

# THE CLEARING + HOUSE OF MISERY

PAVL WEST

OUTSIDE the railroad station at Evian-les-Bains they had gathered together, a group of some 50 or 60. They were women and children, with a scattering of old men. Each bore a tag printed in German and with a large number on it. Some carried bundles, others were empty-handed; their clothing was nondescript. Their faces were drawn and pinched in the evening sun that came over the waters of the lake of Geneva, and the children among them clung to the knees of the women in that pitiful, frightened way so many children of France have of doing these days.

Inside the station I could hear the Chasseurs Alpins, three drummers and three buglers, loudly playing "Le Savoyard." There were some cheers as the band, leading the main body of the convoy which had just come in from Switzerland, marched out through the station to join the group I was watching. Great caissons of the American Red Cross stood waiting to receive the infirm among them. Otherwise it was very quiet, not at all the scene I had expected to find here.

There were some women and children in the group who fascinated me by their dazed, hopeless expression—the still, numb way in which they stood, almost trembling, it seemed to me. I turned my camera toward them to take a picture, when, as they caught sight of my action, there was a cry from them. A very old woman raised her shriveled hand and tried to hide her face from the lens. The children shrank further into the folds of their women folks' skirts, and an old man gasped: "For the Prussian. He is going to send our pictures back to the Prussians, and they—"

A Red Cross nurse at my side explained that I did not wish to do any such thing—that they were safe back in France, their France, again, and that the Prussians could never touch them. She pointed to the arch across the street, a few feet away, through which they would soon pass, with the American and French flags intertwined and the motto in big scrawly letters, "Soyez les Bienvenus." She explained that I was an American. They seemed to understand, and their faces lighted up, for this was in early June, and even these pitiful ones, who had been where little news had reached them for nearly four years, knew that the Americans were in France in good numbers now, and were their allies.

So the group ceased to shrink from my camera. A woman even thrust her child forward and smoothed its hair so that it would look well in the picture. But, just as I was about to snap the shutter, another woman in the group, standing a little back, looked at me with an expression that was full of condemnation, full of appeal, as she said: "Yes, my friends, let us stand up straight, so that he can get a good photograph of misery!" Then she laughed bitterly, and I—well, I did not take the picture.

At this moment the rest of the convoy began to come out of the station, led by the Chasseurs' little band. With them came Red Cross men and nurses, carrying or helping those who could not walk into the waiting caissons and ambulances. I put up my camera and hurried ahead to reach the casino, whether the procession was bound, before their arrival there. Someone struck up "La Marseillaise," some woman with a high, shrill voice. As I climbed upon the front seat of an ambulance and we started to pass the crowd I thought for a moment that I was now going to see, going to hear, what I had come up from Paris for—the glad burst of enthusiasm, of happiness from these people now that they fully realized that they were in France, among their own, free from the German yoke, which had lain on their necks since 1914. But as our ambulance went by the procession there were no other voices raised to join that of the singing woman, and after a few bars she, too, stopped singing and the procession went on, silent, shuffling, except for some small boys, town boys, who trudged ahead of the Chasseurs, still playing their tune on drum and bugle.

I reached the casino ahead of the procession and waited at the door for them to come down the Rue du Casino. The narrow, steep street was crowded along its sidewalks with townspeople, and from windows were flung the tricolor, while the American flag waved here and there, too. As the procession came around the head of the street the people hailed it with cheers and the waving of flags. The Chasseurs played more loudly—now it was "Vive l'Armee" they were tooting. A few of the children raised their heads and looked with glad eyes on the enthusiastic natives who were trying so hard to cheer them home. An old man in the procession straightened up and shouted, "Vive le General Joffre." But otherwise there were no cheers, no thrills of happiness, nor anything but just that down-bent attitude, that shuffling walk, that dazed, whipped, cowed expression. It was, as the woman at the station, had said, misery. For Evian is the clearing house of misery these days.

