

GENERAL RELIEF COMMITTEE

for the
victims of the war in Poland

Vevey-Lausanne, February 1915.

VEVEY (SWITZERLAND) GRAND HOTEL

I

Poland has hitherto been the principal theatre, object and victim of the present war.

The line of battle extends over nearly 1000 kilometres (650 miles), between the Mazurian Lakes and the Carpathian passes, the two extreme limits of the country inhabited by the Poles. It goes through the whole Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, an area of more than 200,000 square kilometres (80,000 square miles) with a population of 21 millions. In this territory about 3 millions of Austro-Germans and 4 millions of Russians are fighting each other. These 7 millions soldiers have been, since more than six months, treading down and tearing in turn the Polish land, famishing and exterminating its inhabitants.

In this war, which is raging on their territory and ruining it, the Poles are obliged to fight in two opposite camps and for a cause which is not their own. They must engage in fraternal strife; put by both sides in the first line of battle, the Polish soldiers very often kill each other in a bayonet charge. Moreover, they undergo recruiting on an exceedingly high scale. No delay neither exemption of military service is accorded to them, as it is granted to the central provinces of the belligerent States and especially to the great towns and to certain important branches of production. On the contrary, they are submitted to a most rigorous system of conscription, used in frontier districts, in order to evacuate in time all the conscripts who could be taken by the enemy. The Poles hitherto have altogether furnished a million and half of soldiers, almost equally divided between the Russians and Austro-German armies. Up to now 400,000 of them have been lost in killed, wounded and prisoners. And all this : *sic vos, non vobis*.

II

The Kingdom of Poland includes 10 provinces, 127,500 square kilometres (51,000 square miles) with 13 millions of inhabitants. The area directly affected by the war is one of 100,000 square kilometres (40,000 s. m.) with 10 millions of people. The two largest and richest provinces after that of Warsaw, those of Lublin and Piotrkow, besides those of Kielce, Radom, Plozk, Kalisch, Suwalki and the greater part of those of Warsaw and Lomza, have been devastated from end to end.

Everywhere the tide of fighting repeatedly overran that country. It submerged about 200 towns and 9000 villages. The material damages amount to above 3 milliards of francs (£ 120 millions). 5000 of these villages were rased to the ground, either in battle or in retreat, to stay pursuit. Innumerable countryhouses and farms were burnt; more than hundred churches pulled down, more than a thousand badly damaged. All the stores of corn and forage were seized or destroyed. One million of horses and 2 millions of cattle were taken for the armies or perished for want of pasture. Even the bare earth was ravaged; by the digging of endless trenches, and also by the effect of heavy shells, the fertile soil was swept away,

buried under clay and gravel, and, even in the richest districts of Lublin and Radom, deprived for a long time of its productiveness. Ruin has come equally upon the peasant population and the great landowners, who have forfeited considerable investments. The whole of the agricultural production, valued at $2\frac{1}{2}$ milliards of francs (£ 100 millions) a year, has been entirely stopped for a long time, by want of seed and cattle. A rural population of 7 millions is therefore reduced to beggary. A very large proportion of them, whose villages in the fire zone have been burnt down, are quite homeless; dying of hunger and cold, feeding on roots, bark and carrion, they roam through the woods or shelter themselves in the towns.

But three quarters of the towns are equally in the midst of the operations of war. Some, like Kalish (50,000 inhabitants), have been destroyed; others, great industrial centres, such as Czenstochowa, Sosnowice (80,000 i. each), Lodz, which was twice captured (450,000 i.), suffer a terrible financial crisis. The capital of Poland, Warsaw (900,000 i.), nearly twice as populous as Brussels or Rome, has also been sorely tried by being constantly threatened with capture, overwhelmed by aerial bombardment and cut off from the wealthiest western districts of the country. The means of communication have ceased to exist; upwards of 1500 kilometres (1000 miles) of railways have been torn away, stations and bridges blown up, even the highroads ploughed over. The coal-pits of Dombrowa, supplying the whole country, were lost at the very beginning of the war; the mines were blown up or flooded. Instead of getting, as usually it does, 30,000 waggons of coal every month, the country barely receives 100 from the far distant coal-pits of the Donetz. All the factories have stopped working, many are greatly damaged, 100 very important ones are destroyed. The whole of the industrial production, amounting to above 2 milliards of francs (£ 80 millions) yearly, has been ruined. 400,000 workmen are now without means of subsistence. Together with the multitude of artisans and tradesmen deprived with their families of any earnings, the great majority of the townsmen, 3 millions in number, are destitute. Many die of hunger; others have been obliged to fly, principally from the smaller towns, to Warsaw or further on to the East, in a state of utter distress. Everywhere epidemical diseases are spreading: famine - typhus, spotted-fever, dysentery (especially among children, from the total want of milk), and imported cholera. Moreover the hospitals are crowded with wounded; and the medicaments, chiefly foreign products, are wanting.

