FOREIGN SERVICE BULLETIN

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AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

Boys Town in Italy

by DON GUIDO VISENDAZ

American Friends Service Committee representatives in Italy are continuing transport service to facilitate the rebuilding of mountain villages, a project begun by British and American Friends in 1945. They are counseling with Italian refugee families, planning work camps for next summer, and assisting Italian organizations with youth work. Don Guido Visendaz, a Catholic priest, started a Boys Town in Lanciano more than a year ago. Service Committee personnel has worked with him and is encouraging other towns to meet their youth problems with a similar approach. The following report is Don Guido Visendaz' story of Boys Town.

In December 1945, I was summoned to Lanciano by a citizens' committee to set up and direct a Boys Town. This committee had shown a great amount of good will, even if up to that moment its members had not fully realized the scope of their commendable plan.

I found about twenty boys confined in the premises of a partly destroyed and abandoned barrack. The morale level and material conditions under which they lived were appalling. In the whole house there were neither chairs nor beds, nor covers of any kind, nor utensils. There was no glass in the windows. Only one dim electric light was in the building, that scarcely lit the walls blackened by smoke from troop fires. In these sad surroundings were living the remainder of two bands of young delinquents that had been rounded up in August by the police.

For eight months during the war the battlefront had wavered before the walls of the old city of Lanciano. And during this period many youngsters that had become orphans or were separated from their families, had banded together to make a living by stealing from the transient troops. In this activity they had proved their great courage and exceptional ingenuity.

The name "boys town" was hardly descriptive of these surroundings. The confinement to which the boys had been condemned within the walls of the barracks was extremely harmful to the morale and physical conditions of these lively, intelligent and brave boys, experienced in the ways of life beyond their years. They made frequent attempts to escape and once free they preferred enduring any hardship in preference to the insufferable barracks. Their lives up to that moment had been a dramatic story of rebellion and suffering and vice.

A Positive Plan

The boys turned their backs on this life only when they were offered a new positive ideal to supplant their unhappy past. They found their new life not in retention but in liberty and in work. These boys worked for months in the bitter cold, night and day, cleaning, repairing, whitewashing, rebuilding, decorating their own home. The stable they changed into a dormitory, and built their own beds. The smallest boys of five years helped to carry bricks, the oldest took upon themselves the hardest and most risky jobs. With their hard work they brought light, air, happiness, hopes for a better future, in the once sad premises of the old abandoned barrack.

They organized their own self government, electing a mayor and a city council. Every month they had their election by orderly and disciplined procedure. They slowly adopted the principles of God, family, and work, almost without being aware of it. They no longer tried to escape. They lived in an atmosphere of complete liberty. No more padlocked doors or barbed wire of the past. Through experience of work backed by faithful and understanding leadership, they reached the realization that their future depended upon their honest life as industrious and conscientious citizens, and on the life of their home.

A Strong Bond

A strong fraternal bond exists between these young members of a community that will grow from day to day. The village is neither a convent nor a seminary, but a home of which the boys are the founders and the leaders. Everything is shared, individual and collective responsibility is that of each member of the family. The teacher is but a big brother who untiringly seeks to remove from the heart of each smaller brother the traces of former suffering and the sadness of past evil. Their time is divided between work and study as in the normal life of a good community. Every boy learns he must earn his own bread with the sweat of his brow, that he must work from day to day for his place at table and his own bed. Their work is rewarded by currency of their own which can be exchanged for real money to be used outside the community. They have their own legislation with rewards, debts, fines, loans, as in actual life. The punishments are decided by the boys themselves and they submit to them voluntarily. It is amazing the way the boys have been able to reconcile self-imposed law with liberty. The law of the village is loyalty to one's brother and loyalty to one's self. They obey willingly.

