

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
CHILD FEEDING MISSION. - BERLIN.

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A DAY IN BERLIN.
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From the palatial offices in Dorotheenstrasse 2, furnished to the Kinderhilfsmission of the American Friends Service Committee through the courtesy of the German Government, we start out to visit the feeding which is being done in Berlin. Of course it is manifestly impossible to visit all or any large number of the eight hundred feeding centres in the city and suburbs, but we have been promised that we shall have a fair sample. Our conveyance is a Ford car, an International auto, for it was born in Detroit, spent its youth in relief work in France, and now bids fair to die very soon, in Germany. It is adorned at the sides and in front with the star which symbolizes Friends Service, and driven by one of our most enthusiastic friends, himself formerly a chauffeur in the family of one of the late Ambassadors from Germany to the United States. There seems to be no limit to the carrying capacity of the car, so in we all climb and off we go to visit school feeding.

The first stop is at the Gruener Weg (Green Road), a name which doubtless has historical significance, but which certainly has none now, for the street is dull and ugly. Once inside the quadrangle of the school, however, - every German school is built around a large court, - there are trees and an open space for children to play. Here in the yard in Summer, and in the nearby gymnasium in Winter, may be seen crowds of little girls eagerly eating the good American food. All the children in the school have been examined - no light task in itself - and at the present time only those are being fed who are certified to be in a dangerous state of under-nourishment. They are kindly, friendly children; both those who are getting the food and their less - or more - fortunate friends greet us with pretty courtesies as we enter and a slender child runs to open the gate into the inner yard for us.

Here there is a smiling Rector (principal) who explains with joy that many of his children are in a much better condition than they were before the feeding commenced. He exhibits with pride two small maidens who have improved so much that they have been ruled out of the feeding. The children come with rather rueful faces to meet us.

Here in the Gruener Weg they are feeding seventy-five children, and the teacher tells us with an eager face that if permitted they can feed two more, as there is an average absence of two among the children on the list. This is a Mittelschule, or school for girls of the middle classes, and the children are exceedingly bright, attractive girls.

Directly around the corner in the Markusstrasse are two other schools in one quadrangle. To the right is a boys' school where



They come to the feeding centers through the rain in bare feet and with few umbrellas. This is in summer time. In December in some Districts we have seen children running through the snow barefoot to the feeding place.



They stand in line outside the door, entrance-cards in hands and spoon and jug ready.

ninety little urchins are being fed in the gymnasium; such an eager hungry lot of boys. By request the Rector calls out all those in the group who are six and seven years old. We make a mental note.

"Most of them look about five". He calls those of eight, of nine, of ten, - and so on to fourteen. On an average the children are about two years behind in physical development. Those who are tall enough are much too thin, and the color of all the young faces is very bad.

We call out at random eight boys from the line. "What did you have for breakfast?" we ask. Of the eight, four reply:

"Nothing yet." That is an answer that we get very many times in Germany when we ask what a child has had for a meal that should be an hour or two past.

"Noch nichts", they say. (Nothing yet). The four who had breakfast say that they had sandwiches for that meal.

"How many?" we ask. Three had only one,

"And made of what?" - "Bread and lard", or "bread and margarine".

"And what did you have for dinner yesterday?" we ask. One boy had potatoes, a second - carrots, a third again - carrots, and so on. Of the eight one asserts with pride that he had tinned meat. The others, after the manner of boys, jeer at him as a "plutocrat".

The teacher hastens to explain:

"It is a great temptation to parents," he says, "if one child is going to get this good food, and there really is not enough to go around, to give all that there is to the others. Of course, in many cases, such as this one (laying his hand on the head of a small boy beside him) there is no work at home, and consequently there was actually no breakfast".

"How many of your children should be fed" we ask him. He shrugs expressively.

"I have eight hundred children in my school. We are now feeding ninety. At least half of my children are really underfed. I think all are hungry. I am often so myself", he replies, somewhat humorously.

Across the yard is a school for deaf-mute children, a class of defectives which has much increased during the war. Here, too, the children are eating the food with signs of evident satisfaction. Very naturally, we have some difficulty in communicating with these children speaking German to a deaf mute is not the easiest thing in the world to an American. But their looks and their actions show their need and their appreciation.

