

# TWO YEARS IN POLAND



WARSAW ===== 1921.

BRIEF SKETCH OF THE WORK  
OF THE FRIENDS MISSION,  
AUGUST 1919 TO AUGUST 1921.

## PURPOSE.

It is the purpose of the Society of Friends, in conducting relief missions in many countries; (including France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Serbia, Poland and Russia) to promote the spirit of international good-will and to relieve those suffering from the effects of war, without respect to politics, nationality or religion.

## THE FIGHT AGAINST TYPHUS.

We first came into Poland in 1919 during the typhus epidemic, to help stem the tide of the disease which threatened to sweep over Europe. In 1916 and 1917 this disease raged in Roumania and East Galicia, continuing practically without control in East Galicia, and with the withdrawal of the Germans all of Poland was swept by bands of people, rushing homeward, herded together in trains by thousands, with no possibilities of cleanliness. The typhus in Poland became a menace to the whole of Europe.

We were stationed first on the western border of Poland at Zawiercie, to stop the march of the disease into yet untouched countries. Later, as control over the typhus increased, we were asked to go to Nadworna, one of the plague spots in the

hills of Southeast Galicia, to help clean up the breeding places of the disease. We disinfected villages, bathed and deloused persons exposed to the disease and supervised a base hospital for typhus cases.

Associated with the typhus was a second disease, the relapsing fever, not so fatal but more debilitating and of longer duration. It is carried by lice in the same way as the typhus. We carried on the campaign against this also; and later when summer came on and the same village areas were found badly infected with dysentery, our column continued to work towards cleaning up the conditions from which these diseases arose. But with one medical officer for a whole county, it was impossible to undertake really serious work of prophylaxis.

Our work showed us the opportunity of instilling ideas of cleanliness, if not into the parents, certainly into the children. The village bathing station which we established became very popular.

The inability of the poorer communities to get clothing, or change of linen, and soap, from the very beginning of the war, had gradually reduced sensibility to dirt over large stretches of country. In East Galicia we found a total inability to keep clean; there were no facilities. We had to begin by furnishing soap and a change of clothes, often burning the old garments which were not even fit to disinfect. This was one of the heavy costs of our fight against typhus.

When the League of Nations at last made an

appropriation for combating typhus on a large scale, and the Polish Government took charge of the work, we then felt free to turn our entire attention to many other forms of work into which we had already been drawn by observed need.

### CHILD RELIEF.

The condition of the children of Poland and their serious need for food, clothing and every sort of care, strongly drew our attention. The food needs of children have been handled on a large scale through the American Relief Administration, but there have been isolated districts in which they had no local group to undertake the distribution and in several such districts we have managed the initial steps, building up the local group and being responsible for food distribution until it could be otherwise handled.

We have also cared for large numbers of individual children who were not adequately reached by the group method of feeding, securing the lists from the schools and giving medical examinations and home visits as well as extra nourishment. Work which we started in connection with the families of intelligencia, (university professors and others who were left quite destitute by the depreciation of the mark) finally resolved itself into individual case work among the children of such families, which we have carried on to a large extent in Warsaw.

Many special forms of work for children, such

as Little Mothers Leagues, district nurse work and milk station work, are carried on in occasional districts where we have already established other work, or where we act in conjunction with the American Red Cross, they furnishing supplies and we trained social workers.

Our main work for children has, however, been in helping the child institutions throughout Poland. Thousands of war-orphans had been rapidly gathered into large institutions, which were in many cases quite destitute of beds, blankets, cooking utensils and other equipment. We undertook to place all such institutions as seemed to be under effective management on a sounder basis by supplying them with sleeping and cooking equipment. By the end of 1920 we had helped nearly 200 such institutions, and this help is still going on to a diminishing extent. We give this aid upon request and after investigation to institutions all over Poland.

Summer colonies for children, which take anemic children from overcrowded city conditions to the fresh air of the country, were found in need of food, clothing and medicine, as well as lacking in trained workers. We have supplied workers in several such colonies to help organize them and put them on a proper basis. We have also furnished them with supplies.

Our policy in all these cases is to help local organizations to get back to self-support and efficiency and then to leave them to their local management, as we are only temporarily in the coun-

try for the purpose of relieving the distress caused by war.

### STUDENT RELIEF.

The universities of Poland were found to be in a most serious condition. Practically suspended during part of the war, sometimes occupied as military establishments, the equipment had been destroyed or commandeered. Students were without adequate food and clothing and were in many cases sleeping on floors without bedding in the effort to pursue their studies and fit themselves for real help to their country. No foreign relief organizations were at that time assisting in this problem.

The students themselves had a Brotherly Help organization which aimed to assist the most needy, expecting them later to return help for others. They had also a system of student hostels, kitchens, and cooperatives. But all these student organizations were quite without resources.

