

Disc No: DOX 78895  
Dur: 12'04"

"CHILDREN IN EUROPE"

by DOROTHY MACARDLE

2. "CHILDREN IN HIDING"

(Reh. & Recording on Tuesday, 19th November 1946 in O.S.2 at 11.15 12.45)  
Trans: NORTH AMERICAN SERVICE: Wed/Thurs. 20th/21st Nov. 1946 : 0045 GMT  
" " " Thursday. 21st Nov. 1946 : 1500 GMT

The fears of childhood seem curiously alike in all places and all generations. Perhaps ancestral memories explain this - I don't know. But they differ vastly in degree.

The fears of a healthy protected child are half fantastical. A piece of him knows, all the time, that there is not really a bogey man lurking in the alley with a sack on his back... but it was an enormous sack, with kicking children in it, and room for more...

There was a huge black dog, too, in the shrubbery, who might leap out any minute, but he never did... it was only in dreams that a giant used to come tramping, near and nearer, his footsteps shaking the ground, to carry a naughty child away. And I think we all doubted that a burning furnace waited in the next world to devour disobedient children, however vividly our nurse made us see the flames and however loudly we howled ... The well-brought-up modern English child would probably laugh at such stories today.

But in Europe, in the countries which were occupied by the Nazis, children suffered these terrors not very long ago - and they were not nightmares, not baseless fears, but warranted and inevitable: because there were men who tore children away from their homes; and mothers did disappear; and those furnaces did exist.

The children knew their danger: nobody could prevent that. What was happening soon became common knowledge, and whisperings and warnings were everywhere. Besides, Jewish children had to be told - they had to be taught to lie and to hide.

The transports began to include children too young to labour. The Gestapo began to visit homes for Jewish children and to take all the children away. Very soon the truth was known:

/the strong...

the strong useful boys were being kept as long as they could work, but most of the little girls, and anyone who looked delicate or who became ill, and boys under ten years of age, could not hope to survive.

All the children were taken from Jewish orphanages in Leyden, the Hague, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, and were never heard of again.

As soon as this was realised in Holland, the campaign of rescue began. The students of Utrecht were the first to act.

In June 1942 a group of them decided to onderduiken "dive under", as they call it in that country of water-ways, and to form a kidnapers' unit of resistance. The same thing was done, then, by students of Amsterdam and Delft and by other groups. Individual onderduikers and groups of social workers joined the conspiracy, and the nation wide organisation that grew up found that almost any patriotic Dutch man or woman could be called upon to take the risk of hiding a Jew.

There was a central office and a clearing house, and there were farms and homes, schools and hospitals and sanatoria where Jewish children were taken in and mixed with others or concealed. Identity Cards, Birth Certificates, and Ration Books were skilfully forged. A dark-eyed baby girl became an Italian contessa - she was the cherished ward of two Baronesses; a small Jewish boy passed as the son of a Spanish diplomatist. Among the blue-eyed and fair haired Dutch boys and girls Jewish children were not always easy to hide.

Those who helped knew that if they were discovered they would be treated as Jews and sent to the same concentration camp. A young man, a teacher, who was found to be concealing ten Jewish children, was beaten to death.

It was dangerous work. At first, when the

organisers ...



organisers had to place Jewish children among others, they felt nervous lest some indiscreet youngster would give the secret away; but the solidarity of the children proved astonishing - they seemed to grasp the fact that questions must not be exercised much more discretion than many adults, and to convince asked, themselves that they knew nothing that it was dangerous to know.

A little girl of eight and her mother were hidden, separately, in a Dutch village. Great pains were taken to convince the child that her mother was in Amsterdam, and she addressed her letter to her there, every week. After the Liberation there was an ecstatic reunion and only then did the little girl confide in her hostess - "Of course", she said, "Mummy has been here all the time. I knew that perfectly well."

The rescue organisation was extremely successful: eleven hundred and thirty children were saved by the four student groups. About four thousand were saved by the Jewish organiser, Walter Süsskind, and his assistant, Hetty Brandel, before these two workers were sent to the concentration camps, where they died. They snatched children from under the eyes of the Gestapo in Amsterdam. The Germans used a theatre there as the assembly centre where the Jews waited in crowds for the buses to take them away. There is a Valvanistic college across the road with a back garden which joins the garden of a day nursery. While the crowd of deportees milled round the buses, filling the street, many of their children were drawn through the doorway of the college and smuggled into the nursery. At night, heavy sacks would be removed from the nursery by rescue workers - in each sack a Jewish child.

What memories and thoughts, what fears and imaginings, must have haunted the minds of these little Jews of Holland and of all the other countries where they were hunted and hidden and hurried secretly from place to place!

Near Brussels there is a sanatorium at the edge of a wood. Jewish families knew Dr. Hendricks and knew that she was a friend. Children were always appearing in the doorstep begging

to be hidden. Soon a large number were in her care. A look out was kept. When a German search party approached the Jewish children ran to the wood and crouched there in the undergrowth until the enemy had gone - a grim game of hide and seek.

Concealment was easier in France where the difference of colouring, build and gesture, between Jewish and non-Jewish children is not so marked. Madame Roubakine kept many among the boarders in her Paris school.

