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A Fortnight
in **A**ustria
in **1920.**

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MAP OF EUROPE SHOWING ROUTE FROM DOVER TO VIENNA.

A Fortnight in Austria in 1920

Report

Of the Women's Co-operative Guild Delegation
to the Austrian Co-operative Congress
and of their visit to Vienna

By

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and

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To be obtained, price 9d., from the
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A Fortnight in Austria in 1920.



M. E. FERGUSON.



A. HONORA ENFIELD.

WHEN we first knew that we were to be the Guild's delegates to the Austrian Co-operative Congress what a long way off Austria seemed! Across the sea, across Belgium, across Germany, two days and a night in the train, three kinds of foreign money to struggle with, two foreign languages, all the strange regulations and customs and officials—thoughts of these things made the distance very great. And now how near it has grown. Only two days and a night separate us from our Austrian friends.



A hundred times during our stay we wished that all our fellow Guild members could have made that journey with us, and could learn from their own experience all that we learnt of the sufferings and hopes and efforts of our Austrian comrades. But since the whole Guild could not visit Austria, we must do our best to bring Austria to the Guild, just as we saw it. This was the chief purpose of our journey, and this was the promise we left with the Austrian women. "We are going back to England to tell our own women how things are with you in Vienna," we explained, as we said good-bye to one poor mother, a widow with five children, whom we visited in her tragic little home. "You won't forget us?" she said, eagerly. "You won't forget us?" "No, we won't forget."

We set ourselves during our stay to try and answer certain definite questions, which guided our inquiries both at Linz, where we stayed for the Congress, and later at Vienna. First of all, what were the real conditions of life in Austria? Were they as bad as they had been represented to us or worse? What did they mean, when translated as it were, into terms of English life?

Secondly, what was the reason for the continuance of the suffering in Austria? What were Austria's difficulties, and what were the Austrians doing to try and meet them?

Our third big question concerned the Co-operative Movement. What position had the Co-operative Movement in Austria? How was it organised, what was it doing, and what were its prospects?

And, finally, what could we Co-operators in England do to help our Austrian comrades in their struggle, and to make the International Co-operation of which we have so often spoken, a practical, living force?

In the too short space of twelve days it was impossible to obtain a complete answer to all these questions, and to many more which we were tempted to ask. But in the following account of our visit we shall try to give the conclusions to which we came as the result of all we saw and heard.

First Impressions.

