, these stretches of ground and the farming country that lies between them and the sea are alike and the same. They are his native soil. They are free Belgium, heritage of the past and earnest of the future.

### Families in the War Zone

AS THE situation in village and farmland has become more and more acute, the problem (as indicated on an earlier page) has been that of getting the children and the feeble to places of greater safety, and that of supplying medical care for civilians. Here the course of the American Red Cross has been to put its resources at the call of agencies already in the field, in a process long under way but hastened by the developments of 1917.

Thus, one hundred and eighty old women and eighty old men had been sheltered in the Repos d'Elizabeth, just outside of La Panne. On the day visited, the women were having their mid-day soup, seated at bench-tables in a long low room. Wrinkled, capped and courtesying, in costume and lineament they looked more like a drawing by Doré than anything else. They wore knitted hoods, or caps, shawls about their shoulders, blue aprons, gray socks showing beneath their short skirts, and, more often than not, wooden shoes. None was less than sixty or sixty-five; one was said to be ninety-three, and we saw another grandmother in the yard, trudging about with her cane, whose ninety-one years came within a decade of taking her back to the Belgians of Napoleon. In another building were housed women of a gentler life. Thirty women were employed at lacemaking on pillows; others helped in the kitchens and about the house.

In a barrack were the old men, many of them grouped about a

central stove, and supplied with earthenware bowls filled with sand, which they used as cuspidors. The sand was neatly smoothed and the floors were white with much scrubbing. Here a young man—in his fiftieth year or so—with a son in the Belgian army and another in occupied Belgium, seemed to be more or less in charge of the household—a volunteer. When La Panne began to be shelled and bombed frequently during the summer of 1917, the old folk were asked if they wanted to leave for a place of safety. Only twenty-six of them did; the rest preferred to stay near their old homes, on Belgian soil. But in the early days of the present winter, when the bombing became a nightly occurrence and people were killed next door to them, they could not sleep nights, and the Red Cross gave the money to transfer the aged company entire to a location in France.

Three distinctive pieces of work, a sanitary service, a civil hospital, and a colony school, which for a period were united as the Aide Civile Belge, date from the travail of Ypres; the bombardments that wrecked the city and the typhoid epidemic that scotched the district the same year (1915). Here the Friends' Ambulance Unit opened a civil hospital in December, 1914, in the unbombarded part of an empty lunatic asylum, and maintained it during the regular bombardments of the town until the following spring, when the city was entirely evacuated of civilians. With a view to stamping out typhoid and creating an immune area, a number of inoculation stations had been established, the population notified by handbills, wall posters and the town crier, house to house visitation had been undertaken by sanitary search parties, and upwards of 20,000 persons had been inoculated.

Just as among the villages of the Marne, the English Quakers and conscientious objectors under the Friends' War Victims Relief Committee have carried on for three years a sustained work of relief and reconstruction, so here at Ypres the volunteers of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, in addition to their hospital at Dunkirk and their extensive work in convoying French and English wounded by motor and hospital trains, "lived and worked as pioneers, the willing servants of all in need, and the happy colleagues of the municipal and ecclesiastical authorities in caring for the people of that distressed town." Out of the search parties of the typhoid epidemic days grew a permanent Civilian, Health and Sanitary Section of the Friends' Unit, with headquarters in a farmhouse close up in the British war zone. Its four inspectors cooperate with the sanitary sections of the army on the civil side and serve as volunteer health inspectors under the Belgian ministry of the interior. Their work takes them among the farmers and workers on the land, among the keepers

of *estaminets* and small shops which line the roadside near camps and billets, and among the refugees, some of whom are fairly well housed, and some, possibly well to do before the war, live in shanties knocked together out of packing cases.

Each inspector is assigned to a given area, and carries out a house to house search for centers of infection. He isolates cases, disinfects dwellings, and generally helps to improve the water supply and sanitary standards. The inspectors report conditions among the people in the British sector better than at any time during the last three years, the farmers profiting by the high prices and the shopkeepers having good custom from the English soldiers; but there are frequent cases of acute distress. Belgian farm laborers were exempted from military duty provided they continued to work on the farms on which they had been employed. Those with large families, unable to seek better wages, and with the cost of living such as has never been known before in this region, have been caught in the pinch of a type of peonage. Soldiers' families are as badly off or worse. When a house is knocked to pieces or burned, a breadwinner is taken sick or is killed, or some other war-time emergency arises, still other households are thrown into want.

In the French and Belgian sectors there is even greater need. Because of the lower pay of army men and the consequent leanness of shopkeeping, conditions are less prosperous.

The American Red Cross, on the first day of January, 1918, placed an emergency fund in the hands of the two commissaires d'Arrondissement left in free Belgium: Jean Steyaert, commissaire of Furnes, and Jean Biebuyck, commissaire of Ypres. They know their people and will administer this relief fund for the Red Cross.