French children are rather highly strung as a rule. Her pupils were nervous. They used to say they heard men prowling around the house at night. Once, when they had all gone to bed, Madame Roubakine found that they had stretched pieces of string across the front door.

The young teacher who slept with the boarders was a special favourite of theirs and she persuaded the children to confide in her. They told her too much. The day came when Madame Roubakine realised suddenly that this girl had denounced her and the school. When she told her quietly to go home there was an outburst of abuse in which the cook also took part.

"You are no better than a Jew yourself! You hide Jews! You should be put away with them!" they said to her before they left.

During the few daylight hours that remained Madame Roubakine was rushing about and telephoning among her friends. She found a bed for every child, and that night no one remained in the school.

In the morning the front door was found broken, the classrooms wrecked, even the children's toys trampled to fragments. It was the end of the school, but all those children's lives had been saved.

Switzerland was the land of refuge. Underground workers in France risked their lives - and many sacrificed them, to smuggle children over the frontier. A child with



features distinctively Jewish would travel in the train with a bandaged face. A group of fugitives would settle for a time in a village close to the frontier, pretending to be a party of convalescents or a vacation party enjoying the skiing in the mountains. They would go for walks and excursions and sing, to delude the guards, and would decide at last at which part of the barbed wire fence it would be best to make the attempt. The great danger was from the dogs. If a guard felt suspicious he would set his police dog to watch the party while he went for help. Then, everyone had to stand still. If a child moved a step, the dog would spring at once for his leg or throat. One group succeeded in cajoling the dog when the guard was out of sight and escaped.

Not many children anywhere escaped without grown-up aid. There is a little Slovak girl who did so and who has come back at last to Piestany where she was born. Her name is Manzi Templer and she is thirteen now. She wrote out for me the bits of her adventure that she could remember but there are big gaps in her memory, as in the memories of nearly all children who have suffered fear and shock.

She was nine years old when she was deported with her parents and brother. She remembered her father, mother and brother being shot. The Germans took her to Maidanek, where there was a great extermination camp. She does not know how she escaped from them the first time.

"How we got to be in Maidanek in the cellar, I can't remember," she writes. A girl of her own age called Erika Brichta was with her.

"There were about thirty children there", her story goes on. "We had fleas and lice. We never had a wash and our clothes were just rags. Winter came twice and we lived there in the cellar and many children died. An old woman looked after us. Now and then she took us out for a while in

/the air....

the air, but only in the dark, because the Germans must not know that we were there. But one day somebody told them about us, and the trucks came to take us away. Erika and I got on to the last truck and as soon as we were out of the town in the open, and the car stopped near a wood, we got off the truck and in a moment when nobody was looking we crouched down and hid in the wood. For two days and nights we wandered around until we were stopped by a Russian patrol. From that moment on everything was all right. We could eat as much as we liked and then we were washed and clean."

It seems that the children were excellently cared for and were brought to Prague with the army of liberation in a hospital train. There they were placed in an institution and sent to school, but Manzi was unable to remember from where she came - until something happened.

"One day" she writes, "when we were walking in the street in Prague I heard a gentleman saying to another gentleman 'Tonight I am going to Piestany'. I suddenly stood still as if struck by lightning and begged the gentleman to take me too. But he couldn't take me with him because he didn't know to whom to take me."

That gentleman took a great deal of trouble for Manzi. He found her relatives in her native town and they sent for her.

Her story has a happy ending: - "That is how I came to Piestany. It was winter and outside the snow was deep but all the houses were so warm. And that's how I came to Aunt E. and one day Erika came too, and we were very happy ... Erika hadn't known at all the name of her grandmother, only this she knew - that she lived in Vave-mesto and spoke Italian. In that way she could easily be found: in Vave-mesto people didn't speak Italian."

/Manzi's Aunt....



Manzi's Aunt added a little note to her letter. She says "The children were not children like other children. It was heartbreaking, the way they told their experiences... they had only a resigned kind of sigh.

"Manzi, the elder of the two was very intelligent and a good observer; she soon knew who was genuinely kind and who "was kind only in a fickle way." Her Aunt describes the first Friday evening when the atmosphere of Sabbath was in the house and the Jewish Sabbath rituals began. When Manzi saw the candles and the table set, she trembled. The child suddenly began stammering prayers in Hebrew and saying things about her parents' home - her mother who lit the candles, and her father.

Her aunt says: "We had a shaking experience which we grown ups will never forget. My pen can hardly describe what went on in the soul of this child. My That evening she felt, for the first time, all the things that had happened; what she had lost and what she had regained.... she suddenly knew everything, and for the first time, Manzi cried and wept bitter tears - an orphan.

"We grew to love her sincerely" this note goes on. "We spoiled her... as she stood in her new coat and shoes before the mirror she said, 'What would the children say if they could see me in all my new things?' All the unhappiness suddenly forgotten, the happy laughter of a child lit up the house."

When I read that letter a verse of Blake's came into my mind -

He who gives a child a treat  
Rings joy-bells in Heaven's street:  
He who gives a child a home  
Builds Palaces in Kingdom Come.

It would surely need a poet like Blake to describe what happens in the heart and mind of a child who, having lived in hiding, having depended for life itself on tricks and deceptions, having been sought and hunted by men whose purpose was to put him to death, finds himself secure at last, in a friendly world, protected and loved.