

TYPHUS FEVER WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE SERBIAN EPIDEMIC

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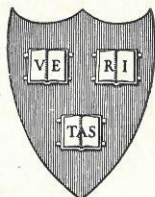
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70,000 Austrian prisoners in Serbia died of typhus during the epidemic. The Serbians supplied their prisoners with as good food as it was possible for them to furnish, but the sanitary conditions of the people of Serbia in general precluded the placing of their prisoners under proper sanitary conditions.

In the early part of the epidemic, there were no hospitals for the women and children, so that when they were affected with the disease they were compelled to remain at home or wherever they were taken sick, and hence usually were not attended by physicians. Nevertheless, the mortality among them was frequently lower because they at least received some care and attention from members of their family and were probably usually fed more or less regularly.

In order that the reader may better realize the conditions in Serbia, a few extracts from reports of those who witnessed these scenes will be quoted. Sir Thomas Lipton who did so much for the Serbian people, and whose own health was greatly impaired for a number of months owing to hardship and exposure undergone in Serbia during the epidemic, recounting the conditions there in March, 1915 says:

"I met on the country roads many victims too weak to crawl to a hospital. Bullock-carts were gathering them up. Often a woman and her children were leading the bullocks, while in the cart the husband and father was raving with fever. Scarcely enough people remain unstricken to dig graves for the dead, whose bodies lie exposed in the cemeteries. The situation is entirely beyond the control of the present force, which imperatively needs all the help it can get — tents, hospitals, doctors, nurses, modern appliances, and clothing to replace the garments full of typhus-bearing vermin."

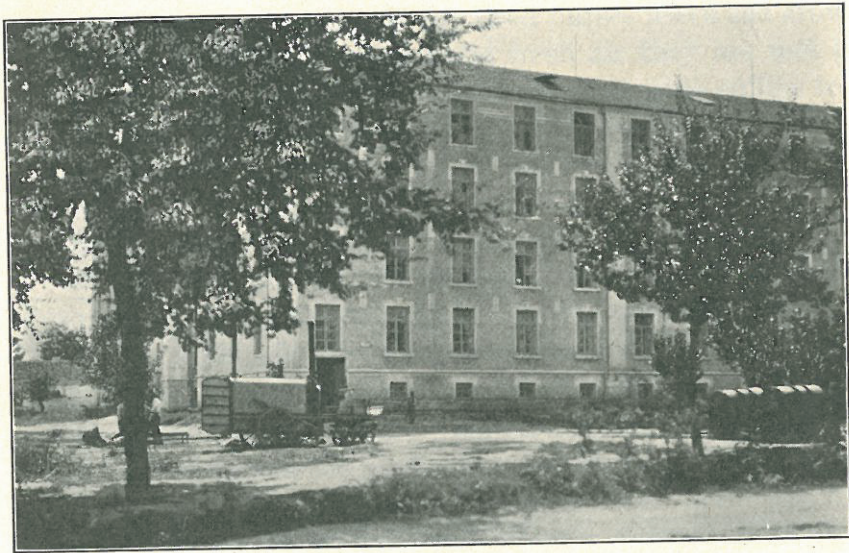
His picture of the hospital at Ghevgheli, where Dr. James F. Donnelly of the American Red Cross died, is appalling. Sir Thomas calls Dr. Donnelly one of the greatest heroes of the war. In his description of this hospital he says:

"The place is a village in a barren, uncultivated country, the hospital an old tobacco factory, formerly belonging to Abdul Hamid. In it were crowded 1400 persons, without blankets or

mattresses, or even straw; men lying in the clothes in which they had lived in the trenches for months, clothes swarming with vermin, victims of different diseases — typhus, typhoid, dysentery, and smallpox — were herded together. In such a state Dr. Donnelly found the hospital, where he had a force of six American doctors, twelve American nurses, and three Serbian doctors. When I visited the hospital three of the American doctors, the three Serbian doctors, and nine of the nurses were themselves ill. The patients were waited on by Austrian prisoners. The fumes of illness were unbearable. The patients objected to the windows being opened, and Dr. Donnelly was forced to break the panes. One of the first things he did on his arrival was to test the water which he found infected. He then improvised boilers of oil drums in which to boil water for use, and he built ovens in which to bake the clothes of the patients, since the hospital was not provided with proper sterilizing apparatus. The street cleaning and hospital waiting was done by Austrians whose numbers were rapidly thinning from typhus and other diseases.”

Captain Bennett of the British Red Cross in describing one of the prison camps in Serbia writes:

“It is not a hospital, remember, but simply an area where 750 Austrians have been collected; nevertheless the disease has fallen like a blight upon the camp. At an earlier date one doctor was in charge of this camp, but he is now stricken down by typhus, and various forms of infection of the malady are raging unchecked. Typhus, dysentery, smallpox, and diphtheria have swept over the place with devastating effects. Last week only twenty men out of 750 could stand on their feet. There they lie in utter wretchedness. Here and there one finds a mattress and here and there a little straw, but the bulk of the sick men are stretched out on the muddy ground. Their clothes are foul and alive with vermin which spread the deadly typhus. The silence of the camp is broken only by sighs and groans. A recent visitor noticed a number of recumbent forms covered with greatcoats and found on removing these that five out of the number had already been dead several days. There was



AMERICAN RED CROSS HOSPITAL AT GHEVGHELI

PLATE I

CHAPTER XXII

AN INVASION OF TYPHUS. THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION OFFERS HELP. DR. STRONG AGAIN TO THE FRONT. THE AMERICAN RED CROSS SANITARY COMMISSION. DISINFECTING A NATION. OVER THE MOUNTAINS TO MONTENEGRO. CONQUEST OF THE FEVER. WITH THE TURKISH ARMY. A DESERT HOSPITAL. ON CAMEL AMBULANCE TO JERUSALEM.

ONE day there came to the American Red Cross from Mr. Bicknell, who was with the Rockefeller Commission in Europe, a cable into which was compressed a tale of national woe: "Typhus epidemic overshadows everything else." Into the cities and towns of Serbia were huddled refugees by thousands from the north. Schoolhouses, convents and all other buildings were so crowded that neither health nor sanitary conditions received any consideration. Two previous wars had brought such destitution that the people were an easy prey to typhus, typhoid and re-occurrent fevers. Smallpox and scarlet fever had appeared. The greatly dreaded cholera threatened to develop with the coming summer. Already fifteen of the eighteen surgeons and nurses of our later Red Cross units sent to Serbia, who had been stationed at Ghevgheli in a vast tobacco factory converted into a hospital, had developed typhus fever. Four hundred of the twelve hundred patients in their charge were ill with this disease, and escape became impossible.

Dr. James F. Donnelly and Dr. Ernest P. Magruder, two of our courageous surgeons, succumbed to the fever. They gave their lives for their fellow men, and more can no man give. On their graves, in the far-away Balkan land, where the flowers are few, "I always find," said one of the nurses, "fresh leaves and green branches tenderly placed by the grateful people."