It was not so at first, the American Red Cross doctor told me, and so the subprefect of the department of the Haute-Savoie also assured me. "Which is why we make such a great effort to cheer them as they come in nowadays," he said. "They are crushed, these people; they are like dead men and women, and the children, even the little ones, are scarcely alive to the situation. Free from Germany once more? They cannot believe it—there is scarcely enough strength left in their poor minds and bodies for them to be able to understand."

"Yes," added the Red Cross doctor, pointing out a girl of eighteen or nineteen who passed; "look at the expression on the face of that girl!" I looked, I caught her eye as she turned in my di-



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RETURNING EXILES IN RAILROAD STATION AT EVIAN



ANAEMIC CHILDREN ON BALCONY OF EVIAN HOSPITAL

rection, but I do not think she saw me at all, or saw anything. Her face was blank for a moment, then, as I looked aside she nearly collided with someone ahead of her, she shrank from him with a sort of cry, as if she had expected to be beaten down.

We followed the procession into the large hall, now, where the people of Evian greet these home-comers, and where, at long tables, they feed them. Over the balcony hung the flags of the allies, with the French and American closely intertwined. The people were placed at the tables, unobtrusively obeying the Red Cross nurses who dived about assisting them. They ate the food which was set before them without a word.

As they ate and drank—there was some \$50 of these people—I walked about with the Red Cross doctor and studied their faces, their demeanor. Occasionally as one saw us he or she smiled, but for the most part it was like walking through the halls of an asylum for the mentally deficient—the eyes were dazed, the expression empty, vacant.

By now some young women had passed among the crowd giving to each a little French flag. I noticed a boy of about twenty, tall, well put together. The girl had to thrust the flag into his hand and explain to him what it was.

"That boy hasn't always been an idiot, I would say offhand," said the doctor at my side. "He looks beaten, whipped. That's the sort they are sending back to us, nowadays."

The boy still holds the flag, looking at it as if trying to recall where he had seen that combination of colors before. I recollected that he would have been about fifteen or sixteen when the war broke out, when he, with these others and so many thousands like them, were caught in that first southward rush of the German horde through the towns of northern France.

The subprefect was mounting the platform to speak to the diners. The Chasseurs played their tunes loudly. The subprefect began to talk to them. He told them they were safe among their friends once more, that never again would they be slaves of Germany, that homes would be found for them and an effort made to find the friends and relatives whom they had not seen nor even heard from for four years. He told them that France soon would conquer, that she was now joined by America with her millions of young men, and then he gave the signal for the band to start the "Marseillaise." This it did.

As the first notes were heard some of the faces lighted up. There was an effort to sing the wonderful song, and after a fashion it succeeded. But though before the refrain had been finished there were many voices hushed, many hands that could not wave the little French flags—for a moment patriotism, love of country, hope and trust had been awakened. A few minutes later I followed the Red Cross doctor into the big room where he examines every child who comes into Evian with these convoys of repatriated people. So far he

has examined nearly 50,000. I saw 280 little children examined. They ranged in age from three to twelve years, and of them all there were barely more than 50 per cent whom he could pass as being even fairly well nourished.

"They have been fed mostly on turnips and black bread for months," he explained, "and with each convoy there are more undernourished ones and more like this little fellow." He indicated a thin wisp of a boy—he was ten years of age—it was tuberculosis.

This explains, furthermore, why the American Red Cross hospital, as a part of its war burden, has been obliged to extend its work into the foundation and maintenance of homes, here, there and everywhere throughout France, for these unfortunate whom Germany is sending back by the hundreds of thousands. For they are unable to work, unable to make their own homes, and the civilian population of France, bent double with the pack of its own problems, has been increasingly powerless to cope with this, Germany's insidious effort to break the morale of France.

It was all new to me when I went up to Evian from Paris to see the repatriates come in. I had heard of how Germany had begun sending them back in 1916, and how, as the numbers of them increased, the American Red Cross stepped in and undertook to look out for the sick children, finally extending its work to caring for the hundreds of tuberculous women whom Germany returned to France. But I had heard, also, of how the repatriates, sent through Switzerland by the Germans arrived at Evian, singing, kneeling down and kissing the soil of France and gladly taking up their share of their country's work in factories and on farms. I had looked for a scene of joy at the station there in Evian, for cheers and heart-thrills at the casino. Here was a people being returned to the country that it belonged to; here were banners of welcome, here were hands and hearts open to it. But I had seen something entirely different, and when I inquired it was explained to me. "It is plainly," I was told, "part of the German plan of breaking down French morale, of destroying the efficiency of the American Red Cross, which it has learned is doing such a large part in the work of handling repatriates."

