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"CHILDREN OF EUROPE"

by

DOROTHY McCARDLE

Children

1. "A PROBLEM GENERATION"

(Recorded on Wednesday, 13th November 1946 in Ram2. at 2.15 - 3.45.)

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OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT:

(Not recorded)

This is London calling. Miss Dorothy McCardle has recently returned from a visit to seven of the liberated countries of Europe, a visit for the purpose of studying the effects of the war upon children under fifteen, a problem about which she is now writing a book. Today we bring you the first of three talks she is going to give about these children. She calls it "A PROBLEM GENERATION". Miss McCardle is the Irish Historian and Novelist who wrote "The Unforeseen" and "The Uninvited", both novels published in America, and the second of which was made into a film. MISS DOROTHY McCARDLE —

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As liberation came to country after country in Europe, and their proper rulers, taking over control, began to investigate conditions, the injuries inflicted by enemy occupation became gradually manifest. The full extent of these injuries has not yet been measured; in especial, the harm done to the children is difficult to assess.

One aspect, the physical deterioration of the children, is calculable: it is known that a high percentage of the children of Marseilles and Lyons and the Department of the Seine have lost three inches of growth; that the age group most seriously affected is that in the early 'teens. Plainly visible in many countries are the defects due to prolonged malnutrition - the pallor, the under-developed body and narrow chest, with arms and legs that look too thin and long; the peaked little faces with large eyes. The increase of tuberculosis in children can be plotted on graphs.

The children sent abroad for convalescence - those whom we receive in our homes and schools - are, as a rule, physically delicate but mentally and morally sound. There are others, however, whose injuries are imponderable, not comprehended by the child himself, half forgotten and half disguised, while the pain which results from them is expressed in perplexing ways. The hurt that has been done to these children's faith in life, to their mental growth and nervous balance, is unfathomable, for the children have no language in which to explain their bewilderments and no standard of comparison by which to measure their loss.

In camps and hostels all over Europe are children whose relatives are all missing or dead. Some of the children are amenable and co-operative but others are "difficult" and unhappy. Matrons and Monitors struggle against restless excitability among their charges, and with an even more distressing apathy, - and unresponsiveness repelling all approach. Educators despair over children who crave for schooling yet seem unable to concentrate. Ministries of Justice are agitated over the increase of juvenile delinquency. Psychologists are baffled by quirks of behaviour and strange neuroses not in the text books. If you ask these devoted and anxious workers how deep is the harm that has been done they all, always, give you the same answer: "It is too early yet to say."

Since all the children's troubles have their dark roots in experience it should help a little in understanding them if we recall a few typical experiences of childhood in war-ravaged Europe.

The Nazis were logical; and it is logical, when attempting the total and final subjugation of a country, to debilitate its children and condition the young survivors to servitude. Their logic led to the calculated effort to corrupt the youth of Poland, to the starving of children as well as adults in Greece and Yugoslavia; it led to the suppression of all higher education in Czechoslovakia, and, in the Western Democracies, to the distorting, in varying degrees, of all education in order to Germanise or subdue the youth.

The children resisted Germanisation. They knew that their teachers gave these absurd lessons under compulsion, and they learned not to learn. They closed their minds to what they were being taught. "The girls with stone faces", the Germans called the schoolgirls of Luxembourg. The teachers played the bitter comedy of compliance, or resisted and were dismissed or executed. The Norwegian teachers, by their splendid and famous protest, raised a banner of truth before the eyes of the children, but brought on themselves deportation to the Arctic North. In the Slav countries teachers were recognised as probable leaders of resistance, and great numbers were executed or sent to concentration camps. Nazis or collaborators appointed to replace them had a thankless task in the schools. Boys and girls brought the fine art of making life a misery for the teacher to perfection - and that entertaining habit is easier to acquire than to forget.

At home and in their leisure hours also, children in the occupied countries were without guidance and without training except such as was given in the Nazi youth organisations. Fathers and elder brothers were at war, or in hiding, or prisoners; mothers were at forced labour, or were interned, or were searching all day for food. The children had to make what they could of the world for themselves.

It was a harsh world. They taught themselves that, in it, soft emotions were out of place.

British planes flew over Holland to bomb Berlin -

"I hope they smash it flat", a Dutch schoolboy was heard to say.

"I don't", a little girl confessed - "because my brother is there."

"All the same", the hardy young patriot insisted, "I hope they smash it to bits."

Doubtless that appeared the correct sentiment; doubtless the little girl felt inferior and ashamed.

While the children were deprived of normal training, there was one kind of teaching that they did receive - had to receive.