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A Story of Aachen, Germany

by ELIZABETH BOWEN

The Service Committee has sent more than two million pounds of food and clothing to the four zones of Germany, the distributions in the Russian Zone having been made through the International Red Cross. Quaker workers in the British Zone maintain self-help projects such as shoe-repairing and the collection of wood to make furniture. They distribute supplementary food, clothing, blankets and cooking utensils, and provide services for refugees. American members of the British teams are at work in Hannover, Dortmund, Oberhausen, Aachen, Goslar and Oldenburg. The following account is by Elizabeth Bowen, who is working with the team in Aachen.

On an old Twelfth Century gateway in what used to be the lovely historic center of Aachen, is a sign saying "Kein Durchgang! This building is sure to tumble!" That describes the look of this whole city. Its central area is little more than a rubble heap. Tanks and cars lie half-buried in debris in the streets, and some of the roads are not yet cleared. People live in buildings that have no roofs, that are burned to cinders inside, and that are landsliding into the streets.

Aachen was shelled and bombed for five months. The German forces made their last stand in the big fashionable "Quellenhof" hotel that now looks beyond repair. There are still casualties from exploding mines in nearby areas. In a forest in the Eifel district there are hundreds, possibly thousands, of soldiers lying buried. No one ventures there. The people of Aachen were evacuated when the city began to be shelled and bombed by the American Army, but several thousand crept back. They and the American troops broke into many of the houses left standing, so that there are few people here who have not lost all or a part of their belongings. One wonders where all the people manage to find shelter. Shop windows have very little in them, and what one sees is often all the shop has.

Prospect for the Winter

There was a potato famine during the summer months. But though the new crop is now in and the situation eased, the prospect for the winter still is not good. Since this is a mining and industrial area, agricultural products are raised only on a small scale. Transportation facilities are such that there will be little brought in from other areas. Two weeks ago the official daily ration was raised to 1150 calories. It is estimated that the average during the last year in the city itself was actually about 960 calories per day. The streets are crowded with men, women and children out searching for food. It is against the law to get it directly from the country and people coming into town may expect to be searched. Every day people sift through our garbage can. We saw an old man running his finger around the inside of a dirty can and chewing on a filthy bone there among the trash till every bit of meat was gone. People look grim and worried and hungry. Children go about barefoot, and many of them, especially the bunker* children, have scabies. Today I was stopped on the street by an elderly man, a Ph.D., travelled, able to speak four languages fluently, wearing a coat of gunny sacks with no shirt. He is not eligible for food and clothing rations, and lives in a cellar where there is no running water or heat or light.

Agencies at Work in Aachen

There are only two voluntary societies at work in the area of Aachen and the twelve hundred square miles surrounding it—the Don Suisse team of five, which lives next door, and our team of eleven. The Don Suisse team is giving additional rations of soup or cocoa and a biscuit three times a week to 6,300 children from two to six years old, and two tins of milk each two weeks to 2,800 children under two years of age. Their team also runs a sewing and knitting center for making children's clothes.

The Military Government gives additional rations to all the children in school, so at present all children and young people in Aachen up to fourteen years of age are receiving supplementary food. This does not seem to be true in most of the big cities of Germany.

Our team has eight vehicles, and a large part of its energy has gone into transport jobs. We deliver materials to German welfare organizations for distribution, carry bunker children to the only public bath in Aachen which serves more than a hundred thousand people, and see to it that these children get at least one bath per month. We have just managed to get fifteen small zinc tubs, enough for one in each bunker.

Three times a week during the summer, bunker children were taken to the country for afternoon outings. Each child had this kind of outing every two weeks. The team helped organize the camp, and transported the children, fifty each three weeks, to it. While there, they were supervised by Catholic Caritas sisters from a nearby children's home.

We want to work more with young people. A youth camp was set up by the team this summer at Rotgen, and members of several youth groups come to Thursday night meetings at the house. Another activity of the team has been in helping to establish clinics in various parts of the town where any mother can bring her baby for free advice or treatment once each week. The team is also involved in a survey of housing, nutrition, clothing, health, schools, and youth groups in the area for which we are responsible.