III

Galicia (Austrian Poland) includes 82 districts, 78,500 square kilometres (32,000 square miles) with 8 millions of inhabitants. With the only exception of Cracow and the 6 adjoining districts (5000 square kilometres and 750,000 inhabitants), it has become throughout the seat of war. The 17 eastern districts (18,000 s. k. and $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions i.) have been captured since the beginning of the war. But the rest of the country, where the great operations of war have taken place (56,000 s. k. and 6 millions i.), has suffered much more. Here especially a large transversal tract between Lemberg and Bochnia (10,000 s. k. and 1 million i.), where the principal battles have been fought, is totally depopulated and looks like an immense cemetery.

Nearly all this territory had to undergo fights and invasion again and again, in certain places seven times over. 100 towns and 6000 villages were damaged and the immediate losses amount to 2 milliards francs (£ 80 millions). More than 2,500 villages were utterly destroyed. 800,000 horses were taken $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions cattle and nearly all the stores of corn and forage. The yearly agricultural production of about a milliard francs (£ 40 millions) has been ruined for

considerable time, as has also been the industrial, worth $\frac{1}{2}$ milliard of francs (£ 20 millions) yearly, and employing 100,000 workmen, chiefly in the oil-fields. All the towns are severely damaged; many, like Tarnopol, Brody, Tarnow, Nisko, are in ruins. Amongst the most important, the administrative head of the country, Lemberg (250,000 i.) fell into the hands of the invaders almost at the beginning of the war; the ancient crowning capital of Poland, Cracow (180,000 i.) saw its civil population forcedly evacuated; the fortress of Przemyśl (60,000 i.) is still besieged. More than 700 churches have been demolished or severely damaged. Many Polish landowners and peasants, chiefly from the eastern invaded districts, were compelled to seek refuge in the Austrian central provinces. They were followed by a great number of fugitives from the towns and by the former Polish administration of the occupied districts (40,000 of railway officials alone). The forced Galician emigration in the interior of the Austrian empire amounts already to more than a million (there are in Bohemia alone 350,000 of them). Most of these exiles are without any means, in the deepest misery. Generally speaking, all the calamities brought about by the war, such as destruction, famine, sickness and death, throughout the Kingdom of Poland, has also befallen Galicia.

Finally, on the extreme limits of Poland, there are the 300,000 Polish Mazurs of the Lake plain of East Prussia, who have twice endured the heaviest disasters of war. There are further the 200,000 Polish mountaineers upon the Hungarian and Bukowina frontiers, who have twice been overrun by invasion. And lastly, there are the 250,000 Polish inhabitants of the districts of Białystok, Biala and Sokolka in the province of Grodno, who suffered the same evils.

IV

Poland, great and ancient among civilised nations, tormented incessantly since a century and a half, has now been plunged, without any fault of her own, into the deepest misery of a universal war. On a territory nearly equal to that of the whole of England and Scotland, and more populous than Spain, this unhappy but industrious people, of so strong a vitality, has been suddenly deprived of all its means of existence and condemned to the most terrible sufferings, almost to extinction, by the faults of others. Such misfortune, combined with such injustice, is without a parallel in modern history. Nevertheless, in face of so appalling a tragedy the world seems unmoved. It is certainly not for want of compassion, but for want of exact information on the true state of affairs in Poland. The undersigned Committee, in bringing this information to the civilised world, believes to be doing its duty not only to the cause of its country, but to the conscience of humanity.

*General Relief Committee
for the victims of the war in Poland.*

General Relief Committee for the victims of the war in Poland: Henry Sienkiewicz, president; Ignace Paderewski, vicepresident; Anthony Osuchowski, president of Executive Commission. The Swiss National Bank (Banque Nationale Suisse) at Lausanne, receives subscriptions. Address of the Executive Commission: Vevey (Switzerland), Grand Hotel.