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## "The children's plight". [1914-1918]

New York: The Commission for Relief in Belgium, [1914-1918]

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# THE COMMISSION FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM

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## “The Children’s Plight”

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### An Alarming Position in Belgium and Northern France Tuberculosis Rapidly Increasing

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A recent interview with Mr. W. L. Honnold, Director of the Commission, who asks for at least \$1,000,000 per month to save the little ones.

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“If the children of Belgium and Northern France are to grow to healthy maturity, they must be provided with more food than is now supplied to them, and to this end the Commission for Relief in Belgium will ask the people of the United States to give at least one million dollars monthly toward the cost of a special meal which will be served every day in the schools,” said W. L. Honnold, who has just arrived in New York to succeed to the Directorship of the Commission in America, after having filled a similar position in London in close association with the Chairman, Mr. Herbert Hoover.

Just before he sailed for America, Mr. Honnold made a thorough inspection of conditions in the occupied areas and he comes here convinced that the Commission must augment its activities on behalf of the children, and, particularly, must combat an alarming increase of tubercular troubles among both children and adults. In discussing this phase of the work, Mr. Honnold said: “I am sure that the plight of the children will appeal strongly to the charitable instincts of the American people and that they will gladly support us in meeting this insistent call of humanity.”

It is the opinion of the Commission that the war will continue for at least another year and that further relief must be afforded for a

corresponding period. This means that the Commission, which has now been in operation for two years, will probably have to deliver during the next year about 1,250,000 tons of foodstuffs into Belgium and Northern France, calling for an expenditure of more than \$150,000,000. A large portion of the population, say 5,000,000 people, owing to the cessation of export and import trade, are wholly or partially destitute and have to be provided with food free of charge. This class will call for fully \$60,000,000 of charity in the coming year, or over \$5,000,000 per month. Notwithstanding that certain localities and, more particularly, certain individuals, have most generously supported the Commission, the fact remains that up to date the United States has only contributed an average of less than \$500,000 per month, a relatively small amount in comparison with what others have done, and in view of the fact that the Commission's purchases in this country have averaged over \$5,000,000 per month, recent months averaging over \$10,000,000. It would seem, therefore, that the more adequate feeding of the children now so urgently calling for additional funds, offers an opportunity for further generosity which the American people cannot but welcome.

The Commission has lately made a thorough investigation of health conditions in Belgium and Northern France to determine the degree of success that has attended its operations. Dr. William Palmer Lucas, of the Medical Department of the University of California, who undertook this investigation, spent three months in close association with Belgian physicians and Health Authorities and arrived at some interesting conclusions. He reports that the agricultural class, which has been able directly or indirectly to secure a sufficiency of foodstuffs, is, broadly speaking, in a normal state of health. The same may be said of the well-to-do classes, who have been able to purchase both native and imported supplies. On the other hand, the high prices obtaining for native products have made it practically impossible for laborers and minor commercial people to secure the necessary supplement to their pro rata of the Commission's importations. These classes, comprising something like 5,000,000 people, generally show diminished vitality, although the infants, owing largely to the natural solicitude of the women of

Belgium and to the special organizations supported by the relief organization, are really above normal in general health. The improvement in infant mortality, however, has been more than offset by a marked reduction in the birth rate, considered to be largely due to the undernourished and anxious state of possible mothers, and by an increased percentage of imperfectly developed new-born babes, the ill-nourishment of mothers being also responsible here and being further reflected in a curtailed nursing period. In the case of the older children belonging to these classes, particularly those in the adolescent stage, there is an alarming increase in tuberculosis, due to the lower power of resistance consequent on inadequate diet. It is to correct this serious tendency that the system of school feeding previously referred to is being installed, and it is this added service that will entail the extra expenditure of over one million dollars per month which it is hoped America will assume. Steps are also being taken, in so far as resources will permit, to deal with children outside the schools and to counteract the increase of tuberculosis among adults by special feeding and through an extension of the sanatoria of the country.

Asked as to the attitude of the German authorities towards the crops of the country, Mr. Honnold states that the whole of the native products of Belgium have, through the intercession of the Commission, been reserved for the civil population. The harvest this year has been a fairly good one, although the production is less than 40 per cent of the requirements. In Northern France, owing to the absence of the men with the French army, the peasants have been incapable of planting the whole of their fields, and the Germans have cultivated large areas. Mr. Herbert Hoover, who is rendering such extraordinary services as Chairman of the Commission, effected last year an arrangement with the occupying army whereby a large part of the wheat actually raised by the people of the country, roughly, one-third of their requirements, was set aside for the civil population. This arrangement has been extended to the present harvest, and, in addition, a similar quantity is now to be released by the Germans from the harvest resulting through their own exertions.

Mr. Honnold succeeds Captain J. F. Lucey, who has recently

been acting as Director of the Commission in America. Both Captain Lucey and Mr. John B. White, who preceded him, will continue as members of the Advisory Committee.

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**Subscriptions are urgently needed for this relief work, and  
should be sent to**

**The Commission for Relief in Belgium  
120 Broadway, New York City**

**or to Local Committees where they have been formed.**

**COMMISSION FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM  
1009 MILLS BLDG., SAN FRANCISCO**