* *Bunkers are former air-raid shelters now serving as homes.*

An Indian Village Fights Against Famine

by HORACE ALEXANDER

The Friends Service Unit in India is developing long-term programs in public health, industrial rehabilitation, cooperatives, orphanages, and village reconstruction. It is also trying to meet some of the critical food needs in Bengal and South India. Horace Alexander was the original head of the Friends Ambulance Unit team in Calcutta before it became the Friends Service Unit. He is now Commissioner to India, representing British Friends, and cooperates with the Unit. His contacts with political leaders and others is of great value to the Unit.

The village of Belgatta is a typical village of the Deccan plateau of South India. It is some four hundred miles from Cape Comorin, over a hundred from the west coast, and about two hundred from the east coast. Its annual rainfall is just above twenty inches. It is an agricultural village, in normal times relying on its own production of millets and pulses, eked out with mango fruit and bananas and toddy tapped from the toddy-palm. The villagers also grow some cotton, ground-nuts, castor and other oils, and by selling these products can purchase rice and cloth.

How rarely, when everything depends on the weather, does the normal occur. Last year, 1945, was exceptionally abnormal. The rains failed completely. Crops withered in the ground. Even the trees lost their leaves. The cattle starved. Owing to short-sighted war-time policies, the surplus from earlier years had been used. The village had nothing to fall back on, nothing to look forward to except famine. For nearly twelve months the spectre of starvation has been around the corner, sometimes within whispering distance. Today it is further off, almost banished. The new crops are good, ripe for the harvest, and the Mysore State Government, after a perilously slow and unconvincing start, has taken adequate measures to feed the people.

United Action of the Continents

Mysore alone could not do it. Though the administrative machinery had to be devised on the spot, the food had to come from much further off. Scarcely fifty miles away, in western Mysore, where three or four times as much rain comes each year from the west as Belgatta gets from the east, and where the rains did not fail in 1945, there was a small surplus of rice. But this was soon consumed, and Belgatta, like hundreds of other Deccan villages, had to look for imports from distant parts of India and from overseas. This whole village, whose inhabitants have never seen the sea or a great city or a great river, has been saved by the united action of the continents. Inside the village depot are bags of wheat flour from Australia, wheat from Canada, and maize from the United States. A recent assignment, which the local officials greeted with curiosity, was "Egyptian millet," which proved to be their own familiar jowary or jola, whose tall brown seed-heads are now nodding hopefully in the fields.

There was a recent arrival of Burma rice, and the surplus states and provinces of India have sent their quotas. All the world has been conspiring together to save the humble village of Belgatta from starvation. Yet, as the minds of these people have turned from dread to hope, they give thanks, not mainly to Australia or America or Egypt or Burma, but to God. As the postmaster suddenly observed as we were drinking coffee together in his home a short time ago, "The benevolence of God has sent us the rain at the right time."

A young medical graduate is living in this village and serving five villages. "Has the food shortage increased the incidence of disease?" I asked him. "Of course it has," he replied, "especially skin diseases and intestinal trouble." Yet in a time of semi-starvation, when in many places it was hard to find any good water to drink, no major epidemic has broken out.

Belgatta Is Not All India

Belgatta is a village of hope. And it is surrounded by other villages of hope. The millets, which are the staple food of these Deccan villages, are almost ripe. Increased distribution of milk and multivitamins to children all over South India is helping to hold back the threat of famine. Yet that district is not all India. Only a few hundred miles away millions of Madras peasants are still surviving on a precarious ration; even in Mysore they plead, "Send us more rice." And behind South India and its continued need lies a big question mark covering Bengal.

