

British Appeal Committee
for
Russian Women Refugees in the Far East.

The Refugee problem is a serious social problem and one which causes severe physical and mental suffering to the unfortunate people concerned. We, therefore, do not desire to detract attention from the general problem of the Refugees, but we think it necessary to refer in this review to a particular section of them whose suffering and tragic situation must press heavily on the heart of everyone who knows the facts. We refer to the Russian Women Refugees and their families in Manchuria and North China. The facts are stated in the League of Nations' Reports. The plight of these people was first made known by the Traffic in Women and Children in the East Commission of the League in its Report (1933). Many of them, perhaps most, fled from the Russian revolution in the years 1919-20 and a number belong to the educated classes; others are of Russian families who were already in the Railway Zone of North Manchuria, engaged in legitimate work, and who lost their incomes when the revolution occurred. The Chinese have for the most part been kind to them but these people were entirely destitute, with no money and no person or country admitting any responsibility for them. We will not enlarge on what happened to those who were stranded and got into debt in the remote villages of Manchuria where the Chinese peasantry are sometimes obliged by sheer poverty to sell or pawn their own daughters into the local brothel, but we know the Russian women had to get food for their children in the same way. For them there is little or no hope now. But for the children of those who struggled through, or were already in Harbin, Mukden, Shanghai, Peiping and other cities and who are now from 15 to 25 years old there is hope if only the facts could be investigated, the work of benevolent societies co-ordinated, and relief and training arranged. Now they are hopeless, homeless, stateless, and in utter destitution, while conditions are getting worse rather than better in Manchuria, and in Shanghai the official reports state that the problem is "fast outgrowing the scope of private and semi-organised charity and calls for a collective effort." We admit freely that a percentage of the women are totally demoralised by their experiences, but the majority are of different character and it seems terrible that they should just be doomed, without a chance of life apart from prostitution. Already in Shanghai it is estimated by careful observers that 22½ per cent. of these Russian women refugees are either prostitutes, or very near to being so, while in Manchuria something like 70 per cent. have had to resort to earning some money by promiscuity.

Yet the problem is comparatively manageable if money were available. £10,000 would go a long way to clearing up the frightful situation of those who hate and detest this way of living and would gladly do honest work.

In 1935 the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene convened meetings of a group of societies interested and now 22 British national organisations are co-operating in an effort to raise some of this money. Donations should be made payable to the Dowager Lady Nunburnholme, and addressed to Miss Janet Mitchell, the Hon. Secretary of the Appeal, 6, Belsize Crescent, London, N.W.3.