Under enemy occupation, to tell a quick and convincing lie is often the only way to save life. Jewish children, hidden among non-Jews, had their false papers and their "cover-stories" and their young comrades had to know these by heart. The best liar was the best friend. A child might have to lie, also, to protect someone who gave him food. In Czechoslovakia, to give or sell poppy-seed, except to the Germans, was punishable by death. Parents

sent their children to the farms to secure it because there was no other source of oil. A Government official in Prague told me how he used to warn his little son: "If a German catches you with it you must tell him that you stole it, or else the farmer will be shot."

Doubtless the child knew that if this happened he would be banished to a German Reformatory - and, doubtless, he would bravely have lied.

The lesson of destruction is another that these children had to learn. Of course, they enjoyed it. Violence releases uncivilised instincts and there is a sort of glee in that release; besides, violence and wreckage were everywhere and seemed natural. Those Norwegian youngsters who heard that their school was to be occupied by the Germans, knew what to do: they broke in at night and smashed every electric gadget in the place. In Holland, when the famine-winter was killing the old people and the babies with cold, a boy would delight in finding a tree to cut down or an empty house whose stairs could be broken up. He would come home with his load a hero, a saviour of life.

It is no wonder that the Ministers at the Hague, after the liberation, were at their wits' end to know how to save from the youngsters such plantations as the Germans had spared! They have solved their problem by sending the school children out to plant trees - no child destroys a tree planted by a child.

"Commandeering", "Requisitioning", are other habits more easily acquired than overcome, and it is not only children who have shown that they do not know when to stop. Many a young, so-called "delinquent" has been a hero in his time.

Jonny was a young warrior of Luxembourg. For months he brought food secretly to a brother, a fugitive from conscription, in the woods of the Ardennes. When his parents were deported the local Maquis let Jonny stay with them. He was caught by the Germans and interrogated - plunged first into hot water, then into cold - rather weakening treatment - but he told them nothing. This summer, Dr. Armande who was taking care of him and was very fond of him, rebuked him in sorrow for stealing a watch. Jonny sighed deeply, filled with remorse.

"I am awful!" he lamented. "Why do I do it? It just seems that I can't help myself. The truth is, Madam Doctoresse, I have been too long with the Maquis".

These children are patriots, but there are others - the children of collaborators. What is to be done with them? Belgium and Norway have tried from the first to assimilate and absorb them, but Holland made a mistake. Some eighty-eight thousand Quislings and Suspects were imprisoned at the liberation in Holland, children and all. Later, the children were removed to institutions and segregated. They were growing sullen and bitter until a movement to help them started and quickly prevailed. Now, most of them go to the local schools and in one collective home, at least, they are normal, happy, Dutch boys and girls.

In all the countries still troubled with shortages and disorder the young toughs are thriving, of course. Trading in the black market is the natural outlet, now, for the spryness and slyness, the dash and enterprise, acquired in tricking the Germans or in helping them. It is both more amusing and more profitable than work.

Apart from this, and from graver evils - moral laxity and worse practices learnt in the concentration camps,

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thousands of boys and girls who would normally be well-behaved children are full of turbulent impulses and unhappy tendencies still. They do not know what to make of the world and of the people in it. It seems to be a place in which, in order to survive, you have to trample and elbow very hard. You have to be ready to trick and grab and lie and steal and to die for your friends. And if all your friends are dead?.....

Such youngsters, ~~many~~ matured in some ways, retarded in others, will never be good children again. They will never, content and docile, walk in a crocodile or recite lessons from a bench. Nor will they believe in fairy tales. They are realists, quick to see through hypocrisy, quick to suspect motives and to distrust. They are also self-reliant, resourceful, loyal and brave. Action is necessary to them and so is responsibility. Years have been cut out of their lives; they have a desperate sense of urgency and must know where they are going and see results.

What can be done for them?

Two things have proved successful so far.

For the older ones, surroundings and enterprises have here and there been created which give them scope for activity - small communities where they live in groups, contriving their own comfort and order and more or less governing themselves. Naturally, in such communities, everything depends on the personality and tact of the adult in charge: too much leadership or too little would be equally ruinous. Where the right man or woman is in the right place, creating a new life for these virile, experienced, war-hardened children, an atmosphere of most promising vitality and progress prevails.

For the younger children it has been found that a change to a new environment, to home-life and peaceful surroundings can work a miracle. Not only do they recover physical health and nervous poise with startling rapidity, but sly habits often vanish while candid ways take their place. It is as if the impulse to straight, balanced, upright growth were as strong in the children as in a tree, - so strong that, given a chance they can, in time, recover from all the distortions of war.

One thing seems true of all of them of all ages: for these children the whole human race is divided into friends and enemies. They need, first of all and most of all, to be assured that they have a great many friends.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT:

(Not recorded) That was MISS DOROTHY MACARDLE, the Irish Historian and Novelist, talking about the Children in Europe. The programme was brought to you by the British Broadcasting Corporation.