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VOLUNTEERS CAMP REPORTS

GUTMADINGEN(AFSC)

Celia Radcliffe:

"... at first (she joined the camp a fortnight after the start) insufficient organisation, lack of tools and shortage of building materials made it very difficult indeed if not impossible to keep fully occupied. The first of these difficulties was soon overcome by electing a volunteer to act as a link between the works foreman and the volunteers ... as time went on this arrangement showed itself of very great value. As time passed also more and more building materials arrived ... so that eventually there became much instead of too little to do.

I came away with very mixed feeling - very great happiness at the welcome received and friendliness and consideration shown and respect for the opinions and views of those with whom I worked yet also a very puzzled feeling at the lack of enthusiasm exhibited. No-one seemed particularly concerned how fast a house went up - neither the settlers themselves (who were doing 2.000 hours work as part payment for the houses in which they would live), nor the hired workmen, nor the campers in general ... the settlers were, merely filling in the time, possibly not on their own particular house, the workmen ... had no personal reason to exert themselves, and the campers - mainly students - perhaps had no conception of how a job could be done if the determination was there ... So despite all the other joys of camp there was missing that feeling of a common effort put to the common end - where was that unselfish desire to do something for some other, perhaps unknown persons without gain to oneself - and surely to provide houses for homeless people could have been a means to this end.

Perhaps I did not understand - perhaps my opinion was unbalanced - perhaps to others the effort was great - as great as the need seemed to warrant - whatever the reasons might be I kept coming up on little turns of character here and there that brought me up with a start by their thoughtful nature and made me ashamed that I had been so critical.

The life of the camp was both of delight and value. Excursions took place which will live in the memory, not only because of new things experienced (the Black Forest, Lake Constance and the distant Alps) but because others experienced them too. Perhaps one would remember seeing the Alps on the horizon but how much more will one remember the crowd standing in the lorry all seeing the same thing at one and the same time. The evening discussions, nobly translated ... threw new light into the minds of others and the few individual talks squeezed into a busy time made one aware of a side of life which before was distant and unreal.

The camp too was not a self-contained unit. Apart from the fact the 6 organisations worked on the same project, thereby developing a remarkable feeling of unity, there was essential and therefore worthwhile contact with the local population - a contact which perhaps even seemed more to me because I could not speak the language.

Contact with the actual refugees was first made by working in the evening when they were fitting in the 2.000 hours ... shopkeepers were soon known and villagers who stopped for a gossip or kindly offered succulent plums to returning workers. An open discussion on conscientious objection brought several villagers in and a large camp fire attracted others. But the happiest contact of all was made the night I came away. One or maybe two hundred people gathered in a village canteen to hear a short account of work camps in many places, to see almost impromptu skits and so on and then to dance the night through to music a song freely provided as a thanks for our services. The feeling of understanding and unity that developed that night is beyond description because of the very realness of its nature.

Good-bye Gutmadingen and thank you."