In 1915 Dr. Rulot, head of the Health Service of the Ministry of the Interior, organized what were called infant consultations, or clinics. These are now carried on by the Service de Santé, assisted by two committees, one Belgian under Madame Hymans and Madame Van de Vyvere, and one English under the Duchess of Norfolk and Madame Harden-Guest. Union with these committees has been effected by the American Red Cross, clothing and milk supplied and a portable barrack shipped for a small baby hospital at La Panne. A Red Cross woman has been dispatched from America to engage in the clinical work.

With the Service de Santé of the Belgian government and with the health inspectors of the Society of Friends, the Red Cross has undertaken in the English army sector a program for distributing milk to children in areas where it is impossible for the mothers to

buy milk, and for distributing milk and eggs to people who have incipient cases of tuberculosis.

Mothers who take advantage of the milk distribution must have their children examined once each week. Those who accept the milk and egg service must cooperate in ways the health inspectors prescribe. The great majority of the people will be able to pay for the milk. Those unable will be given the service free.

The Service de Santé will give direction, the trained workers of the Society of Friends will constitute the personnel, the American Red Cross will finance the undertaking and probably put a child specialist or two into the service as needed.

Just as the Friends in France have put their experience and cooperation at the service of the Red Cross in the liberated districts, so here, the alliance between their society and the American Red Cross will afford a framework for helping the neighboring civilian population of occupied Belgium when the Germans retire. Not only prompt provisioning, but medical care and relief, disinfection and sanitation will be greatly needed in a country which has been completely disorganized by the sweep of battle and the presence of invaders.

### A Hospital Close In

AT THE rear of an old estate in the very heart of the British war zone is the Countess Van den Steen's hospital for civilians. The countess is a nurse who carried on a hospital in her home which, with its Belgian wounded, fell into the hands of the Germans at the time of the invasion. Later she got out of occupied Belgium, cooperated with the Friends in the work of Ypres, and was appointed directress of the Hospital Elizabeth at Poperinghe. This also had to be evacuated because of bombardment, and is now continued as a first aid station for civilians. So, in one sense, the circle of tents and barracks which make up the New Hospital Elizabeth at Proven is the heir of two other institutions which have gone down in the fortunes of war; and even its tenure here is uncertain, in a region where bombing is a matter of daily occurrence and the roads swarm with military activities. The hospital was established at a time when the neighborhood was fairly clear of military establishments, but now storage places, army hospitals, stables and camps shoulder it on every hand, and the big cross in its central grass-plot, made of the tin cans and biscuit boxes and painted red is, after all, only a tiny splotch in the landscape. Some of the wards are given up to Belgian soldiers, others to wounded civilians, others to old folk and to women and children.



Near the stove in the center of one, on a November day, sat three old women, in soft slippers and wrapped in shawls. Two were sisters, refugees from Poperinghe; one of them ninety-four, the other eighty-two and wounded in the shoulder. Nearby was a younger, fresh looking peasant who had been hit by shrapnel and had a fractured femur and wounds all over her body. Next was a townswoman who had been visiting a "delousing station"—for refugees living near the front suffer from the common affliction. The "delousing station" was hit by a shell and in the process of escaping from lesser enemies this woman was seriously injured by a greater. One farmer's wife who had her leg fractured by shell fire, a second sick of a liver complaint (for the ordinary ills of ordinary times are no respecters of war), and two others with fractured arms, filled neighboring beds.

In the children's row lay two or three boys who had been run over by motor vehicles. The story was told of one child of six, whose parents were killed when their house was hit and whose sight was put out by the wind of the shell. It had "fairly pulled his eyes out of the sockets."

The men's ward bore evidence of the hazards of unheralded civilian service in the war zone. There had been two postmen in Poperinghe; one was killed, and his fellow lay here with his skull fractured by shell fire. A policeman stood by the side of his bed at attention. He had had both arms and both legs fractured by a bomb at Vlamerting.

It is shell fire that causes the damage and suffering in these towns up near the front; it is bombing which gives the coast towns trouble; and it is the interlacing of civilian life with military operations which brings both home to the people of the country. They suffer also from those new savageries of war which set off this conflict from all its predecessors. When, recently, the Germans were using gas shells against the British forces, a father, a mother and all their children were brought in, victims of the "mustard gas" which burns the eyes and tissues and leads to pneumonia. Several died. When a neighborhood becomes altogether untenable, it is evacuated of civilians by the authorities. Earlier in the war the church at Armentières burned, and mass was held thereafter in a barn. It is the custom for the men to sit on one side of the church and the women on the other. A shell burst in the midst of service in the barn, and fifteen women were wounded, some of them dying in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. This was perhaps the night when twenty-eight cases were brought in from this one town, which has since been evacuated.

