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THE
WHITE RAG
AND
OTHER STORIES

EUROPEAN STUDENT RELIEF
WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION

THE WHITE RAG.

HE was a stranger in town. Of this there could be no doubt. His dress, his manner of walking, the interested and semi-curious way in which he turned his head from side to side; each of these factors in itself sufficed to show that he was not a native.

He was strolling along a road in the residential section of the city. Almost of a sudden he stopped. His eyes seemed to be drawn toward one of the windows of an apartment house on his left. He hesitated a moment, scrutinized something about the window very closely, smiled to himself and resumed his walk.

At the first street crossing beyond the apartment house he stopped again. Once more his gaze rested on a window just above the side walk, and the smile seemed to give way to a look of wonder. Toward another window he turned his eyes, and the look on his face became one of perplexity.

Other windows he scanned in rapid succession in the seconds which followed, his perplexity increasing all the while. Removing his hat, he began to run his fingers through his hair as if to make sure that he was awake. He also began to murmur to himself.

Forming thus an almost perfect picture of uncertainty, doubt, and meditative wonder, the stranger stood for a full minute. He might have remained longer in this attitude had he not been slightly startled by the sound of cart wheels approaching from behind. From the last window at which he had been looking, he turned his eyes toward this cart. Here he found another cause for doubting both his wits and his vision. The cart was being pushed by two very well dressed young men, whom, by their bright caps, he recognized at once as university students.

A somewhat peculiar intuition told him that there was some connection between these students and the windows which had been attracting his attention. He decided to hail them and seek an explanation.

"You will pardon what may appear to be idle curiosity on my part," he said in introducing himself, "but I would like very much to have you explain to me if possible the significance of the pieces of cloth which are suspended from the windows of so many houses in this street."

"Certainly, Sir. This is White Rag Day."

"White Rag Day? I fear that I am still in the dark. Is this the anniversary of some historical battle? As you may observe, I am not one of your fellow countrymen, and I am not familiar with your celebrations. Tell me a bit about this Day if you have time, will you?"

"No, it is not a celebration so much as an inauguration, not an anniversary but a beginning of something new, something which we hope will be a great success. Shall I go into detail?"

"If you please. I am very interested."

"There are in many Central European countries and in Russia today thousands of students who have neither clothes nor food in sufficient quantities to enable them to enjoy even a decent animal existence. These students must receive help from more fortunate students living elsewhere, give up their studies or undergo hardships which already have weakened them and caused the death of many of their comrades."

"Really!"

"We students here in the university have contributed what money we can to help them, but this is not enough. So we are having a White Rag Day to obtain more clothing for them."

"This is interesting indeed. Continue please."

"Several weeks ago the executive committee of our student body decided to have a clothing raid. We arranged for a public meeting to be held in the auditorium of the University. To this meeting all influential persons in the city were invited personally. Through the newspapers an invitation was extended to the general public.

"At the meeting a number of interesting speakers, who are authorities on European post-war educational conditions, told our guests about the conditions under which large numbers of students are living only a few hundred miles away. Those present agreed unanimously that the cause was a worthy one, and most of them approved the idea of a clothing raid when it was suggested to them. There were some who doubted the wisdom of such a raid, but

they constituted a decided minority. Some of them said that we students did not have enthusiasm enough to make the raid a success, and others said that the city as a whole would not cooperate; but we are having it anyway.

"Yesterday through notices in the newspapers and by distributing circulars we urged everyone to contribute, and asked that each person who had some garment which he or she was willing to give to a needy student to suspend a white rag from a window or balcony.

"Everyone seems to be cooperating with us wonderfully. The local authorities not only gave us permission to hold the raid but also supplied us with thirty or forty of these small carts in which to make our house to house collections. The city has been divided into districts, and in each district there is an assembling place to which we fellows cart our collections. From these points the clothing will be carried to one central station on large auto trucks furnished gratis by our leading merchants and manufacturers. More than 100 students are now working in different parts of the city, each of them wearing this badge of identification."

The student was full of enthusiasm over the drive, and, the stranger being an interested and attentive listener, he told him the whole story of the "White Rag" almost in one breath.

"I was inclined to laugh when I first noticed the 'rags' this morning, but, since I understand the meaning behind them, I am inclined to take off my hat to you students. You are doing a good work apparently, and in fine style. I have already detained you too long; but I would like to ask just one question more. To what students are you sending the clothing which you collect."

"For the greater part, the refugee students of Prague, Sir. We shall send them to the representative of the European Student Relief, who will supervise their distribution."