The faithful Ford now carries us to one of the great kitchens, where our food for the city of Berlin is cooked. It is in



Girls of 12 - 14 - -, a slender aesthetic type. The former round, rosy Gretchen has disappeared.



Berlin boys getting their food in an outdoor feeding room.

the Tresckowstrasse, is a building erected in 1892 by the city as a market hall. In 1916, when most of the women of the country had gone into industry, and so were unable to care for their families properly, the municipality installed here a great kitchen, one of many which were instituted throughout Germany to cook food for the masses. In this kitchen food can be cooked for 35000 persons at one time and was originally supplied at a cost of 40 Pfennigs per portion (one liter). At present this feeding has been diminished to 5000 and the cost is now 2 Mark 50 Pfennigs.

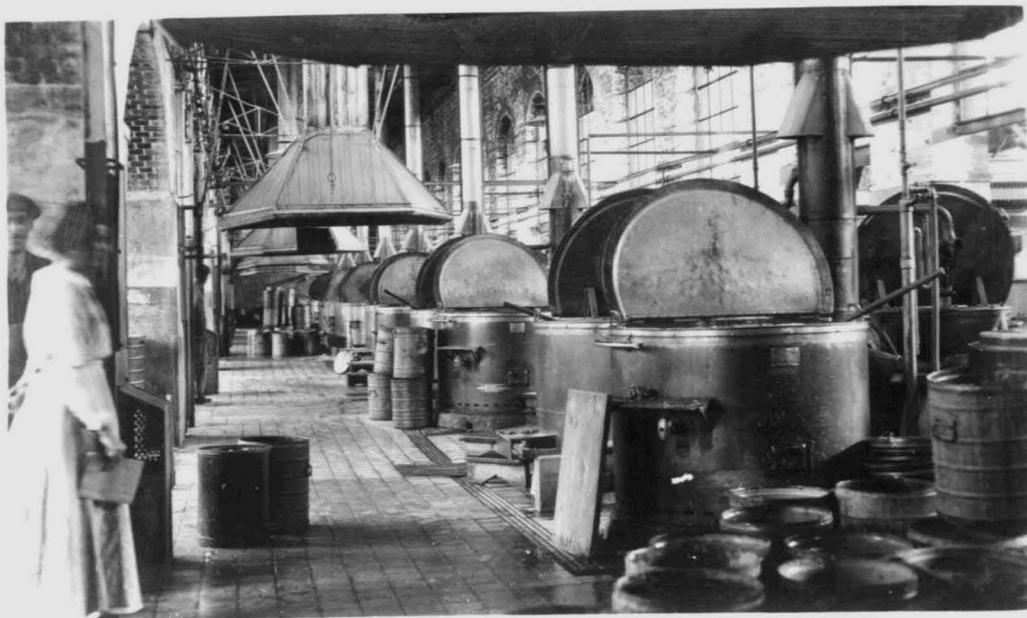
The major portion of this kitchen is now being used for preparing the American food. Two rooms at the side are devoted to storing the American supplies, and certain ones of the huge kettles are set apart for its preparation. We meet the Herr Inspector who is in charge of the whole institution, and the woman who has direct supervision of the cooking. Pleasant, interested people they are, both of them, proud of the great work they are doing, and eager to make it efficient. We go over to see one of the great kettles. It holds six hundred liters, and is heated by gas flames below. They are cooking chocolate pudding, and a pleasant odor hovers in the vicinity of the kettles. At the next kettle three women are engaged in measuring out the pudding into thermos kettles, in which it will be sent to the feeding centers for the afternoon feeding. We see these thermos kettles, carefully sealed, to prevent loss between the kitchen and centre, being loaded in wagons, along with sealed bags of lovely big white rolls. While the wagons are being loaded, the horses are having their dinner. From the nose bag of one of them we get a bit of his fodder. It is mainly composed of straw, with an occasional oat, and a little bran. There is a chorus of amazement from the Americans who see it. How can the horses live on this!