So the census of tent and barrack wards ran—country folk, town folk—the casualties of camp life which had overwhelmed their accus-

tomed walks, persisting everyday ills, and the bloody intrusions of unremitting battle; and in the midst of it this courageous work of succor, month after month, to which the Red Cross, through gifts of money, hospital supplies and ambulances, has brought new resources.

### The Children's Colonies

THE LAST civilian to leave Ypres, the outstanding figure in its tragedy, if not in that of this whole fragment of Belgium, is the Abbé Delaere, curé of the church of St. Pierre. The children's colonies at Wisques and Wizernes, of which he is the head, are the third outgrowth of the early work at Ypres to which reference has been made. They are two of the school colonies promoted by the Belgian Department of the Interior under a special administrative bureau, known as the Colonies Scolaires. You may find these colonies scattered through northern France, in parish halls, as at Wizernes, in old monasteries, as at Wisques, in substantial farm buildings as at Sassetot, in vacant villas as at Malaise, and in seaside resort buildings as at Cayeux and at Pt. Dalles, in the little valleys that cut the cliffs between Calais and Savre. You may see their wards of a Sunday, washed and brushed and marching to the village churches; or in a long dining room eyeing their bowls of soup ruefully, as they are asked to rise and give the visitors a song; or out in a play yard, the least tame newcomers among them giving the sisters' fresh problems in discipline.

The first of these children's shelters were set up as early as 1915. Now there are fifty-eight of them, caring for 6,000 children from free Belgium and 2,000 from occupied Belgium. They have had to develop on slender resources, both because they fall outside the war expenditures permitted the Belgian government, and because such well-to-do Belgians as are free are exiles and there has been no new group growing prosperous out of war industries. The colonies have benefited most from the Belgian Relief Fund, raised in England at the beginning of the war by Major Cordon and the Belgian minister. An example of the thrift with which they are administered is the fact that of the last three hundred refugee children from Flanders, each brought a pair of sheets. If their homes were shelled, it was argued, the sheets would be lost, and three hundred pairs of sheets saved the colonies a good deal of expense.

With but one exception, they have been established in the country where the cost of food is lower and where they can have gardens. Last summer they were able to sell some of their produce, and, even with all the new children coming in this winter, they have enough

potatoes to tide them over. The housekeepers and teachers in charge are for the most part nuns, chosen both because they are themselves refugees (thus one hand was made to wash the other), and because, with their vow of poverty, they could manage on little. They do not light the lights before it is quite necessary; they are careful of soap and food; they do not break off twelve inches of thread to sew something when six will do. So their stewardship was described by Madame Carton de Wiart, wife of the Belgian minister of justice, who is their informal supervisor, a woman known to American social workers through her action in introducing the juvenile court into Belgium before the war, and more recently for her translation into French of Brand Whitlock's book, *Forty Years of It*. Madame Carton de Wiart was a co-laborer with the American minister in his work for the people of Brussels following the invasion, and was thrust into prison by the Germans for communicating with her husband. It was while in prison that she translated the autobiographical chapters of the American minister of Belgium. Now they are again working together for Belgian war sufferers at Havre.

The school facilities in some of the colonies are pitifully meager; the dormitories are overcrowded and unheated; some of the flimsy hotel buildings must be bitterly cold this winter, for they were shivery places in November; in one at least, a storm carried the sea up into the dining room. But even if hands have to be rubbed to keep them from being blue all the time, there is security and warmth of heart. Little Jules Prinzie, born on a farm at Noordschoote, where the armies met in 1914—Jules, who with his parents, his brother and his two little sisters, fled to a neighboring township only to have a bomb fall on the house where they lay hidden, killing his mother and two sisters, and destroying the sight of his own right eye, writes in his copy book at the Dames Blanches at Yvetot. "I am very happy. Now I have already learned how to read a little, and I am able to write my sad story myself."

The sisters in charge send in weekly reports, giving the menus served, clothing needs, etc. Card indices are kept of all children, and as the younger French doctors are at the front, a medical examiner goes from school to school. Up to the fall of 1917, a quarantine station for newcomers was maintained at St. Idelsbad, but it had to be given up because of shell fire. Now it is, perhaps, less needed, as the children are coming out in larger groups because of that same shell fire, and an effort is made to keep those of the same neighborhood together. Not only is it necessary to get the children away because of the physical dangers, but there are the moral hazards of the front, where they often go about, selling boot-ties, oranges,

etc., to the soldiers, and see and hear that which does them harm. Conditions are no worse than those of other countries similarly placed, but it is well to get the little girls out. Many of the children are, of course, very nervous when they come. They have had to sleep with the noise of the guns going on and the aeroplanes roaring overhead. When a thunderstorm passed over one colony, some of the children dived under the beds—human nature is much the same the world over—and others, remembering what they had been taught, ran for the cellar.

