

Smith Alumnae Round Up Refugees Safely

Herd Peasant Women and Children in Great Drive From Regions They Had Reconstructed—Must Do Work All Over

By STERLING HEILIG.

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE,
April 5 (Delayed).

THE rushing hell of the great German offensive over the regions which they had previously devastated between Noyon and Ham tossed like a cyclone all the patient work of home repairing and field planting for the unhappy populations done by the all girl unit of a great American college alumnae body.

The Smith Collegers (from New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Cleveland, California, New Jersey, Connecticut, &c., and sustained by families of graduates in every city of our land) labored and triumphed under Gotha bombs and German long range cannon shells to relieve fourteen French villages ruined by the Germans before their famous retreat of a year ago.

Just as they saw the fruit of their labors, in patched homes, green kitchen gardens, comforted old folks and cleaned children, ruin, new ruin, swift and smashing, came to wipe all out and imperil the lives of the girls and their poor village friends.

Be off! Rush! Do not look behind! The great offensive! Crash! Ta-ra-ra-ta-ra-ra! To the sound of bugles, tolling bells, explosions, automobile honks and cries of men and women, all must be evacuated!

"Has all our work been done in vain?"

Triumphed Under Double Toil.

Just once they asked themselves the natural question. Then the girls rose up and triumphed in the midst of double devastation.

Once, last October, by the kindness of the French authorities I was taken in a military auto by a Lieutenant of Engineers to visit the Smith Collegers at their ruined Chateau of Greecourt and the fourteen crushed villages which they had come to relieve and comfort.

They were at that moment as follows:

Ruth Joslin of Chicago, Millicent Lewis of Irvington-on-Hudson, Alice Leavens of Boston, Ruth Gaines of New York, Dr. Alice Tallant of Philadelphia, Dr. Maud Kelly of St. Louis, Anne Chapin of Springfield, Elizabeth Bliss and Elizabeth Dana of Worcester, Mass.; Margaret Wood of Pasadena, Cal.; Margerie Carr of Cleveland, Catherine Hooper of Montclair, N. J.; L. O. Mather of Hartford, Conn.; Marie Wolfs of Newark, N. J., and Marie Bennet of Boston.

Almost immediately arrived Mrs. Hawes, I believe of Pittsburg, and Miss Ashley of New Orleans. Since other alumnae have come from Boston, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Seattle and other cities. In the present movement and confusion of evacuation their names cannot be immediately learned; but all are safe.

Men Drove Into Hell for Babies.

David Jones of Utica, N. Y., one of their camion drivers, drove back into a hotly bombarded town to bring out the last families. Harold Taylor of Youngstown, Ohio, drove into the same hell with three flat tires and a broken front spring, but carrying out six persons, mostly wounded!

Next time in the early part of March it was along with my janitor, who is a native of Offoy, near Ham, one of the Smith Collegers' fourteen villages. He went to persuade his old mother to come with him to Neuilly-Paris. She had refused vehemently and refused again.

"What! I held this roof all through under the Germans!" exclaimed the slender, wiry wisp of an old peasant dame aged 77, living alone in her damaged Offoy cottage. "In two years I fried 7,482 eggs for those Boche brutes and saved a bed, a stove, three chairs and two saucepans from their bonfires when they quit us. Shall I leave my house now that I've got my American girls coming to tea and the garden cultivated? They are angels of the good God!"

She spent all her son's visit telling him about the paragons.

"Son, they are of rich American fam-



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Miss Joslin, a Smith College girl, and an American Quaker distributing shoes to children in a devastated French village.

ilies, demoiselles of chateaux, yet they cross the seas to help old peasant women dig gardens! They wash a child's sore eyes! They have a store in Greecourt grounds, and if a family cannot pay there's credit. They make afternoon parties for mothers to cut and fit and all have coffee and buttered white bread! They gave me a yellow ulcer! They cured Pere Lamenant's swelled leg. Me go away to-night! Son, do not think of it. My Americaines will help me plant the little field to-morrow. What would they think when they come in their auto to find my door locked and me gone?"

It was only a month ago.

Yet all the time while laboring thus the girls were overwhelmed by material needs.

Among the last to enter the American Red Cross, they had continual difficulties with transportation. Their supplies were often held up. Once, I understand, of eighty little cook stoves only about thirty reached them, the remainder being deflected. "Tell home folks to send us money!" exclaimed Miss Joslin. "With it we can buy essential things here for the poor people. I know that a second hand bed at Compiègne costs \$160, not worth \$10, but we don't have to buy it, do we? I would rather knock together strips and put in chicken wire for a mattress. What we want to buy is cook stoves, garden implements and stuff to patch up houses!"

Impassioned Appeals to U. S.

They wrote home impassioned appeals to Mrs. Lucius Thayer of Portsmouth, N. H., the head of their executive committee, and Mrs. Harrison Lyman of Sharon, Mass., their treasurer. They had come to do social service—and found poor folks living in chicken houses!

Later when they entered the American Red Cross they had its mighty organization to draw on. Great works and great hopes were blooming with the fields. The devastated regions won back by French valor (in what cruel state!) began to look like land instead of chaos. Andre de Fouquieres, the former cotillon leader of Paris society, has paid his tribute to them.