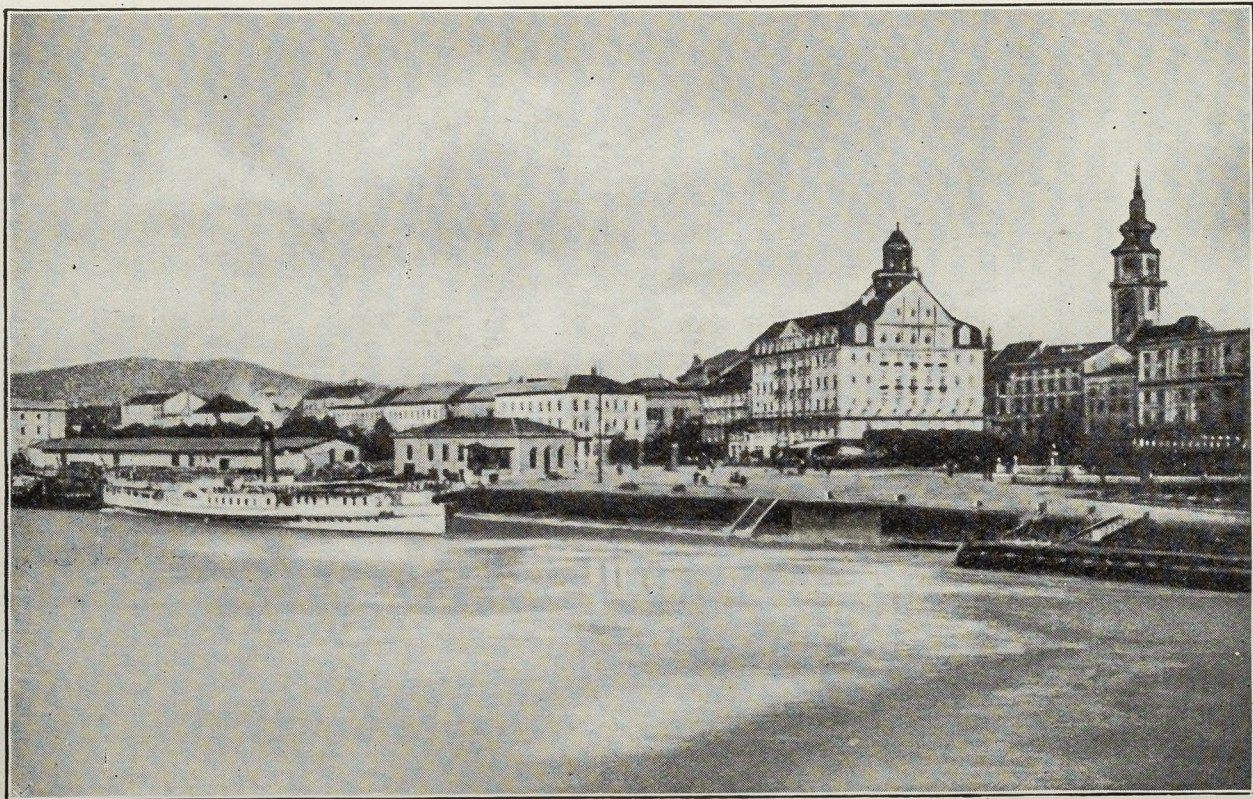
We left London on November 9th, and crossed from Dover to Ostend in almost summer sunshine. We were fortunate in having lovely weather throughout our stay, so that all we saw was, in this respect, seen at its best. The journey is quite a straightforward one, and we travelled without change from Ostend to Linz. But anyone who had travelled by an international express before the war must have noticed the change. The train was heated (too much, as usual!), but there was a whole carriage without lights; many were shabby to a degree and very dirty; there was no water on the train, and by the time we arrived at Linz we were hours late. The further east we went the more obvious grew the signs of stagnation and lifelessness. On the Austrian railway we noticed no train but our own. In the fields we could have counted on our fingers the few sheep and cows.

The night journey lay through Germany, and with the methodical habits of the Germans, the ticket inspector came to examine our tickets about every

hour, so there was not much chance of sleep. But the officials were always kind and polite. With the average German traveller good manners were never a strong point, but the two rather uncouth men who got into our compartment at Cologne were kindly and good-tempered, and did their best to show their friendliness by offering us a "Schnapse"—a taste from their bottle of wine—which we declined! In the early morning their places were taken by a gentle elderly woman—a teacher, as we found out—and a pathetic young girl who were travelling to Nüremberg. We asked them about the places we passed, and they were pleased to talk. No one showed the slightest sign of hostility towards us English.

Linz is a charming little town on the Danube, the capital now of Upper Austria. The Congress was held there instead of at Vienna, because, being in an agricultural district, Linz could find food for the 150 delegates more easily than Vienna. As everywhere in Austria most of the buildings are white, and the town looked wonderfully bright and clean in the sunshine which greeted our first morning.

We were the first arrivals at the Hotel Weininger, where rooms had been taken for all the foreign and many of the Austrian delegates to the Congress. So we had our first breakfast alone. A foreign breakfast is not the substantial meal that we are accustomed to in England. It usually consists of excellent coffee with plenty of hot milk, delicious newly-baked rolls, butter, and perhaps honey. We had coffee—of a kind—a very little tinned milk, a slice of dry white bread, and a very dry roll each. Perhaps we



LINZ, THE DANUBE, AND HOTEL WEININGER.

could have had butter if we had asked for it, but we preferred to see what kind of food such a hotel was accustomed to provide in these days. For this meal we paid 30 kronen. The krone before the war was worth about 10d. in our money. Now it is worth only about one-seventh of a penny. This makes living in Austria very cheap for people with English money, while it is terribly dear for the Austrians themselves.



