

# American Friends Service Committee

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## BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

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### OPENING WINTER QUARTERS OF THE MACJANNET COLONY AT PRINGY

by Ruth von Wild, Directress

Although this report is now several months old, it gives a picture of the Colony and some of the children who live there. The MacJannet Camp will be reopened for these and other children early in May if the weather permits.

12th December - afternoon: Snow is falling in thick flakes; I am getting ready to go to Annecy and meet the children whom we have been expecting from Lyon. There is a knock at the door and what do we see but the corridor filled all of a sudden with little snow-covered figures. They are here unexpectedly - and there is the noise of shouting, stamping feet, shaking of coats until we run to help them take off their wet garments. Soon the little group is installed at Table in the well heated dining-room and follows with glowing eyes the hot soup as it is poured into the dishes.

Here are the first children who will live in the new colony at Pringy, near Annecy, intended for child refugees and victims of war. They have come, some of them, from the occupied zone of France, others have suffered from the effects of the terrible war in other parts: they come from Mulhouse, Paris, Boulogne, Toulouse, Marseille and Lyon. While they eat, we learn from the nurse who accompanied them, some details concerning the children's history and observations she made during the journey.

Every one of these children, without exception, can tell us the tale of a sad life. Yvonne, a little French girl of 15, comes from Warsaw, where her father was Director of a bank. She lived through the terrible bombardments of that city, where she stayed for days in a district completely destroyed, without water, electricity or heating, before leaving the country with her elder sister. The two young girls sought refuge with an aunt in Lyon, who could not keep them, however, since her funds did not permit. The elder looked for work, while the younger came to Pringy where - she told us with a happy air - she wants to help us look after the younger children. The experiences she has gone through have done nothing to unbalance this charming young girl. Sylvie, her little comrade from Toulouse, is less brave. She is mourning; her eldest brother, who supported his family, did not return from the front; the family received a little letter, informing

them of his death. Sylvie is homesick; her parents are dead, she lived with her sister, who has three children to look after and could not keep her long. She is not old enough and has not the physical strength to work and she feels her situation with all the vehemence of her character.

Two other children, Suzanne and Robert, from Mulhouse, lost their father four years ago; their mother has earned a living by selling chocolate in the streets. When the war came she was evacuated from Alsace, and came to Messia-les-Chilly, a little village in the Jura where she lived as a refugee. And then there are the three Goth brothers, the twins Marcel and Robert, and little Emile, from the department of Herault. Their father, an agricultural worker, was placed in a lunatic asylum some months ago. His madness is said to have been brought about by the war. On the faces of the three boys are traces of misery and privation. And the two little blond sisters at the end of the table? Renee and Michelle, from Lyon? Will they ever see their father again? Since June they have had no news of him. Perhaps he is a prisoner? Or killed? When one questions them they hang their heads and say nothing.

The meal is finished and the first shyness passed. Already the children are taking possession of their new surroundings..... "comme c'est joli", they cry on entering the big dormitory. The weather has brightened and the sun outside shines on freshly fallen snow: the room is full of cheerful light. Each child has chosen his bed. The girls begin to unpack their cases and arrange their belongings in drawers assigned to them. One little girl, alas, has brought nothing but a nightdress - much too long. The boys, who do not appear to have such a sense of order, are playing with a football. Happy youth, which can forget its troubles in the winking of an eye.

Alas - the questions of heat and food are worrying us just now. We have been lucky enough to find a little wood, and have even managed to make a small stock of coal. As far as food is concerned, we can find nearly everything we need at Annecy, principal town of the department of Haute-Savoie. We transport the food in small quantities on our bicycles, for means of transport are few and far between. From time to time the Annecy car going to St. Julien serves us. Milk, fresh vegetables, fruit, eggs and even - that rare commodity - potatoes, we can get from a neighboring farmer. It is not always easy, however, to find what we need, although the region in which we live is rich in all kinds of fruit, and one to which the misery of the big cities has not yet penetrated.

Our first wish is to strengthen the children with good food and plenty of open-air exercise; our second, to get them away from the atmosphere of war and misery into which they have been plunged; to have them live in happy surroundings, under conscientious guidance and care; the life to which they have a right. We want to make them feel a true affection - to make them understand that understanding between nations is a real and possible thing, even in these times of tribulations.

Ruth von Wild

Pringy, 14th December 1940