Rice and Wheat

I have seen scores of children in Travancore drinking our milk and coming back for more. But the cry is still for "Rice and wheat, rice and wheat." The South India rice will not be ready to market until January or February 1947, and only fitful rice shipments come from overseas and from North India. Can that uncertain stream be kept up and amplified with sufficient wheat from America, to keep these millions alive? We do not know. We only know that the hearts and minds and wills of men in many nations must be moved to help their unseen brothers in distant lands.

Impressions of Europe

by JULIA E. BRANSON

Julia E. Branson, Assistant Foreign Service Secretary of the Committee, has just returned to the United States after a six month visit to Germany, Italy, France and Austria where she consulted with Quaker workers.

Fear permeates European life today. Economic insecurities, political disagreements, and differences between Russia and the United States bring the fear that the world will be gripped in a new conflict. It is a paralyzing reality to international statesmen and to every European. It concerns all of us engaged in international work, for it emphasizes again that sharing of American food and clothing and provision of services are tangible expressions of understanding.

Basic to the restoration of confidence is clear assurance that every effort is being made to bring supplies promptly to the people who view the approach of winter with dread; to the people who know they will be cold and hungry, crowded into already overcrowded and unrepaired dwellings. Basic to renewed hope is the assurance that beyond the loneliness, weariness, and bitter isolation of war years, there are understanding friends.

Service in Italy

Impressions of Italy, Germany, France and Austria are kaleidoscopic, as varied as the Quaker services in those four countries. In Italy our service is providing transport to carry building materials to isolated mountain villages. This service penetrates into remote spots where government aid otherwise would not reach. Some of our people will be working this winter in the camps where refugee families still remain. By planning through the winter with these families, it is hoped that a way will be found to provide housing for them next spring. Another service in which we are helping with personnel and funds will bring us into association with Italian leaders who are working with teen age boys. The region in central Italy where our staffs are working is one of great natural beauty and terrible devastation. It was interesting to meet an old peasant woman in one of these villages, to look out with her on beauty and ruins, and hear her appreciative tribute to it as "la bella, bella."

Islands in Germany

Since many of the contacts in Germany were among German Quakers, old friends, it is perhaps not fair to generalize about attitudes. Certainly they face the heavy tasks of restoring Germany with quiet faith, and rejoice in renewed associations with the world outside.

In the American Zone in each of the German cities there is an American island almost completely separated from the surrounding ocean of need. In Berlin, Omgus is located in Dahlem, a beautiful suburb which was almost untouched by the war. The actual Omgus headquarters are located in the Luftwaffe Buildings, modern attractive office buildings. Across the street is Truman Hall, the dining hall built this year on the edge of the Grünewald with a large expanse of manicured lawn. Here the officers of military government eat three excellent meals for ninety cents a day. All German employees receive one meal a day at barracks where the food is doled out soup kitchen style. There is no place for them to sit down, so they often walk back to their offices with trays of food, or stand washing their dishes in big cans outside the barrack.

You cannot be long in Germany as a representative of one of the occupying powers without becoming aware of the effort to make real contact with German life. You can live in comfort and security in heated houses, work in heated offices, eat excellent food and ride in partly empty busses. The distance was symbolized to me by the extra effort it took to get a German paper, for none was to be had in places frequented by Americans. The distance is most obvious when you see the barbed wire surrounding the sections in which American families live.

Recovery in France

In France recovery has been slow, but there were evidences of improvement in November. Paris, undamaged and lovely, is unbelievable after one has seen the ruins in other European cities. A modern Rip Van Winkle might rub his eyes at the displays in the shop windows, but be truly startled by the price tags. One of the critical problems in France is distribution. Quaker work this winter will center on distribution in the most critical areas. The growing emphasis on community centers such as those at Le Havre, Toulouse, Montauban and Perpignan represents an orientation toward rehabilitation service.

At Toulouse it was delightful to see the pleasure of the young Spanish artisans in the stone barracks which house both dormitories and workshops for radio, carpentry and tailoring. The center at Montauban, where nursery school, workshops and social rooms are housed, has been attractively redecorated under the direction of one of our workers.