The American Red Cross, which has made special gifts ranging from cows to barrack-infirmaries and playrooms in various colonies, has made its larger contributions to two special phases of the children's movement: one, the provision of shelter in Belgium for children whose parents are loath to be altogether separated from them; the other, provision for children from occupied Belgium. Both phases have been the special concern of the queen.

Among the households which have held their ground on Belgian soil has been that of King Albert and Queen Elizabeth, who have shared the fortunes of their people within range of the guns. This has been no small factor in the spirit with which free Belgium has borne the long drag of forty months of war.

At Vinckem is the Queen's School—land as flat as a table; barracks, the customary uncompromising army design; walls, plain boards. Yet there is a spirit of youth and a sort of Kate-Greenaway look to it, with its curtains gathered back from the windows, with shrubs and gay garden plots easing the right angles of the duck-boards that run from door to door, and with five hundred children romping in the play space back of the infirmary, given by a New Jersey town. They are as unconscious, all of them, of observation balloons and biplanes and the clatter of anti-aircraft guns along the sky line, as an ordinary school yard would be of a distant freight train. The colony is set off amid fields and has gone unscathed and unattacked from the first. On a visiting day you may see men and women who have walked or driven over from the more exposed districts along the front. They are parents, making friends with their children. Often the father wears the brown-green uniform of the Belgian army.

The school has admitted boys and girls between the ages of four and thirteen years, but was unable to receive younger children until the American Red Cross made it a gift of a babies' pavilion. These little ones—one hundred of them—could not well be taken into France without their mothers, and had been especially subject to the prevailing hardships.

Early in the fall of 1917 the Red Cross made a grant to the Colonies Scolaires for a second large colony on Belgian soil, in response to the need described in the report quoted on page three. The site first selected by the Belgian authorities proved too close to military operations and in November and December it was struck by bombs and shells. The erection of the buildings was delayed and in December the Red Cross shipped five large barracks to Cayeaux-sur-mer, in France, to enlarge the school there and care for the children who needed to be moved before the new institution would be ready.

Ground has been broken for the new colony near Leysele, just at the frontier of France and not far from the Queen's School. Here the Red Cross will build, equip, staff and maintain a colony for six hundred children.

Two colonies of Belgian children in Switzerland, instituted by the Rockefeller War Relief Commission, have also been placed under the management of the Red Cross Department for Belgium, the Foundation continuing to bear the cost of providing for the four hundred children cared for.

Recent reports which have reached the Belgian authorities of conditions in occupied Belgium—showing a shortage of food, the spread of tuberculosis and infant mortality, and the extreme poverty of many of the people—have given urgency to the project, which must be credited to the generous thought of the queen, of bringing children in colonies to France. Here the American Red Cross has taken the lead, and the first large company of five hundred and seventy children was brought through Switzerland in mid-November. The children are selected by the Comité National de Secours et Alimentation, the Belgian organization which administers the distribution of provisions gathered by the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Many are from the families of working people from the industrial district about Liège. With the consent of the German authorities, they were taken by special train to the Swiss border. There the German women who had accompanied them turned them over to a Swiss committee, which, at the French border, entrusted them to their new guardians. The story is told that one boy almost smothered the Belgian officer who had come to meet them. His mother had told him to embrace the first man he saw in the uniform of his homeland, and with a jump and a bear-hug he carried her commission out to the letter.

The destination of these youngsters was the Carthusian monastery at Le Glandier, one of the branch institutions set up by the parent house at Grenoble, famous for its Chartreuse liqueur. Mon-

astery, liqueur, and all were taken over by the French government when the religious orders were disestablished in 1902. The monastery consists of a group of forty buildings, built round a close. Though the original monastery dates back to 1219, it has been burned and rebuilt several times; the present structure has the quaintness of its predecessors, but it also has running water in every room and electric lights. Such equipment especially adapts it to its present novel occupancy, which brings the laughter of children and the ministrations of teachers and nurses from overseas into inner gardens which, in the old time, were barred to woman. The village institution—for such it is—permitting of modern classification of its charges in its buildings, is set in a charming valley. The gates are reached through an avenue of trees, and when the camionloads of children, after their long days and nights on the train and their many months of hard experience, were emptied, and the little folks came up the gravel way, it was as if they were tiny argonauts who had at length attained their golden fleece.

The colony at Le Glandier is under the management of Capt. Charles Graux, special agent of Queen Elizabeth. With young American play leaders and nurses, in addition to the Belgian sisters, and with visiting specialists from the Children's Bureau of the American Red Cross at Paris, it should prove not only the most picturesque, but the most progressive of the children's colonies. Its numbers will be brought up to one thousand, and the American Red Cross department for Belgium has already plans completed, money appropriated, and sites selected (châteaux and monasteries in the hill-country of Auvergne) to care for a second thousand.