"Prague! I expect to be in Prague myself within a few weeks. Perhaps I shall meet your clothing again in that city."

"I envy you the trip. If possible you should call around at Studentsky Domov, a center around which revolves the lives of students of 19 nationalities, who now are trying to get an education in Prague."

Making a note of this suggestion, the stranger took leave of the students and continued his walk. They, in the meantime, resumed their activities, calling at each house from which fluttered a white rag.

Four weeks subsequent to the date on which we first met him, our stranger arrived in Prague. Here, after taking care of the business interests which brought him thither, he made an inquiry concerning Studentsky Domov and was given directions promptly by the first person to whom he addressed himself. Arriving at this internationally famous institution, he was greatly surprised to find the students of so many nations, students who were supposed to be enemies of one another, mingling together in the greatest spirit of friendliness. He asked about the articles of clothing which the two students and their comrades had gathered, and was introduced at once to a number of students who were wearing them.

In a reply to one remark which he made concerning the newness of some of the clothing he learned from the representative of E.S.R. in Prague further details concerning the magic exerted by the white rag. He was told that numbers of commercial firms had given new suits of clothing and new shoes, that one firm had supplied packing material and an expert packer to superintend the preparation of the goods for shipment and that another had provided drayage to the railway station. He noticed some of the students smoking cigarettes and was told that several packages of them had been placed in the pockets of the articles of clothing contributed. Finally he was shown the local cooperative tailor, and shoe repair shops where the last of the second-hand clothing and shoes were being put in order by students of 14 nationalities. So impressed was he by what he saw that he immediately made a money contribution to E.S.R. himself. Today he is a whole-hearted booster for this organization.

“The City of the White Rag” is Geneva, Switzerland. By using the unique method described above, the students of this city were able to collect 8,223 articles of clothing. 3,273 of these were for women and 4,950 were for men. When ready for shipment they filled 41 cases and 26 bales. Conservatively estimated, they were worth 29,000 Swiss Francs, \$4,500 or £1,000. To the refugee students who continue to arrive in Prague wearing clothing made of

patches on top of patches and army uniforms which are old, dirty and torn the value of this clothing will be many times even its original worth when new. To them these garments mean the difference between clothes and no clothes, and in winter this difference is not hard to visualize.

The stranger referred to may have been any one of a number of persons who were in Geneva on the day of the raid or in Prague when the clothes arrived. No person would have failed to be suprised at the number of White Rags which were flapping in the Geneva breezes, nor would anyone have failed to make a contribution after seeing personally the efficient way in which a vast number of distressing needs are met by the E.S.R. in Prague.

OTHER STORIES.

What has been said about Prague holds true of every other center in which E.S.R. is operating. Some of the needs which have been met, the ways in which they have been met and the appreciation felt by the persons assisted may be gleaned from the following paragraphs:

A few months ago England sent a gift of £150 to the E.S.R. national representative for Hungary to be used for relief among the Hungarian professors. With this money the E.S.R. man at once purchased a quantity of clothing at a bargain and opened a small tailor shop. Here more than 100 professors have received a new suit or had their old ones turned and renovated at no cost to themselves and for only a small expenditure of cash by E.S.R.

The plight of these professors is most embarrassing. For more than four years now they have existed and bought the barest necessities for their children by selling furniture and heirlooms. For personal wearing apparel they have had nothing whatever to spend. To the tailor shop one professor, a Vice-Chancellor of the University, brought one morning four suits that had been worn long past what may be called the wearing stage. His Prince Albert his wife had remade into a morning suit, his morning suit into a business suit, and his two regular business suits she had turned and returned, patched, cleaned and re-lined until it was impossible to do more with them. He was one of those to whom a new suit was given,

In a small Budapest student hostel occupied by eleven girls an E.S.R. representative recently found one very sick. She had had no food for 24 hours, and none of the girls in the hostel had money to buy any thing for her. Five of them were almost bare-footed, so worn were their shoes. There was no fire in the house although the snow was piled deep outside. Wrapped in all kinds of old clothes and blankets, they were studying while trying to keep warm by sitting close together. Five pairs of second hand shoes and a number of garments were given to the eleven. To the sick girl some food was sent, because she needed this rather than medicine. Three days later she was on her feet.

R.— may correctly be called the personification of pluck and also of misery. Having plenty of ambition but absolutely no money, this Hungarian girl engaged herself as a servant and worked from morning till night scrubbing, washing and polishing floors. Tired as she was from this work, each night she would study from her medical books into the morning hours. This she continued until her constitution broke down completely. A colleague found her sick and helpless in bed one day and carried her to a hostel. She had neither linen nor shoes. These the E.S.R. supplied from its second-hand stock, giving her at the same time a small sum of money with which to buy food for a week. She now has a job which pays somewhat better than her last one, and which does not require quite such hard work.