"At the same time that Germany is hurling her big shells into Paris by day and air raiding it by night; at the same time that she is driving refugees by the thousands from their homes in towns along the line of her proposed advance; at the same time she is filling the hospitals with wounded French and American soldiers, taxing the equipment of the American Red Cross to the limit, as she believes, she has tried a new trick during this offensive."

"If this is not so, how can it be accounted for that each succeeding trainload of repatriates is larger, contains more sick and completely used up individuals than the previous one? How can you account for the large number of young women with babies born in Germany since they were taken there—babies whose fathers may be German, but whose identity will ever remain a mystery—which are unloaded on us every day?"

Even at that it seemed rather a difficult task. These people who were coming in—I saw several trainloads of them—seemed such hopeless things. What could be done with them? What a burden they would be on the French! How little result there would be from anything done for them or with them!

"That is far from being the case," I was told. "They respond in an incredibly short time to all we do for them. Their health improves, their minds clear. From being liabilities they soon become assets. Germany sends these people in, wrecks, so cowed, so starved, that they can scarcely tell where they have been, what has happened to them in the years of their captivity in the mines, the mills, the fields of their captor country. Tuberculosis seems to have a firm grip on many of them, and the children are filled with the germs of contagious diseases. But either by happy ability of the French to rise under difficulties, or the joy of finding themselves back in their own land, the rapidity with which they rally, the quickness with which their minds clear, is remarkable."

A French woman, in charge of the casino vestiaire at Evian, where clothing is found for these unfortunates, said: "The more they send, the better we like it. We can care for all, with the help of our friends, the Americans. And the faster they send them back, though their coming so fast unquestionably taxes our resources to the utmost, the more quickly will France get back her own people."



## Forward!

With no thought of bursting shrapnel and poisonous gases into which they plunge—with every muscle tense, with every faculty of mind alert, with one thought only—TO FIGHT AND WIN.

That is the way our men are going into battle. When the shrill whistle sounds the advance, out they go—their whole heart in the task before them. No power on earth can hold them back.

## Forward!

The same sharp challenge to battle is sounding for us. We must answer in the same proud way—the way of our fighting men—the American way. We must lend the way they fight.

We must show the war-maddened Hun a united American people moving forward shoulder to shoulder, irresistibly, to Victory.

Our task is to supply the money, the ships, the guns, the shells that we must have to win. It is a tremendous task. We must do it as our fighting men do theirs—with the indomitable spirit of Victory.

We must work, and save, and lend with one thought only—TO FIGHT AND WIN.

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**Toasts and Roasts.**  
At a little luncheon recently held by a mutual admiration club, the following toasts were proposed:  
"His highness, the hetman of Ukraine! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"  
—Kaiser Bill.  
"His majesty, the Kerman kaiser! Hoch, hoch, hoch!"—General Skoropadski of Ukraine.  
Such outbursts of impassioned eloquence and expressions of undying fealty will probably go thundering down the ages and cause even President Wilson to shake in his shoes—with laughter.  
**True.**  
"Is golf a difficult game to master?"  
"I guess so. Nobody's ever mastered it yet."  
**Sometimes, of Course.**  
"Anger, for example, is an emotion, an abstract quality," explained the college lecturer. "One can see only the effects of it. One cannot taste it, hear it, see it, smell it or feel it."  
"Oh, I know, but professor, it has color," said the usual class boob.  
"You must be mistaken, young man," replied the prof.  
"Well, in a book I am reading it says that man's face was purple with anger."  
The teacher is one who makes two ideas grow where only one grew before.  
No matter how well you do a thing, you are sure to hear more complaints than compliments.

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