These, then, are the newest chapters in the story of succor of Belgian children, which began with the many out-reachings of help from Holland and France, England and America, in the fall of 1914—such work as that of the Franco-American Society for the Protection of Children of the Frontier, the Friends' Unit, the Aide Civile Belge at Ypres, and the enterprise of Georgia Fyfe, who, largely on funds subscribed in Scotland, has long maintained two hospices, a children's home and a maternity hospital where mothers have the satisfaction of bearing their children on Belgian soil.

In addition to its children's colonies, the Belgian Ministry of the Interior itself carried on a home for the aged, infirm and sick near Montreuil, to which such classes among the refugees are sent; the home for the aged at LaPanne already described; a sanatorium for the tuberculous at Chanay; a maternity hospital at Rousbrugge, and a general hospital for infectious diseases at St. Isabel. But its most interesting activities are bound up in its *Comités des Réfugiés*.

## IV.—A People in Exile

**T**HERE are perhaps 250,000 Belgian refugees in France, and the French government is their outstanding benefactor. Since October, 1914, the Belgian families in France who are in destitute circumstances have received the same allowance (*allocation*) from the French government as the French refugees. The census made by the French Ministry of the Interior last September showed that they numbered 160,174. Many of these are of course the families of Belgian soldiers.

The regular pay of the common soldier in the Belgian army is thirty centimes (less than six cents) a day, board and keep. When he goes to the firing line, he gets one franc a day—by current exchange, seventeen cents; when he is assigned to a munitions factory, he is paid three to four francs a day, and, if he finds food and lodging for himself, he receives two francs extra.

A soldier's wife, as a refugee in France, receives, under the recently increased schedule, one and one-half francs a day for herself from the French government, and one franc a day for every child. In addition, she gets from the Belgian government a "lodging indemnity" of thirty francs a month for herself and ten francs for each child, if they live in one of the larger cities. If they live in a village, the rates are twenty any seven-fifty francs respectively. The French government gives its refugee allowance only to such families as it believes to be in need. If the wife of the Belgian soldier does not get French aid, she receives from the Belgian government one and one-quarter francs for herself and fifty centimes a day for each child, but no "lodging indemnity." The families of Belgian soldiers living in free Belgium get this Belgian military allowance. The families of Belgian refugees who are not soldiers' families get the French allowance in France, if they are in need, but of course no "lodging indemnity." If they are resident in Belgium they may get a refugee allowance from the Belgian government, but this is only granted to very poor families. The maximum is one and one-half francs for adults and one franc for children.

This, then, outside of their own power to earn, is the economic basis of family life among the Belgians in exile. In general it may be said that the refugees who are capable of working find work readily, but when there are old parents or babies or sickness, or some accident in the general run of life occurs, these things create

cases of need, just as they do in normal times; only there are inferior reserves and resources on the part of the people themselves to meet them. Right here government aid, the Belgians' habit of cooperative action, and the work of voluntary agencies enter in. What the Red Cross is attempting to do, will be better understood if we set down something of what in three years has already been done for the Belgian refugees, and what they have done for themselves.

When in 1914, the Belgians came down at the time of the invasion, they were cared for by the various French communities into which they fled, or were distributed by the French at the same time and in the same way that French fugitives were cared for. In addition, committees of the more resourceful refugees were formed by the Belgian consuls in different cities, to look after their compatriots. Later a Central Committee was instituted at Havre under the Belgian Ministry of the Interior, and set about organizing further local committees wherever Belgians had gathered. The church is a state institution in Belgium, and the relations of church and state fall under the Ministry of Justice. The priests were mobilized and, in cooperation with the central committee, were sent to points in France where they could look after refugees, act as correspondents, start schools, give confession in Flemish and hold services in French churches. The Ministry of Sciences and Arts started schools for children in the refugee centers. The War Office was later called upon for older soldiers who had been teachers, so that they could be sent out and the boys and girls get their national training and be taught in the Flemish tongue. The fact that their parents are with them of course helps in looking after the girls who get work in the munitions factories and ateliers, but then young folks' need for more normal and racial environment, with the customs and safeguards of the home community, is keenly felt by the older generation.

One of the baffling problems of the early period was that of re-assembling families which had been broken up. Husbands were separated from their wives, mothers from their children. Disrupted families were scattered throughout France, England and Holland. A special service was organized, and refugees were brought in touch with one another through the newspapers, through a widespread system of postcards, through the consuls, the French authorities and the local Belgian committees. Even now the committee still gets letters asking where members of families may be found; and in a single month in the autumn of 1917 sent out a thousand pieces of mail bearing on such cases.

Today, at its headquarters, the Central Committee has a record



of practically every Belgian refugee in France—the card catalog of a nation in exile. Questionnaires were sent out calling for each man's name, age, former location in Belgium and place of residence in France. Those are the basis of four complete files which are not only of current use but will be invaluable in the period of return and rehabilitation. An effort has been made to bring together refugees from the same districts in Belgium: a difficult undertaking, as the French government had already allotted them to the different departments according to local conditions and resources. Automatically, however, certain natural groupings have asserted themselves; for example, many of the fugitives from Ypres are at Paris-Plage.

