

# FAR LAND

## Meeting Seven Hundred Orphans

(By a Staff Reporter)



Above: In Persia they all became members of the Scout movement, and many of the girls were wearing Guide uniform when they landed. Left: A little girl attacks a hot meal on arrival at the Pahiatua camp.



She nodded, she understood, and she could answer in English. This was her story:

"In 1939 we were deported to Russia. In 1940 we were in Siberia, where we worked 10 hours a day, every day. The first year we worked in the fields, digging and building irrigation works. The second year we made bricks, 6000 a day, and carried them to the buildings. It was all very, very hard work. We had to give away our rings and valuables for bread. Then after much negotiating, we and many of the children were sent to Persia. There were 3000 children in the camp there. Many of them are still there. The conditions were better than in Russia, but the children suffered greatly from the intense heat. We lived in school buildings, with one kitchen to the whole camp. The children were divided into pre-school, primary and secondary, and we were free to give them schooling to the best of our ability. Most of the adults here are teachers. Very few of the children have mothers in this party, for most of the children are orphans. Many of them saw their parents die before their eyes. In Persia the girls were all taught dressmaking and tailoring. It was there, too, that all the boys and girls became members of the scout movement, which has been a very great help to them. You will notice that many of them are wearing khaki drill tunics. Those are scout clothes.

Some of the children were standing round displaying their scout badges while she went on talking. Her English was good, considering the very short time she had been learning it. Of the overpowering conditions that had so altered their lives and had spread such misery upon them, she said nothing. Yet the weight of what was left unsaid bore more heavily upon us than her words.

"I come from Cracow," she continued. "Cracow was one of the oldest cities in

Europe. My husband was an officer there. He is on the ship, too, but he is very ill. He has been in a labour camp."

BY this time other women had come up, burning with questions, which the first woman translated.

"Tell us something about Wellington, please," they entreated.

"What kind of vegetables can you get, what kind of fruit? How many people live here? Can you buy wool? What are the prices of dress materials? What about milk, butter, eggs? Is there any flat land in New Zealand, or is it all hills like this?"

Everyone was standing about now. They were hungry, for this was a two-meal-a-day ship. I felt my acquaintance's hands, and they were cold. She looked very tired all of a sudden. The sores of the children will be much quicker healing than the mental hurts of these women, I thought. But they are charming women and very hospitable.

"Come and have dinner with us," they pleaded.

"Come and share our meal," they insisted.

Below deck the children, hungry but resigned, were crowded into queues between the tiers of bunks. They didn't push, they didn't talk much, but each child's face was turned firmly towards the food. Feeling like a usurper, I stood with the women and became a refugee. We moved on. This life was bounded by food queues, but on the ship there was no fear of the food disappearing before we were fed—and it was good food, too, not waste material. The Americans stood in a line and dished out meat and vegetables, bread and ice-cream on to our trays, which were fitted with depressions for the purpose. They found seats for us all, poured us cups of tea, hovered round to look after us. The Polish people said grace and crossed themselves before they started to eat. As they finished, they moved off quietly to make room for others. Opposite me was a mother with small twin daughters. One was eating heartily, the other was a dabbler. With all the patience of a refugee the mother coaxed the child to eat. Thus she had done in Persia, in Russia, through every stage of the weary journey. A refugee who is a mother has the hardest task on earth, I thought.

## He Also Has Seen Much



**M** JAN SLEDZINSKI (above), delegate of the Polish Ministry of Social Welfare and Education, has crammed more variety, excitement and discomfort into the years since 1939 than most men can cram into a whole lifetime. In the days when war was still something to be avoided, M. Sledzinski, M.A. B.Sc., was first a teacher of science in a boys' secondary school, then an inspector of schools. In Poland a school inspector is not only concerned with the actual education of the students, he also builds schools, appoints teachers, arranges salaries and generally supervises every aspect of school life. Poland before the war was divided up into educational districts, each with its own inspectors, who controlled all the schools, private, State, primary and secondary, in the district. One syllabus of work operated throughout Poland, but was augmented in each district by local history and geography. It is this system which M. Sledzinski plans to put into operation in the New Zealand camp for Polish children. They will study

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A typical group: they smiled at the camera, but they needed persuading.