We undertook to do whatever was necessary to enable the 30,000 students in Polish universities to continue their work. We equipped student kitchens, furnished food at reduced rates to student cooperatives, gave beds and bedding to student hostels, gave the necessary assistance to a students sanatorium to prevent its closing, and sold clothing at reduced rates to needy students. We worked always through some organization of the students themselves, strengthening them in every

possible way. In giving clothes to individual students, it was our policy to require some payment, in order that everyone might help to the extent of his ability in passing on aid to others.

We withdrew from the work in the universities as others came to take it up. The A. R. A. now furnishes food to students and the World's Christian Student Federation has taken over other forms of student relief. We have therefore turned our attention to the 15,000 young men and women in the normal schools of the country, for whom no other organization is caring.

These young people are the vital point in Poland's future education; they will go into the country villages and establish the schools which until now have scarcely existed in the greater part of Poland. In many cases the village school teacher is the only adult who can read and write and is approached on all questions of social aid. It is important that these young people shall be given the chance to make the best of their education. Among them we are now equipping the cooperative student boarding-houses and kitchens, supplying beds and bedding for hostels, and furnishing clothing to individual students at whatever rates they can afford. We expect in this way to help all the most needy among the 15,000 students,—to the number probably this fall of from 5000 to 7500 persons.

#### MEDICAL RELIEF.

Our medical relief began by the starting of village dispensaries in two districts where we were

carrying on general relief. This brought us in touch with the local hospital situation and we found these hospitals almost entirely lacking in supplies. As the American Red Cross was working in this field, we did not go into it at the moment, but later, when the Red Cross concentrated on children's work, we began to investigate conditions among civilian hospitals, as distinct from the infectious diseases hospitals in which we had already given some help.

The hospitals of Poland were left quite destitute by the war, — linen, blankets and instruments having often been taken by occupying armies, and bandages and medical supplies having long ago been used up. Budgets were impossibly small, government grants quite inadequate and the old group of paying patients had largely vanished, their place being taken by persons who had to be treated free.

We are helping to re-equip many such hospitals, going chiefly to those smaller town hospitals which by reason of remoteness have been missed by the larger earlier distributions of the Red Cross, but where the need is very great of giving decent standards of health to country people who have no other sources of health education.

Our main health problem this fall is in connection with the fight against tuberculosis, and in this we are helped by a grant from the A. R. A. both for the improvement of dispensary and hospital work and for extra nourishment among tuberculous children. It is estimated that half of the

workmen's children are infected with this disease, which is at present the great scourge of Poland, due to the under-nourishment and overcrowded housing conditions of war-time.

We work partly through a Polish Anti-Tuberculosis Society which has established itself on a sound basis in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, but which is lacking in funds. We are assisting it to get on its feet by grants which increase the number of hours which doctors and nurses can work in the dispensaries, and by money for the distribution of propaganda.

We also assist in building up struggling sanatoria through the gifts of equipment and the temporary endowment of beds. We use these beds for a given number of weeks for cases which we find in connection with our other work. In this way we are able to combine emergency relief with a permanent assistance to worth-while institutions, and a permanent bettering of health standards.

### THE REFUGEES.

During the war between Poland and Soviet Russia, large masses of civilians driven from east to west across the country were followed by our workers almost to the German frontier. Special efforts were made to get at groups of children and these were helped by clothing, food, and bedding, large quantities of material being used in this way to relieve situations of extreme need.

Since the signing of the peace treaty last March with Soviet Russia, Polish refugees are

pouring back into Poland at a greatly increased rate. Some of them have been prisoners of war, others are civilians driven into Russia before the retreating Russian army in the early days of the world war. It is estimated that over a million Poles are waiting [their chance to return. The Polish Government has established repatriation camps on the border with a capacity of 1000 — 4000 per week each. Here the refugees are disinfected, and provided with some food and clothing.

They return in all sorts of conditions, but usually with quite worthless money, and without property. Some have homes or relatives; others have no place to go to. They are sent to shelters, some of which are in Warsaw, and are held there for two weeks while attempts are made to find work and friends. We are giving aid in connection with these shelters.

The return of these refugees presents the great emergency of the present time in Poland, a real war emergency of a very acute kind. Even those who own little patches of land and are returning home to them, find in many cases their dwellings destroyed, their land uncultivated, and they themselves are without horse or cow, plough or farming implements, seed for planting or wood for rebuilding. Help of every kind is needed to reestablish them, and this is a form of help which is especially worth giving, as these who receive are not beggars, but may become in a short time self-supporting and self-respecting peasants, even repaying in part the help given them.

There are also refugees from Soviet Russia who cannot return to their own country; the Russian Red Cross is responsible for them, but we aid by contributions of food. There are interned refugees from Ukraine and White Russia, a most difficult problem, since no one knows what will ultimately become of them. We help here with gifts of materials to start some form of industrial occupation, and with food for women and children.

### BRINGING DISTRICTS TO SELF-SUPPORT.

There are, however, very large districts in Poland so devastated by the war that they need not merely a few special forms of relief, but help in reconstruction on a comprehensive scale, in order that they may again be brought to self-support. Houses, live-stock and farm implements have been swept away by the passing and repassing of armies, and the peasants returning homeward from Russia find only earth and sky.