FRAU FREUNDLICH.

At midday Frau Freundlich arrived and with her the manager of the Wholesale's cotton business, who speaks excellent English, and who acted as a most kind and interesting guide to us on many occasions. Before long, we hope, Guild members may have the pleasure of seeing Frau Freundlich in England and learning for themselves what a charming and remarkable woman she is. She is the leading woman in the Austrian Co-operative Movement, a member of the Wholesale Board, an M.P., a director of the Food Ministry and a member of the Vienna Municipal Council. She has taken a very prominent part in the new and most interesting developments of Austrian Co-operation. She is a great internationalist, and on this, on women's questions, and on all industrial and Co-operative matters we found her thinking our own thoughts. She is keen on the place and power of women in the Co-operative Movement and elsewhere.

"The men always see all the difficulties" she said, in discussing some problem with us, "but it is the women who have to find the way out—and then the men think they have done it all!" She has taught herself English, and in the evenings when she has no meetings to address after her busy day in Parliament, in the Town Hall, or in one of her three offices, she goes home to read her foreign papers and make translations for the Austrian "Free Co-operator." She is familiar with many of the doings of our own Guild, which she admires very much, and knew all about our Minimum Wage Campaign, our Maternity work, and our International propaganda.

From the moment of her arrival at Linz till we said good-bye to her on the platform at Vienna twelve days later, Frau Freundlich devoted her time and thought to making our stay a happy and successful one. It is impossible to describe the kindness we received from her and from all the many Co-operative friends we found in Austria. Everything was thought of, planned for us, even paid for whenever we were with them. Such generosity was quite overwhelming, for we knew that what meant only a few shillings to us meant many precious kronen to them. Some one who could speak English (usually Frau Freundlich herself) was always ready to accompany us wherever we wanted to go, and to answer all our tiresome questions. We had only to say that we should like this or that, and it was arranged without any trouble to ourselves. And besides the unfailing courtesy of our hosts and hostesses, the very real sense of Co-operative

comradeship made us feel ourselves in the midst of friends from the very first.

The Congress at Linz.

The Congress was a most interesting experience—it was so entirely unlike an English one. It lasted two days—Saturday and Sunday—and was followed by the annual meeting of the Wholesale Society on Monday, which was attended by the same delegates. It was timed to begin at 9 o'clock on Saturday morning; but though they keep early hours, punctuality does not seem to be one of the virtues of the Austrians! When our party, under the guidance of Frau Freundlich and Dr. Kronegger, the Secretary of their Wholesale, reached the hall at 9-15 the proceedings had not yet begun, and the delegates continued to move about in friendly conversation with each other for another half-hour.

The hall looked very different from our halls, for the delegates sat at long tables, on which large glasses of beer and plates of hot sausages made their appearance about half-way through the morning. (Our English rows of chairs and nothing to eat must seem very unfriendly to foreign delegates.) We sat at the top of the centre table, immediately in front of the platform; next to us sat Frau Freundlich, and on her right our C.W.S. directors, Mr. Oliver and Mr. Denman, with Mr. Booth of the Export Department, who had come with them from Manchester, and Mr. Thompson who was already in Austria. Opposite were the two delegates from the Swedish Wholesale, Frau Popp, a prominent Socialist M.P., and next to

her Dr. Renner and his wife. Dr. Renner is the most prominent man in the Austrian Co-operative Movement—indeed, one might almost say in Austria—for when the Socialist Government came into power after the war, Dr. Renner became Chancellor (corresponding to our Prime Minister) and held that office till the last election, a few weeks before our visit, when the clerical party became the largest in Parliament. During his Chancellorship he had to give up his Presidency of the Co-operative Union, but at this Congress he was re-elected for the coming year.