On the industrial side, more definite results have been obtained. One of the first activities instituted by the Central Committee was a labor exchange, which set out to discover the vocations of the refugees and make them known to French employers. This has resulted in a considerable shifting about—miners to mines, farmers to farms, industrial workers to the factories. Large numbers of Belgian metal workers, for instance, are to be found in the great mills at St. Etienne, in the center of France. Many from Liège were gun-makers and have found work at their old trade. A branch mine-workers' office was established in Paris. Altogether some 18,000 to 20,000 wage-earners have been so placed, and perhaps 10,000 peasants on farms in Normandy.

### Social Adjustments

THE FLEMISH people do not understand the French language; they have often had to grope their way; but they have a sure instinct for the land. It has been remarkable how they have gathered in districts where the soil is good and where there has been need of their labor. The Belgian Ministry of Agriculture has founded a special service for farm workers, and last summer over 60,000 acres were cultivated by Belgians in France to supply vegetables for the use of the Belgian army. As already noted, invalided soldiers and soldiers on leave whose families are in occupied Belgium, and who welcome a chance to earn money, were enlisted in this work. The Central Committee has organized farm placement also, adopting the rules of the French Agricultural Association as to rates of pay and preparing contract forms in duplicate, in Flemish and French, for lease takers. Sometimes those who had money have bought land, and these may remain after the war; but the Belgian leaders believe the national feeling to be so strong that most of them will go back, and say that all will want to end their days in their own country.

At some stages of the war there has been feeling against the Belgian refugees in some parts of France, notably in Paris. Human nature does not change, and Flemish lawbreakers have been put in prison in France for civil offenses. The stirring espousal of the Belgian cause had a natural, but essentially false, emotional bottom, in that Belgium was for the moment looked upon as a nation of martyrs, instead of a nation of all sorts and conditions of men. And it is hard to be in the companionship of martyrs for forty months running. People forget how their own fellow townsmen, the people of their own block or apartment house, or, for that matter, their own families, would have measured up in similar circumstances of strange environment and alien manners; and the traits of groups or individuals were ascribed to the whole nation. In especial, the charge was made that the Belgian men were idling on the government bounty. Whatever friction there was in the earlier stages of the war could probably be traced back to the fact, not that they were idle, but that sometimes they set to work in places left vacant by Frenchmen who had gone to the front. This situation improved with the passage of the Belgian obligatory service laws, the first in 1915, and the second, calling out all men from eighteen to forty, in 1916.

But in common with all fugitives, Belgian families suffered through the wiping out of their personal capital, from clothes and household furniture to farms and livestock and the working associations of a lifetime. Beyond that, they had lost many of their breadwinners, or their breadwinners were at the war. In addition to the central committees organized in each of the countries which sheltered Belgians (there are roughly 180,000 in England, 80,000 in Holland, and 30,000 in Switzerland), an *Oeuvre d'Assistance Temporaire aux Réfugiés Belges* was appointed in each country by the minister of the interior, that for France being located at Paris under the chairmanship of Madame Beyens, wife of the former minister of foreign affairs. This agency answers appeals for help which come to it from local committees and correspondents scattered all over France.

The refugees who come out of free Belgium today, driven by the increased shell fire and bombing of recent months, do not want to go far into France, but would rather stay in these nearby provinces from which they can return at the first opportunity. When the English took over the sector at Nieuport from the French last spring, they bombarded the German positions in the dunes, and the Germans answered in heaped-up measure. The activity of the second army sector at Paeschendaele also made new areas untenable. In

general, numerous villages were needed for the British troops, and these were evacuated. So throughout the summer of 1917, there was this new refugee problem, although the Belgian government has been careful not to encourage the coming of refugees from free Belgium to add to the burden already borne by the French, and to find scant accommodation in the already overtaxed towns. When a man writes to the Central Committee at Havre that he wants to come there, he is advised to leave his family behind, come along, and first find work and quarters. Usually, and naturally, it turns out the other way. The whole family arrives together. On one day in mid-November, when there was not a room to be had in Havre, three such families came to the office. In one, there were eleven members; in the second, eight; in the third, seven. They could stay at the police station from seven in the evening until six the next morning, then were turned on the street again. They had spent the night before in a cold drizzle on seats in the park.

Nor is the situation faced by the resident refugee easy. In the department of Pas-de-Calais, for example, the Belgian men work as agricultural laborers, as army cooks and on the roads; the women, in the manufacture of pens at Boulogne, of lace at Calais and in all sorts of domestic operations. Yet the greater number of both French and Belgian refugees have to be given fuel in the winter, and other forms of assistance. The prefect has a departmental committee which ameliorates their condition, and cooperates with local relief committees. The mayor of each commune requisitions the money needed for special relief from the prefect; the prefect in turn calls on the national French government. The individual gets an order and takes it to merchants to get provisions, coal, etc. "Is this enough?" the prefect was asked. "Never," he said.

