

American Friends Service Committee

20 South Twelfth Street



Philadelphia, Penna.

BULLETIN ON RELIEF IN FRANCE

Bulletin #45

For the Use of Editorial Comment and Re-publication

August 20, 1942

NURSING MOTHERS AND BABIES

The health of new-born babies has been of primary concern to French health authorities and to relief groups working in unoccupied France.

Contributions of generous individuals and groups to the American Friends Service Committee have made possible the purchase of Swiss milk for distribution through official baby clinics as well as the provision of special foods for both mothers and infants. This help, admittedly inadequate, has been of appreciable benefit.

French health authorities have recognized the importance of protecting the mother before and after the birth of her child. She is now permitted to receive a ration corresponding in bulk to that of the individual doing hard physical work. She has an extra supplement of nearly three ounces of bread daily, milk when it is available and a double ration of fish and calves' liver when these rare commodities are on the market. Instead of the customary one egg a month, she is allotted two.

FOOD EXPENSIVE

Yet even with these concessions, the pregnant and nursing mother does not always fare too well. Frequently, the extra foods are too expensive for her modest budget, the supplies are not available in the local market, or watching the hungry faces of her other children, she denies herself to feed them. A study of 16 families in the Marseille area in the period between February and June 1941 showed that whereas 2830 calories were permitted these mothers daily, they actually consumed only 1600 calories. This may well mean a less healthy baby at birth and the undernourished condition of the mother may prevent her from nursing the infant as long as might be desirable.

Premature births and infant mortality increased in 1941 over 1940, if one may judge from the few statistics available. In October, 1940, out of 145 births in Marseille, six were premature and there were no deaths. A year later, in October 1941, there were out of 174 births, 14 premature, all of whom died.

Medical authorities report that French babies of 1941 and 1942 frequently lack vitality and seem to have less resistance to disease.

In a country like unoccupied France, all categories of the population suffer. Yet the health of children under two is at present more satisfactory than that of most other groups. The rations for infants are adequate. The food supplements which the mother may purchase before and after the birth of her child are a safeguard, even though she may use less of them than she needs. A third

protection is provided in the services of the numerous official clinics giving medical and nursing care and foods provided by committees like the American Friends Service Committee. It seems extremely important that such help be maintained and extended.

CHURCH FAIRS

Shopping is an arduous occupation for French housewives, and particularly so, for the prospective mother. She is entitled to purchase six sheets, three pillow cases, a puff and a blanket of mixed wool for her baby. Yet the shops are bare of these articles. She keeps an inquiring eye out for church fairs. At these fairs there are occasionally such articles as cloth goods and other pre-war luxuries for sale.

Even among the articles which the prospective mother is permitted to purchase for herself there are wide discrepancies between the permissions to purchase and actual availability of supplies. There is the further element of expense. She may, for instance, be able to find a nightgown of poor quality rayon, but the price of 410 francs will be prohibitive. If her husband is an office worker, his monthly salary will be about 1,400 francs a month. Stretching his salary over necessities is as much as she can manage. There is no possibility of spending more than a fourth of it for what seems like a luxury.

Not only the prospective mother, but all French housewives find marketing a full time job these days. Frequently, the stock is exhausted before their turn comes. Sometimes they smile wryly when they purchase the soap to which their ration cards entitle them, small clay-like bars with a fat content of only 12%.

Shortage accentuates the sense of thrift of all French householders. One woman attaches a string to the leg of her hen and leads him down the main thoroughfare in the hope that some corn may have spilled from the produce trucks. A wilted lettuce leaf she will, herself, pick up for the family soup pot. The dressmaker laments the passing of the common pin. She pins the hem of a client's gown with her meager supply and must hasten to baste it before she refits a suit for her next customer.