C.— is another medical student who knows what misery means. Her spiritual insight is extraordinary and her knowledge of her branch of study is said to be the marvel of her comrades. She has just taken her examinations and is now earning her own living. When she went up for these examinations, which she passed with great distinction, every garment on her head, her back and her feet had been either furnished by the European Student Relief or lent to her by a fellow student.

NEED FOR CLOTHING UNIVERSAL.

In regard to student needs Prague may very well be spelled B-e-r-l-i-n, and Budapest may be given the shorter form W-a-r-s-a-w. Throughout Central Europe intellectual life in one university city differs from that in another only in the intensity of hardships endured and not in the presence or absence of suffering. Whether it be Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade or any of the other capitals, conditions are similiar.

In the Near East like problems are faced. The Smyrna debacle caused numbers of students to lose everything. On E.S.R. fell the task of re-clothing them, in some instances "from head to foot."

It is in Russia, however, that the clothing shortage is greatest and is felt most keenly. Concerning the problem faced by the students of this country much information may be found in a letter received recently from the Senior Representative of the American Section of E.S.R. in Russia. It reads in part as follows:

"WHY WE ASK FOR CLOTHING."

"Russia normally gets half her cotton from abroad. For the last five years she has received next to none. Even her own cotton fields in Turkestan were for a time completely cut off by military operations from European Russia. The crop of the past season was far below normal, probably less than one-fourth of what was raised in 1914. In a word, Russia is without the raw materials for clothing.

"In countries such as India, where the demand for clothing is largely based on standards of decency and fashion, a shortage of cotton is comparatively not serious. In Russia, on the other hand, clothing is not a matter of decency only, but an absolutely necessary protection against the climate and against the national scourge of typhus.

"The shortage of cotton and wool has brought about in the rural districts a marked return to pastoral life very much like that of the first settlers in America. The peasants raise their own flax where possible. Those who have no flax use something just as good. This something may be horse hair, cow hair, camel hair or bark. Even in these rural districts many peasants have killed their last sheep to make themselves a coat.

"But, in the cities, where our students are, the problem is quite another one. Here substitution is

a matter of 'ramnsacking' old cupboards (if one is lucky enough to have such) for clothing of the pattern of long ago. Carpets have been taken up to provide shoes, the heavy curtains used in Petrograd to shut out the light during the 'white nights' have reappeared in every form from ladies' dresses to caps for babies. Even A.R.A. shipping bags are used for coat linings, and flour sacks for underwear.

"The severity of the need for clothing is reflected in the relative high cost of materials as compared with that of food. Black bread costs today (Feb. 12) 750,000 Roubles per pound; but even thus, on a gold basis, it costs only half what it did in 1914. Articles of clothing, on the other hand, figured on the same gold basis, cost twice what they did in 1914.

"Russia must always have cotton from abroad to meet her clothing demands; and the day when she can buy to meet her needs is not in sight. It is easy for the outer world to say that this will adjust itself in time, but what will become of the University World in the meanwhile? The last shipment of clothing gave some help to about 5,000 students; but ten times that shipment of 119 bales will not be one bale too much to meet the needs of the six universities being cared for by the E.S.R. American Section alone."

The thanks of the 5,000 who received this clothing were heaped, of course, upon E.S.R. representatives for many days. To quote from another letter of recent date:

"Thanks were expressed not only in letters, but also by personal calls. One well-dressed young stranger, who came into the office a few days subsequent to the clothing distribution, advanced to my desk and said something unintelligible in Russian. While I was marshalling words for a reply, he took off his overcoat and revolved slowly around before my astonished and wondering eyes. Only gradually did I gather that he had benefitted from the clothing distribution, and that he had come to thank me. He had been lucky enough, or else had been so nearly clothed in rags, that he had been given an overcoat and a suit of clothes as well."

No Russian ever accepts a favor without making his thanks known to his benefactor, this being done when possible in writing. Of many hundreds of letters which might be used to express the gratitude which

the students felt for the clothing the following is very typical:

“Dear Friends:—

“I am one of those very lucky beggars who had the honor and pleasure of putting on a decent dress sent by you. Our country is a country of milliards; one must be a milliardaire at least in order to purchase one cheap suit. We students are beggars because we are only little millionaires. It is easier for students in other countries to buy an automobile than for us to buy a pair of shoes. For most of us a suit is but a dream, a far off and unattainable dream, the realization of which is lost somewhere in the future. There is the Institute to finish and employment to get before we can earn the necessary milliard to buy a suit.

