

War Gifts and Taxes Threaten Home Charity

How Local Benefactions Are Affected by American Philanthropy in Europe—New Government Levies Curtail Incomes of Those Who Formerly Gave Freely

By RICHARD BARRY.

ARE we forgetting the poor within our gates in the louder call of the anguish beyond seas? A hundred millions to the Red Cross, fifty millions for the Y. M. C. A., ten millions for the Jewish foreign relief, millions for the Belgians, the Serbians, the Italians, the Russians, the French; hundreds of thousands for bazaars, for fairs, and for countless private contributions.

We have a vast "reservoir of generosity," to use a fascinating phrase of Robert W. de Forest's, yet what of New York City? It may not be amiss to recall that it is ever new, as was long ago written—"the poor we have always with us." And Winter is at our door; Christmas is all but here.

Hints have been dropped recently that the local charities, not only in New York, but throughout the country, were beginning to feel the diversion of home charity to war charity abroad. Word has come of the serious condition in some inland cities. In one case it is said that a will of a wealthy person has been changed so that bequests formerly intended for home charitable use are to be diverted to an international object.

It would not be fair to say that home charities have complained. They are not begrudging anything done in the foreign field, but they are apprehensive. Some of them are seriously wondering what they will do to get through the coming Winter as well as they have weathered former seasons.

For an elucidation of the situation Mr. de Forest, President of the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, was sought. As he is also Vice President of the National Red Cross Society, his dual interest in international and in local relief would seem to give him both an intimate knowledge of the facts and an unbiased view of them.

"The outlook for organized charity in New York is grave," said Mr. de Forest. "I do not wish to be pessimistic or to sound an undue alarm, but I will be frank to say that you have consulted me at a moment when I am viewing the future with a degree of apprehension I have not experienced in recent years."

"Are the appeals for help more this year than usual?"

"That is difficult to say, just yet. At first glance one would think that they should be less, as there is so little excuse this year for unemployment. Every man or woman who wants work can find it now. Every able-bodied man is needed, somewhere, and every able-bodied woman, too.

"But what is saved through the lessening of unemployment will be more than lost, I fear, through other causes. For instance, I have this." Mr. de Forest showed a letter from Miss Lillian Wald of the Henry House Settlement, saying that demand for nursing had increased 40 per cent., and asking what could be done for assistance.

"Chaotic conditions among all classes of people mean a breaking down of routine ways of life, and this is likely to mean increased want and privation among the poorer classes. The calls on local charities will be heavier than ever, and it will cost more to supply them."

"Has the drafting of young men increased the calls for aid?"

"In a measure, yes. Of course, each soldier has his pay, and he can, if he wishes, send part or all of it to those left behind. But it is entirely up to his individual conscience, and many, at a distance, forget. The war offers a wonderful opportunity for the shifting of burdens; not only among the poor, either. I have in mind a story I heard the other day from one of our Red Cross officers stationed in Paris. He had a position in the service for a woman, and forty ap-

plicants appeared for it—forty unemployed, independent American women in Paris! One of them told the officer quite frankly that she had left a happy home and two children in America because she 'wanted a change.'

"This is a bit beside the point. It merely illustrates the fact that, if those in the upper classes 'want a change,' those in the lower classes are not without the same wants, and they don't always consider the privation, often the suffering, that ensues when they get what they want. That is where the charity societies come in.

"Perhaps this, too, is an inconsiderable item. There is all too much unavoidable suffering, of genuinely distressing cases for which no one seems actually to blame. For illustration see THE TIMES 100 neediest cases in last Sunday's issue. In any event, the ones who suffer are blameless, and it must be our office to relieve that suffering. Yet we are handicapped as never before."

"By lack of contribution?"

"Not entirely.

In a broad way, from an executive standpoint, I will explain it in this way. Local charities at this moment find themselves in a predicament similar to that of the railroads. As I am a railroad Director, I know something of that. It is now generally seen, as we in the railroad business have seen for some time, that the Government was discriminating against the rail-

roads—not intentionally, of course. However, in the press of the moment, attention was concentrated on ships and sea transportation, apparently forgetting that railroads and land transportation were just as vital to the general situation as shipping. Of what service will a perfect line of sea transportation be if the land transportation is crippled? The Government and the public, too, is at last awake to this imperative truth.

"Let us apply the same reasoning to charities; for the same or a similar situation exists there. As a people we have heard so much about, thought so much about, and done so much for distress among foreign peoples and in the war zone that we are on the verge of forgetting our own needs at home. I do not say we actually have forgotten them, but I am apprehensive; I am troubled with fears for the immediate future.

"It is a much more complex thing than just the matter of contributions, though that is a vital part of it. Take our own New York Charity Organization Society. We have given our very best men to the Red Cross. Dr. Edward T. Devine, our General Secretary and Director of our School of Philanthropy, is serving the Red Cross in France; W. Frank Persons, until the opening of the war our Director, has been called to Washington as Red Cross Director General of Civilian Relief; Mrs. John M. Glenn, Chairman of our Committee on Co-operation and District Work, is at the head of the Bureau of Home Service of the New York County Red Cross Chapter, and has the families of nearly 2,000 soldiers under her care, and some of the most experienced members of our staff are serving with her. Otto T. Bannard, our Vice President, has been in charge of the Red Cross Supply Depot in this city.