At the other end of the kitchen, we see the food which is being cooked for the municipal feeding. It is a sort of gruel to-day made mostly of buck-wheat, a gray, uninteresting looking mass. For to-morrow they will have a boiled dinner, as we can see from the great piles of purple cabbage which are already in course of preparation. To this cabbage, the inspector informs us there will be added some potatoes, about an eighth of a pound per person, and twenty pounds of meat for every six-hundred persons.

"Of course, it is not as appetizing as your food," says the head cook, "but it is a meal."

Near the entrance to the great hall there is a place railed off, where citizens come to eat the municipal food. They are an interesting group, many unemployed, many old, and so beyond employment, a few thin children, and here and there someone who stands out from the crowd as an intellectual. We question the inspector about these.

"Oh yes," he replies "we always have a good number of teachers and professors. They get so little money nowadays that they



The food is cooked in great kettles, each holding 600 liters. In the foreground stand the thermos kettles. This kitchen is at the central slaughter house, Berlin.



Loading the thermos kettles full of hot food on the wagons to be carried to schools and other feeding places.

are often glad to take advantage of this feeding. Of course it costs the city more than the charge we make. But we have recently raised it from 1 Mark 30 Pfennigs to 2 Marks 50 Pfennigs. That nearly covers the costs. The city is too poor to give food away."

Out again to the Ford, and southward to a section of the city where in a good restaurant we eat a good meal. If one has foreign exchange, one can live pretty well, even in Central Europe, though we do have some difficulty in getting any of the miserable brown bread, as some of the party are only visitors, and so have no ration cards. We are informed by our guide, who has been here for a year, that there is a marked change for the better in the bread since she has been here.

At three in the afternoon begins the feeding of expectant and nursing mothers and little children, below school age, in various places which are known as "open feeding centers". We go to one in Waldemarstrasse. This is an exceedingly poor neighborhood in Berlin-South. One hundred and fifty women are receiving their extra meal here, and outside the gate, - poor little Peris shut out of a very human Paradise, - there are waiting many children who came along, but could not be admitted. Inside there are many touching bits of stories. Here is a girl of ten who has brought her brother, aged five. She has had no lunch herself, but she may not eat his food. She seems very glad that he gets it. There are countless little fathers and mothers of this sort in our feeding-centres everywhere. Here is a mother who has smuggled her three-year-old child into the room with her, and is surreptitiously feeding him. She is not the only mother in the world who would do the same. The manager of this feeding-centre can tell us many stories of the need among her people.

But we must go on. We turn northward again to the Müllerstrasse. Here we see a duplication of the former scene, with one addition. There is some food left over, after everyone has had his measured portion, and it is to be divided among the mothers who are there at the end of the feeding time. At five minutes before five, our attention is attracted by a moving sight. Behind the counter where the food is given out, is the woman who distributes it, on the other side of the counter are perhaps thirty women, many of whose figures show that they are being fed for the sake of the child that is to come. Silently they stand, each holding out her bowl in mute appeal for the nourishing food. If it is divided, there will be less than a half cup apiece.

"A picture of that would make good publicity material", whispers one of the American visitors; but it is impossible to make pictures of that kind of human need.

If we have time, we go in the evening to the feeding of the "Jugendliche", or boys and girls from fourteen to eighteen. These are young people from the so-called "Continuation Schools". They have finished their common school education, but the new law of the Republic makes it obligatory that they attend school for at least six hours a week. These schools afford an opportunity for finding the most needy youths of this age.

When we see them even after the preparation we have had among the children of other ages, we are always shocked. Such puny, small young people-and so dull-eyed, and greenish-greyskinned! One wonders whether they are not past real succor, many of them. Perhaps they are - and there opens out the vista of the next generation, to whom these underfed adolescents are to be the fathers and mothers. What will they be like?

We go back to the Dorotheenstrasse office, where on the wall there is a map which shows that the things we have seen to-day are being duplicated to-day, and tomorrow and until next August, in many cities in Germany. In our minds is the firm conviction that that map should show more spots, and that each spot should represent more feeding than is at present possible.

Caroline G. Norment.

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