Empty Shops in Austria

Knowing the needs in Austria and the concern which people feel about the withdrawal of UNRRA at the end of December, one expects a world of greys. Certainly the markets and shops are bare, and rations inadequate. There are a few luxuries, but almost no necessities, and the pretty boxes in show windows carry the legend, "These are empty!" The children and old people suffer most, and the Friends are providing supplementary food for them. Certainly one expects the Viennese to be downcast, but actually, last summer when it was still warm, many seemed almost gay, finding release in laughter. They made an adventure of entering the American Zone, which they described to me as the "forty-ninth state." But with winter days, gay Vienna is grey Vienna again.

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Village Plan in China

by TIMOTHY TYNDALL

Quaker services in China include hospital and village rehabilitation, public health work, land reclamation and general relief. The following report by Timothy Tyndall, a British member of the team, is of the village work which started in Honan Province in May 1946.

Chengmou, where our clinic is located, was once the chief town of this area, but now the northern half is under the bed of the Yellow River, and much of the rest of it is a lake. One road runs from the east gate to the west, and about twenty of the hardier houses on it withstood the rushing Yellow River flood waters. All the villages around here are in a similar condition. Nine years of flood, three years of Japanese occupation, and several plagues of locusts have brought the people to a low financial ebb.

A Boy from the Village

One morning, as we in the clinic were cleaning up after treating about sixty patients, a well-built boy, wearing the school children's blue uniform and peaked cap, came to the door. He stood smiling at us, and I almost asked him what he wanted, for he looked strong and healthy. Then I saw that while one cheek was brown and fat, the other was bandaged. Suddenly, I recognized him; he was Li An Wen. When we had first seen him, two months earlier, he had been suffering from a bad case of kala-azar, a common disease in this sandy country for it is transmited by the bite of the sand fly. His legs and arms had been thin and wasted, and he had had a big potbelly caused by the enlarged spleen. He was then feverish and peevish, and decaying gangrene had eaten away half of his cheek and was infecting his teeth and jaw bones. We had started him on daily dressings and injections at once. The gangrene continued to spread, however, and we had had to send him to the hospital at Chengchow. He was very sick when he left, and we were surprised to see him again looking fat and well and with his face almost healed.

The story of Li An Wen is little different from many others. The diseases which once had been fairly well checked, have spread. The daily round in the clinic is one of sores which should have been treated long ago, of eyes doomed to blindness which could have been saved with a little treatment, and of many maladies rising from under- or malnourishment. Yet the spirit of the people is amazing. They laugh and joke and bear uncomplainingly what we would consider impossible burdens.

The Village Plan

The project in this village, begun in May, initiated the cooperative rehabilitation plan of the Friends Ambulance Unit. This plan is to establish cooperatives, schools and clinics on a self-supporting and cooperative basis, under direction of local personnel which will continue to operate after the Friends Ambulance Unit withdraws. Twenty-four persons are now involved in this village plan, including two doctors and the registrar who are employed, five nurses and a mechanic who are trainees, five volunteer Chinese students, and ten Unit members.

The Unit owns land in the nearby village of Shih Li T'ou, and is renting working space in Chungmou City prior to purchasing it. One clinic is operating in each center and five local girls have started training in elementary out patient department work.

CNRRA milk distribution centers are operated in Shih Li T'ou and Chungmou and supervised in neighboring schools. Along with this milk distribution we are trying to teach elementary hygiene. We are also teaching characters to a small class of women. A carding cooperative has been established in Shih Li T'ou and an animal loan cooperative in Tung Shan. Education work continues for both these cooperatives, and a two-month course of a consumer cooperative in Chungmou is underway. We have been joined by an experienced Chinese textile worker who is helping to set up looms for a weaving cooperative.

