American Red Cross Work Among The French People

Fisher Ames
Those bright colored bags filled by the hands of American women with the little luxuries and necessities that men in hospitals so much appreciated, reached many French soldiers as well as Americans. This is a distribution at a French hospital.
AMERICAN RED CROSS WORK AMONG THE FRENCH PEOPLE

BY

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PREFACE

As it would be impossible to give in narrative form a full account of the activities of the American Red Cross among the French during the World War and keep it within the limits of a single volume, and as much of the work was purely technical, it has been thought best to deal with its various aspects in a general fashion rather than specialize on any. It is hoped thereby to inform the reader in an interesting way of the broad character and scope of American Red Cross efforts.

It will be noticed that the book deals with work during the war period and the months immediately following and does not attempt to take up post-war activities in detail.

Fisher Ames, Jr.

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INTRODUCTION

From the inception of the war partisanship for France was palpable in the United States. One heard and read recurring allusions to the vital aid she had rendered us during our War of the Revolution and the debt owed her by the world because of her consistent and heroic efforts to secure the rights of the individual.

France had been the crucible where all the great social and political questions of Europe had first been tried out. She was ever one of the leaders in the onward march of civilization. In art, science, and literature she had held aloft the standard and throughout her history her courage and gallantry had burned like those inextinguishable lamps on the altars of the ancients. The wonder of the Crusades, that still glows for us like a lonely jewel in the dark setting of the Middle Ages, is due mainly to her and she it was who first emerged from the gloom of those stagnant years and gave to Europe the initial example of a new and definite social organization. It was on her soil that the people, as distinguished from the aristocracy, first united in the Third Estate whose voice, sounding always the slogan of justice for the masses, was heard and heeded in other countries. From her Revolution came those ideas that are today the basis of her public and private laws; ideas which “the Republic and the Empire, by their victories, disseminated in every part of Europe and which are destined to spread over the whole world because they are summed up in the one word justice.”

The fact that Germany already had the wanton victory of 1870 to her discredit intensified the sympathy felt among the masses of America for France, and to the student of his-
tory it was known that instead of a grudge, she owed to France a special debt. It was the social principles brought into life by the French Revolution that finally raised the body of the German people out of their wretched and ill-formed state. Even Treitschke was compelled to admit that, “the Constitutional ideas of the Revolution struck root in German soil, and without the Revolution the famous Article 13 of the Act creating the German Federation would never have seen the light.”

Thus for one reason or another there was a measurable amount of sentiment for France in the United States. War had hardly begun before twenty cases of bandages, addressed to the “French Army, Havre,” reached that port. They were the first of a steadily increasing stream of gifts directed across the Atlantic by individuals, societies, communities and eventually by the united people. Notwithstanding their reputation for practicality no people, if any, have greater capabilities for compassion and open-handedness than those of the United States, but they wish to be sure of their facts before they give freely. Their generosity to France at this time was the more noteworthy in that the United States as a whole had not taken sides, but stood apart in what was apparently a fixed attitude of neutrality.

A number of societies for relief work with outlets in France were formed in the States and many volunteers crossed the Atlantic to fight or work by her side. Gifts continued to flow into her ports, but a large proportion were neither properly addressed nor classified. As a result many went astray and thousands of crates and bales collected in neglected heaps at the French docks where no officials had been specially appointed to receive, examine, and distribute them. France, laboring in the grip of war, had little time to think of them. Handicapped by a shortage of labor, material, and inadequate means of transportation, she was making the effort of her life to meet the inexorable demands of her fighting forces.