We went upon request into the Powiat of Hrubieszow in the spring of 1920 to try to re-establish the district by the loan of farming implements, seed, horses and materials for reconstruction. In the fall of 1920 our work was interrupted by the war between Poland and Soviet Russia which again devastated this district, but as soon as the Russians withdrew we returned to our task of clothing distribution already planned before the invasion. In the spring of 1921 we undertook tractor ploughing on a large scale with a unit of four tractors, with a view of bringing the district to

self-support. We ploughed small tracts for the neediest peasants and afterwards larger areas for farmers who agreed to plant them to bread crops to relieve the bread shortage.

During the two years we distributed vegetable seeds to thousands of families for family gardens, flax seed for family clothing and seed for general planting. One train-load of 15 cars of grain caused much excitement among the population.

We assisted those whose houses had been destroyed to rebuild them; they had in many cases received grants of wood from the Government, but needed horses to transport it and saws to cut it. We distributed the food from the A. R. A. to the children, as this district was too remote for them to secure it in any other way. We provided food for many families for the entire winter till harvest, and we noted that in these families there was practically no illness. We carried on district nurse visiting and health education, and helped in the rebuilding of schools.

The land in this district is very fertile and has now produced a good harvest, so we consider that the neighborhood has been brought practically to self-support and can care for its own needy people. We are now moving eastward to a still more devastated section in the Volhynia district, where villages are totally wrecked and where ploughing has been at a standstill for several years for want of implements.

In all this agricultural reconstruction work, our policy is to ask for some payment. Grain is



repaid in kind at harvest, to be used in other districts. Implements and ploughs are paid for in part and by installments, the money being turned over to a local committee which spends it for some local improvement under our direction. In the Hrubieszow district the money from sale of agricultural implements, grain and clothing was used to subsidize an agricultural school which will raise the standards of farming and living throughout the country-side.

### HOUSING RECONSTRUCTION.

Our experience at Hrubieszow turned our attention to the need of houses for the returning peasants, who in large sections of Poland are now living in dugouts or holes in the ground, roofed over with straw and mud. The Government makes grants of wood in the neediest cases, but often this cannot be utilized for want of horses to transport the wood, saws to cut it, or nails, bricks, cement and other supplementary materials for construction. It will take many years for the peasant to make enough from his small tract of land to rebuild his house which the war destroyed, and meantime children are dying in these hovels or growing up permanently impaired in health.

We have therefore undertaken housing reconstruction in co-operation with government authorities in several powiats west of Warsaw and among widows with large families in Hrubieszow. The extent of our help will be measured by the size of contributions yet to be secured, as this is a form

of relief which should be done on a much larger scale than we can undertake at present.

In general we help only those peasants who have very small holdings, and we require that our help shall go for dwellings only, and that no animals shall be housed in the building. We also require that the floor shall be above ground and the windows on hinges, so that they can be opened. We expect the peasants eventually to pay 60 per cent of the cost of what we furnish, over a period of years, without interest, the money to be used under a local committee but after consulting us.

### THE COTTON-SEED MEAL SCHEME.

Milk for children has been one of the bitterest problems of all war-stricken Europe. It cannot be met permanently by importing condensed milk. Consequently in January 1921 we turned our attention to methods for building up the fresh milk supply of Poland. Experiments made with cotton seed meal proved that we could secure 2½ liters increase of milk for every kilogram of the meal furnished to cows.

A grant from the Hoover Administration (A. R. A.) has made it possible for us to embark on an extensive plan for increasing the milk supply of the country. We are supplying the cotton-seed meal to 5000 cows, in and around ten chief cities, and are taking our pay from the farmers in fresh milk, which we then allot to children's institutions. Through this plan 15000 children are to receive a half liter extra fresh milk per day for the next six months.

This plan is attracting widespread attention; as it furnishes milk for children while at the same time rebuilding the vitality of the Polish cattle.

The Minister of Health has expressed his great approval of the scheme and of its double purpose of emergency relief and permanent reconstruction. We receive co-operation from city and central governments, as well as from local committees of farmers and dairymen, which we are organizing to care for all the detailed work.

### OUR GENERAL FUNCTION.

In all of this work it has been our policy to act largely as a „service“ organization, filling in gaps wherever we found them, and making connections between groups of people in need and the various sources of supply for that need. Our field force consists of carefully selected persons,—doctors, nurses, trained social workers, agriculturists, child welfare workers.—who give their time without pay in this service of international relief. Wherever we have undertaken a field and have found later that other organizations were prepared to come in, we have assisted them to do so and have gone on ourselves to other work. Where large supplies of food from the A.R.A. or of medical materials from the A.R.C. or of wood grants from the government have been unavailable for lack of local organization, or of personnel, or of supplementary materials, we have endeavored to supply that lack. This explains the extremely varied and changing nature of our work.

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