I could easily make this list longer. It is not a matter of numbers, but of quality, for the men we have given are among the best qualified in America for relief work. It is no reflection on those now doing their best to fill the vacant places with us to say that the older, more experienced men and women cannot be replaced, certainly not at once.

"While we have given the best of our organization and working force to the Red Cross, the public also has been giving its best to the Red Cross and to the many organizations for foreign relief.

"There is a deep reservoir of generosity in the American people. Just how deep no one knows. It seems that we must have gone rather deeply into it, and what I am chiefly hoping now is that in the process of tapping that reservoir we have not gone so deeply that there is not enough left to care for our customary charitable work at home."

"Do you believe in giving to relieve the suffering in Europe caused by the war?"

"Emphatically, yes. But not at the cost of neglecting suffering in America. While many of the officers and members of the Charity Organization Society are giving liberally of money and of service to the Red Cross and to various committees formed to help women and children and other noncombatants in Europe, they are giving no less service and no

less money to the work of our home society.

"The need in Europe is great—very great. Let us help Europe to meet it if we can. But the direct responsibility for meeting that need falls on the great nations of Europe, one of which certainly is wealthier than our own.

"More important than that is the fact that we have here increasingly each month some of Europe's burdens to bear, for many who have gone to Europe to fight have left their wives and children here.

"We cannot expect help from Europe. We must bear our burden alone, and that after we have helped bear hers. And our burden is going to be greater than ever before.

"Yes, I believe in giving liberally to help suffering in Europe, but we should hold ourselves sufficiently in reserve to be able to relieve suffering at home. It means more sacrifice and more self-denial.

"It has not been necessary before, at times of great disaster, to cripple local charities in relieving the special distress. Though we all helped San Francisco at the time of the fire, no one lessened his customary charities on account of the extra demand. The same condition will doubtless hold true with the Halifax disaster. It is not likely that any of the Canadian home charities will suffer, though large sums will be raised for suffering Halifax. It should be the same with New York charities and the European war. Though that is the greatest disaster of all, it should not blind us to our local calls for help.

Mr. de Forest would not make any definite estimate of sums needed, or of numbers of persons required to aid in the work here. He referred to the last an-

nual report of the Charity Organization Society, which reveals that in the previous year \$323,531 was expended for local purposes in addition to that spent on the School of Philanthropy, which, through endowment, is practically a self-sustaining organization. Thus it appears that nearly a third of a million is required annually by the society to carry on its work, and that most of this sum must come through voluntary annual contribution.

"Has the usefulness of the society been impaired as yet?" Mr. de Forest was asked.

"I do not think so," he replied. "I believe we have been doing just as much and doing it just as well as formerly, but as chief executive of the organization it is my duty to think of the future, and I am grave about that."

"To what extent have your contributions fallen off?"

"I do not say they have yet fallen off at all, but what I do know is this: One can hardly expect to receive the same generous amounts from the same givers who have so kindly helped us in the past. How could it be otherwise? Naturally they have contributed very largely to other pressing charities, international chiefly. At the same time the income tax, the war taxes, the super-profits tax, and, in some instances, especially with men and women of fixed income, an actual decrease of annual revenue, leaves them with a smaller fund to draw on. They positively have not the money to give, however generous they may be."

"But are you not speaking of a more or less limited class of wealthy persons?"

"It is my experience that charitable giving comes from a limited class. Not all the rich are charitable. Not all millionaires are philanthropists. We all know that the great body of support for practically all charities, regardless of denomination, regardless of purpose, comes from a certain comparatively small number of people.

"Of course the general public is always called upon, and the general public responds, as it can, and often in a spirit that is fully as generous as though the amount given had been larger, but the real sustaining body of contributions comes from the limited few. And that few—in the present moment—is suffering from the war."

"What about the new millionaires? It has been revealed recently that the United States has three times as many in 1917 as it had in 1914. Are they not giving?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. de Forest, as though his inner thought had been penetrated, "you have struck the essence of the whole matter. No. The new millionaires are not giving. There may be rare isolated cases, but certainly in a ratio infinitesimal to their number."

"Do you mean to say that the very men who are profiting the most by the war are leaving the burdens of distress and privation caused by the war for others to bear?"

"That is your way of putting it, not mine," continued Mr. de Forest, cautiously. "I would rather say that it is customary for new wealth to turn to charitable giving only after a lapse of time."

"But the war is here. We are living years in months; months in days. They have made their money more rapidly than in peace times. Now are they going to take the normal course in realizing the need of charity?"

"Exactly," concluded Mr. de Forest. "It seems hardly fair to get rich at a war speed and not give with war speed. That is what we need right now—a giving to home charities with a war speed, not a peace speed."



Robert W. de Forest, Who Sees Danger of Decrease in Charitable Gifts.