“Before getting your gift I was always clad in ‘gray,’ that is I was making shift of my soldier uniform. Now I feel so elegant that I fancy I should deign to smile at a pretty face. Honor word, I am getting quite joyful and full of life again! I am deeply grateful to you, dear friends, for your attention and kindness to us. Your relief not only gives us a physical satisfaction but also helps to raise our moral feelings and aspirations.”

For originality, uniqueness and effectiveness the Geneva “White Rag” idea probably has no equal. To The Mountain Republic is awarded therefore a first prize. Other Swiss cities are now planning similar clothing campaigns; and what is good for Switzerland in this case may also prove worth while if tried in other countries.

When “clothing prizes” are being distributed, however, Switzerland has no monopoly on the first places. HOLLAND also is entitled to three gold medals and to be spelled entirely in capital letters. (1) The students of this country were the first to have a clothing raid; (2) they stand at the “head of the class” in the amount of clothing obtained; and (3) they were “long-headed” enough to include needles, thread and other articles for making necessary repairs to some of the garments contributed.

To date (April 1923) clothing raids have been held in the United States of America, Norway and Great Britain and Ireland as well as in Holland and Switzerland. The approximate value of the clothing contributed by each country respectively was as

follows (estimates being stated in Swiss Francs): Holland 235,000.00; Great Britain and Ireland 221,000.00; U.S.A. 43,600.00; Switzerland 28,781.00; and Norway 9,012.00.

The total of the clothing shipments made by all of these countries is only a little less than 100 tons. A conservative estimate of the actual value of these gifts is 537,000.00 Swiss Francs, \$100,000.00 or 22,000 Pounds Sterling. An estimate of their enhanced value in the receiving countries it is almost impossible to make.

Numerous as have been the articles of wearing apparel contributed in the past, the clothing needs among the Central European and Russian students have not been half met. More clothing is needed even now; and with the arrival of another winter this need will increase in intensity and acuteness. And, if this need is to be met "raids" must be held in many countries during the next few months. Otherwise the shipments of clothing will arrive too late to be useful when cold weather again comes to the lands north of the Equator.

Persons intending to help in meeting these clothing needs will be interested in a few sentences contained in letters acknowledging receipt of clothing:

"Shoes contributed should be tied together with wire or extra heavy twine; it is impossible to "match" shoes when four or five hundred odd pairs are thrown "helter skelter" into one box. All parts of each suit of clothing likewise should be fastened together. If articles of clothing are not repaired in country of origin needles and thread will make a welcome addition to the bundles in which they are packed; it is almost impossible for the recipients of garments to purchase the instruments necessary for repair work.

"Women as well as men need clothing, and there are a large number of needy women students in the European Universities. Many of these girls are now wearing mens' overcoats and waists made from mens' shirts contained in recent shipments. Childrens' garments are also acceptable. A number of the students as well as the majority of the professors are married and have two or three little tots who need such garments."

IRISH TOWN SCORES HIGH.

In the mail that brought the first proof of this pamphlet from the printer there came also some interesting information concerning a very successful clothing raid held during the month of March in Carrickfergus, Ireland. From the 5,000 persons living in this small town clothing worth more than £1,000 (English currency) was collected.

How was this success achieved? A natural question, and one which possibly is in the minds of all who have read this pamphlet. "To start the ball rolling," approximately 50 of the most prominent persons of the town were invited to a meeting in the town hall. Here, by speakers who represented every political and religious belief having an appreciable number of adherents in the parish, they were addressed on European student needs and E.S.R. methods of meeting these needs. At this meeting a strong plan of campaign was mapped out, and, in the days that followed was put into action:

The parish was divided into 18 districts, one or two collectors being given charge of each district. Protestants, Roman Catholics and members of the Church of Ireland joined hands in the effort. The local papers printed numerous articles on the raid and its purposes. Cinema houses ran screen advertisements "between reels." Leaflets were distributed from house to house in the more well-to-do neighborhoods. A central "dump" was obtained, and articles collected were brought thither by motor lorries. Money was not asked for, but approximately £50 was offered by various persons, and, of course, was not refused.

The net results of the Carrickfergus campaign were very gratifying. The methods employed by the "raiders," under the leadership of Canon MacNeice, Rector of the parish, have been described here in the hope that they may contain some valuable suggestions for similiar raids in other countries.

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