Animal husbandry demonstration work is now going ahead with two milch goats in Chungmou, and a Berkshire boar which has been taken on tour between the towns. Plans have been submitted to the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration for the building of a mechanized work center. In the meantime a generator has been installed, and local trainees are being selected to begin the adaptation of local equipment for mechanized power.

A Modern Alchemy

Silver and paper are being transmuted daily into shoes and bread for the people of Europe and Asia. Every day evidences that Americans are sharing their joys and their griefs, come to the American Friends Service Committee. Through the medium of that strange and intangible quality, "concern," experiences that reach to the roots of human life are shared with the world.

Vital Sharing

Many new parents have envisioned the despair of other parents who have given up their own rations to feed a child, a child doomed to continuous hunger and cold and disease. And they have translated their own joy into warm blankets and milk and cod liver oil, adding a throng of children to their family circle.

Wedding anniversaries have been approached with special thanksgiving these past few years, for all across the face of Europe and Asia lie fragments of family patterns broken too soon. And anniversary announcements have been sent to friends with the suggestion that silver gifts be sent as silver dollars to the Committee.

Several hundred dollars arrived one day, offered in the place of a stained glass window planned as a memorial. Somehow the living and growing significance of the tokens of food and clothing in a weary and lonely world, expressed more fully the ideals of the ones for whom the window had been planned. Similarly, more than one family has replaced the fleeting loveliness of funeral flowers with gifts that are eloquent of the eternal loveliness of human spirit.

The great festivals of new life, Easter and Christmas, have opened the flood gates of generous sharing. One contributor enclosed this note with his gift: "Herewith what I saved by using day old bread, fish scraps, soup bones, mutton stew, wilted lettuce leaves, patching patched clothing until it is ninety per cent patches. An Easter offering for those who need it." At Christmas time members of some families have conspired to give each other gifts that could be sent from all of them to families in greater need. Some have asked their friends to send only a card and what they would spend on a gift for them to the relief needs of the world. Others have asked the Service Committee for Christmas cards that they could send to friends explaining that their love and their gift this year will be sent overseas to children and men and women who have been isolated from friendship. You may procure a supply of these cards for this Christmas by writing to the Committee.

Young People Are Concerned

A fifteen year old girl has pledged a portion of her allowance to relief work each month. Girls in several college dormitories across the country voluntarily and regularly relinquish one meal or a part of a meal each week, to share a little of the experience of hunger with those far away, and to share their food by sending the money saved through the Service Committee.

Last year two children gave a Christmas play and charged admission to see their tree, to earn money for children in Europe. And in one school on the West coast the children kept small money boxes filled. When told that their contributions were responsible for the supplementary feeding which enabled the Committee to give food each day to thirty-eight French children, one eight-year-old said she was sure they were making one hundred and fourteen people happy because each child must have a parent or grandparent or at least two people who were just as happy about it as the child who got the food.

A Multitude of Others

People in America now who were hungry children after the First World War, have a special understanding of the value of an extra bowl of soup or glass of milk. They find it natural to share what they have with children hungry today. Soldiers and sailors who fought or lived in some foreign land know how basic are food, clothing, shelter and the knowledge that someone cares, and have responded to these needs.

A group of civilian internees at Ellis Island, most of whom had been long-term residents of the United States, collected several hundred dollars among themselves for those in greater need. A lecture, based on a collection of rare books taken from a German city, brought a contribution from the audience to be spent on food for children of that city.

The contributions behind these concerns and many others were translated into almost four thousand tons of food, clothing, soap, vitamins, tools and other items between January and September of this year, and sent to a dozen different countries. Clothing bales alone reached between six and seven hundred tons by the middle of November. The significance of this figure lies in the fact that there is an average of twenty-three hundred garments in each ton. But beyond the physical need met by these gifts, you who have sent them have brought renewed hope to people left friendless. Your goodwill, translated into bread, has been transformed again into good promise for the future.

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by Vera Brittain

Quaker Relief, 1947

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Reports on Conditions in Central Europe, No. 2, 3, 4

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