Perhaps you will think of De Fouquieres as lecturing on a rose and organizing dance lunches at Biarritz, but he is not like that now. In soiled captain's uniform, with broken finger nails, army citations, grimy face and Croix de Guerre, the "dude" helped hold Plessier-de-Roye, the smashed chateau of his friend Vicomte Sam de Pontavice, become a bastion against the Boche at Lassigny, all through 1914, 1915 and 1916. When the region was won back he saw our girls at their work. At a press lunch at the Ambassadeurs, Paris, to which he was invited on a week's leave from the war, he said:

"Those girls! (His face worked and a tear rolled down the emotional Frenchman's cheek—but we've seen other men, hard nuts, "wet" these days.) They are just the angels of the good God!" (Aged peasant grandmother and Paris society butterfly used the same phrase.)

And the Boche came back.

Alas! the bitter disappointment!

"Has all our work been done in vain?" the girls mourned, as the booming of cannon grew louder. Flocks of refugees from towns already under fire came hastening past Ham and Offoy. Old folks and girls wheeled all their family possessions in hand carts, baby carriages and packing boxes set on wheels. Sick women came borne on shutters and planks for stretchers. Groups plodded on, accompanied by cows, donkeys, goats and dogs, each honest beast with some burden bound to its back. Children carried bundles, cats, rabbits and pet birds in cages.

The great German offensive!

Orders Sent by Red Cross.

Red Cross camions came rushing up with news and orders. "The reserves of food in warehouses are turned over to the Tommies." "Pack essential clothing in valises." "A chain of relief stations is being established. Here's the list." "Get your village people ready. We'll be back soon."

Get them ready!

Hurried from their homes at a few hours' notice, lamenting that their bundles must be limited, burdened with the care of sick and aged, faint and hungry till they reached a train head, dazed, confused, without will, they had to be moved from spot to spot like packages. At Offoy they were ordered out of their homes at 7 o'clock of a Sunday night, allowed till midnight to gather their belongings and be ready to pile into the camions: Lucky in those hours seemed the villages, like Hombleux, situated on a railroad!

Boom! Boom! Honk! Honk! The night sky is red with burning towns to northward. The dark village streets, without a light, and full of mud and ruts, echo lamentations.

In the night of horror and confusion there was just this momentary weakness. Then the girls (just ordinary, nice American college girls, you know, not heroines in books) pulled themselves together, as the Quakers wrung their hands, and called:

"All out! Round up the children!"

And it was so. In the fourteen villages assigned them only the college girls knew all the children and where to find them. Already when I visited them last October they were caring for three hundred under 15 years of age.

"Suppose it is Hombleux," they told me. "We get the children together, clean them, clothe them, feed them, give them a good recreation with American games and leave them hand work to do. We try to raise standards, stir hope. These poor people have been terribly tried and are liable to sit dazed and talk about their troubles."

"Each has its regular days for children's gatherings, boys' classes in carpentering and for girls from 12 to 15 dress-making (this was in the beautiful days when things had begun to bloom). The boys under 16 are being kept at home by

their mothers to do housework. It is hard for the boys. We get them together with tools and ideas. It stimulates their self-respect. In each village we have a club for boys and another for girls and children, where mothers can meet to cut out clothes and enjoy social relations, all cosy, warm and nice.

"It may not seem much, but it is a great deal in these villages where the Germans systematically blew up the houses before they went off and burned the furniture in the street if they could not carry it with them."

Not much?

Nobody doubts, least of all the French authorities, now that it is positively known that not a child or aged or sick person was left behind in the second desolation.

Three girls to each auto camion, they jumped in with Red Cross men and French and British rescuers to dash off to the villages—and "round up the children." Of course it meant the mothers and the family as well, including dog, cat and canary.

Only They Know the Children.

You would have to see those villages to understand. No postman could find his way among the ruins. Only the feminine mind could remember who lived where by months of visiting. Our girls counted noses—and ticked off the humble populations. Nobody else knew them!

They rushed them to the nearest relief station.

When the evacuation began the American Red Cross, cooperating with the Franco-British authorities, established a chain of such relief stations for refugees. Floyd Vankeuren of Denver, Col., was in charge at Amiens; W. B. Jackson of Florida, Dr. John C. Baldwin of Baltimore and staff nurses from the Children's Hospital were at Neale, and, as they came up triumphantly in camion after camion, the Quakers and Smith Collegers handled the station at Montdidier.

Travelling northward to Amiens, who should turn up with a special military pass but my Neuilly janitor, seeking his old mother. (A General had once lived in his apartment house.) In that fine city, glory of the British front, the indomitable old dame of 77, with her high heart and burning eyes, sat composedly in a refuge, eating a mustard omelette.

"Where are the young ladies? Are they safe?" he demanded, before he kissed his mother.

"My young ladies? Huh, what would you think?" she answered. "Son, you don't need to save them. They saved me. They have an army with chariots!"

A moment's silence. Then the old French peasant woman looked anxious.

"Son," she quavered, "have you heard bad news? Are my young ladies safe?"

Only a posted bulletin of the Associated Press could compose her to undress and try to sleep.

"The Philadelphia unit," it read, "the Dal; unit, the Smith Collegers from Greecourt and Bismarckcourt and the American Quakers are all safe and doing wonders."