### In the Industrial Cities

IT IS, however, in the industrial cities now become army transport and munition centers, such as Havre and Rouen, that the most serious conditions present themselves. And here the Belgians face problems which are not the common problems of all refugees but are their especial lot. The French moratorium on rents did not apply to refugees and the newcomers, French and Belgian alike, were in many cases mulcted by landlords to make up for what was lost on their old tenants. Beyond that, it is a common practice for many French landlords to refuse to harbor large families; and the Belgians have large families. The number of lodgings open to them was thus further cut down, with consequent exploitation.

Havre, for instance, is a big port and has many transients; facts which make it a difficult place, at best, for family life. One of the real needs at Havre is protected recreation places for the refugee girls. Thousands of troops must be housed in passage. The moving here of the Belgian government, and French and British war work, have brought hundreds of clerks with their families. The French and Belgian fugitives have come in addition. Altogether there are 40,000 or 50,000 more people in Havre than before the war, and it is stated that not a single house has been built. Families with three and four children are living in one room and rents, high before, were increased last fall from twenty and thirty francs a month to forty and fifty francs. Often these rooms are without adequate light and air, and are provided with the crudest sanitary appliances. The refugees are nearly all village people, used to a garden about the house. Not only are the cramped quarters at odds with their instincts, but their habits of scrupulous cleanliness are outraged at every turn by the squalor of the tenements and their accumulated filth. Health conditions are deplorable.

The Belgians have eased the housing situation for some scores of families by turning to use a group of barracks, set up in a competition on a vacant plot; and have taken over and tenanted some excellent unused modern tenements erected for the civil servants of the port. Similarly, thanks to La Famille Belge, a cooperative society along the lines which have developed so extensively in the low countries, they have attempted to lower the ruinous cost of living through a string of eight stores selling drygoods, meats and provisions. But their resources have been strictly limited, a fact illustrated by nothing so forcibly as by the lack of any civilian hospital of their own. While the healthy refugees have had a far from enviable situation, that of the sick has been tragic. The Belgian civilian is not admitted into Belgian military hospitals; and the refugees have gone, if anywhere, to French hospitals, where, Flemings they mostly are, they are not understood and cannot understand.

As its first large contribution to health needs, therefore, the Commission for Belgium of the American Red Cross is giving a 250-bed civil hospital to the Belgian colony at Havre, which will be managed by the Ministry of the Interior and in the staff of which Red Cross personnel will be included. The Red Cross Commission entered upon the New Year with two newly organized bureaux, a Bureau of Health Service and a Bureau for Refugees. Health centers, with district nursing, will be instituted at Havre and Rouen, and the program includes clinics where mothers can bring their babies, and *pouponnières* where abandoned infants can be sheltered. To

this end an Oeuvre de la Protection de la Première Enfance Belge has been organized, made up of leading Belgian women.

This is one step in the difficult task attempted by the Red Cross commission to make its assistance the occasion for correlating all the official and semi-official social work which has been going forward. The older *oeuvres* and the new ones just organized become sections of a new union or federation of social agencies, under the minister of the interior. Thus there is a section for clothing distribution for all of France under Madame Henry Carton de Wiart. There is a section for layettes for all of France under Madame Louise Helleputte. There is a section for families of Belgian soldiers, under Minister Vandervelde. There is a section for other emergency relief made up of the assistance temporaire under the Baronne Beyens. There is a section for mothers and children just described. One for housing, made up of representatives of the King Albert Fund and Ministry of Public Works; another for the new Municipal Hospital, and one for tuberculosis. The registration bureau and placing department of the Central Committee on Refugees, under the presidency of the Minister Helleputte, will be coordinated with this federated system. Twice each month there will be meetings of delegates of all these works with representatives of the American Red Cross and with the minister of the interior, Paul Berryer, who has organized many of the activities just described.

Through a system of traveling inspection, the American Red Cross will keep in touch with governmental and private agencies, French and Belgian. In general its policy is to avoid disorganizing or upsetting what has been done, to leave the responsibility for care of the refugees where it now lies, neither to supplant nor dominate existing agencies, nor yet to encourage them to rely upon the Red Cross in any way which might tempt them to relax their efforts; but rather to strengthen them and back them up where special needs exist, and to stimulate work which has gone unrecognized or dragged because adequate means were lacking. In other words, in this and throughout the work of the commission, to make American help a force for holding the Belgian people together, and for conserving their national spirit and sense of responsibility.

### Reconstruction

WHAT IS true of the health work is true also of the other outstanding contribution of the Red Cross to the improvement of living conditions in the temporary Belgian capital—a gift of 600,000 francs for the construction of a temporary village of houses for refugees near Havre. The houses are being planned and built by the Fonds

du Roi Albert, a semi-governmental body created to execute this very project of promoting provisional rebuilding, while laying plans for permanent reconstruction. The houses will be managed by the Ministry of the Interior and title will be vested in the Belgian government. Houses will be so built that they can be transported to Belgium when the war ends.

The King Albert fund was created by decree in September, 1916, and to it the government made a grant of ten million francs only to be apprised of the fact that it lay outside the scope of war purposes for which the funds advanced to Belgium in the form of loans could be employed. The project of a temporary village near Havre was held up for a year, and the American Red Cross, in stepping into the breach and in helping meet the urgent local need of dwellings for refugees, is thus making the initial practical move toward those ardent plans of reconstruction which fire every branch of the exiled government at Havre.

The purpose of the fund itself is to prepare a program, gather material, and be ready to act quickly when the opportunity comes, on a procedure which bears a modest but practical relation to the larger tasks which will confront the nation. This is to move into a devastated town, and set up a cluster of temporary dwellings; to house in these dwellings the artisans needed to lay drains, put in a water supply, build up the levees along the canal, erect the community buildings, houses and shops requisite to serving the next comers; and thus, by a process of working up from a nucleus, ultimately to rebuild the town. The Belgian government has some small independent sources of revenue and from these sources it has appropriated to the King Albert fund lesser amounts than the original grant. These sums have enabled the engineers not only to go ahead with drafting plans, but to order the construction of a large number of portable houses in Holland, to be held at accessible points on the border, and to set going the roster of the needed men. To quote a prophetic paragraph from the prospectus of the fund:

"It is impossible even now to prepare dwelling houses—if only temporary structures—to shelter the exiles on their return, and to install them very rapidly to keep pace with the liberation of the country; whole villages, with town hall, church and school, will restore them to civil and religious life without any depressing period of waiting, just as the house will give them back the "home" and their former habits of life."

The commissioner for Belgium is a member of the committee of management of the King Albert fund, and at this point the work of the Red Cross reaches out toward the new day of a released nation, made up of free communities and free homes.

## V. War Time Conservation

**T**O help conserve the free people of that future, the American Red Cross has, in the course of three swift months, if we break into its elements the work which has been described:

Sought to conserve the sick and wounded among the defenders of Belgium, by its grant of half a million francs to the Belgian Red Cross toward the new Ocean Hospital to take the place of the bombed buildings at La Panne; by its gift of mobile operating rooms and X-ray cars, hospital supplies, and equipment to the Service de Santé.

Sought to conserve the health and spirit of the troops, by its grant for canteens and recreation halls, baths and rest rooms; by its support of a program for an annual holiday of ten days outside the army zone for every Belgian soldier who cannot rejoin his own family or friends; by its social supplements to the rigid war budget of the army;

Sought to conserve the households which are standing their ground, maintaining the culture of the soil and the fabric of self-government in the war zone, by its relief fund and the proposed expansion of sanitary and social work and milk distribution to all the army sectors; by its aid to the field hospital which ministers to those who fall in this sturdy civilian resistance to invasion; by its removal to safety of the home for the aged and infirm which has sheltered the weakest members of such households;

Sought to conserve the coming generation among these people, by its backing of the existing three score children colonies; by its pavilion for babies at the Queen's Home, enabling the mothers of the war zone to safeguard their youngest offspring; by its gift of a new colony which will double the provision for children on Belgian soil;

Sought to conserve the children of occupied Belgium, by its monastery village at Le Glandier for 1,000 little refugees from the neediest homes of the lowlands; by its plans for another thousand in Auvergne;

Sought to conserve the Belgian refugees of the neighboring French provinces, by its civil hospital and housing enterprise at Havre; by its health center there and at Rouen; by its tuberculosis program, and its strengthening and correlating of government and private agencies close to the needs of the people in exile;

Sought to conserve home and community life whenever military

developments throw open any new area, by its warehouses and stores and scheme for rapid distribution; by its framework for cooperative action in emergent relief and sanitation to prevent distress in the period of transition; by its temporary village as an initial step toward reconstruction.

However large the area falling within the Red Cross Department for Belgium may become, it has been small enough at this stage for its needs to be visualized, its forces for succor and rehabilitation grasped; its leaders known in friendly intimacy and respect. The Red Cross has entered upon a situation of long standing, reinforcing and not disrupting it, strengthening that affection for the American people which is characteristic of the Belgians and which has manifested itself from the first. More than perhaps any other field of Red Cross work in Europe, this in Belgium has lent itself to careful scrutiny in advance; and in common with the work now under way along the entire Western front, purpose has crystallized in terms of execution.

HOTEL DES RÉGATES  
SAINTE-ADRESSE, FRANCE  
JANUARY 10, 1918