Herr Eldersch, the retiring President, took the chair at the Congress, and opened the proceedings with a short speech. This was followed by a resolution against the terms of the Peace Treaty, moved by Herr Kaffe, the editor of the "Free Co-operator," formally seconded and carried unanimously. Then followed Co-operative business.

It was interesting to find that several of the problems which were exercising their Movement were very familiar ones. The Co-operative Press was one of the subjects discussed—how to secure better circulation for their paper, and the desirability of starting a woman's paper (Frau Freundlich was much interested to hear of our "Woman's Outlook"). Co-operative Insurance was another subject. Then there was the raising of capital—an even more urgent problem in Austria with its depreciated money values, than in England—and a proposal to increase the share capital of members. This being a matter which affected the statutory position of Societies the public official corresponding to our Registrar had to be present

while it was considered, in order to see that there were a sufficient number of duly accredited delegates in attendance.

Neither the Congress nor the Wholesale meeting were nearly so lively as ours. This was largely because all the reports and resolutions were moved first (one in a speech lasting over an hour and a quarter !), and the discussion and voting on all of them took place later in the day. Then, too, there was no applause during the speeches, and nothing but a murmured "Hear, hear," at the end.

There were very few women present, which surprised us, as the women have a good position in the Austrian Movement. Frau Freundlich told us that it was unusual to see so few, but that as much of the business was very technical, many of the Societies had sent only their managers or secretaries.

We gained the impression from the Congress and what we learnt afterwards that the Austrian Movement is not so democratic as our own. For instance, all the resolutions were put down by the Committee, and we were told that Societies practically never exercised their right to send in resolutions, though they sent in amendments. Then, again, the Wholesale has only yearly, not quarterly, meetings, and the Directors do not seem to be troubled by any awkward questions from Societies !

The reception of the foreign delegates took place on Saturday evening at a dinner given by the Linz Society. This was held at a delightful hotel standing on a hill above Linz called the Pöstlingberg, which we reached by tram. It was a great assembly,



THE HOTEL AT THE PÖSTLINGBERG.

attended not only by the delegates but also by many of the Co-operators of Linz and their wives. The foreign delegates included one from the German Wholesale, two from the Swedish, one from the Hungarian Working Men's Wholesale, and one from Italy, besides our C.W.S. delegates and ourselves. We, as the only foreign women delegates, had the places of honour next to Herr Eldersch and Dr. Renner, the President and President-elect, of the Union.

Foreign delegates were asked by the Mayor of Linz, who gave the official welcome to the Congress, not to go away with the idea that this was the kind of dinner Austrians had every day; and, indeed, we had seen enough of Austria to know that probably few of them had had such a dinner since the last time they attended a Co-operative Congress; for we had even more than we needed, including meat, which is only allowed in small quantities once a week.

After dinner came the speeches, and charming folk-songs, sung in parts by four voices. After a few words of welcome to the foreign delegates, Herr Eldersch called upon the C.W.S. representative (Mr. Oliver) to speak, then the Guild representative (Mrs. Ferguson), then the German, Hungarian, and Italian delegates. All but Mr. Oliver and Mrs. Ferguson spoke in German, but we English delegates had a very able interpreter in Frau Freundlich. "When my turn came," says Mrs. Ferguson, "what struck me was how they listened. I felt as if I were talking into their hearts, and as if they almost followed what I said in English. I began by saying I brought

greetings from the English women Co-operators, and I went on to tell them what the Guild was and how we work first and foremost for Co-operation, and how, in learning about organisation and government, we were training ourselves to work side by side with the men. I did just put in that we had not yet got a woman on the C.W.S. (and here our directors and I exchanged friendly glances), while in Austria not only had they Frau Freundlich as a director, but they had a rule that at least one woman must be on every committee. Then I said the Guild worked for education and health, which were so important for our movement, and ended by saying Mr. Oliver had taken the lines I had wished to say: 'Nation with nation, hand with hand, Unarmed shall live as comrades free,' &c., and how we Guildswomen had stood for internationalism right through the war, and that the only hope was for all to meet on common ground and be international co-operators."

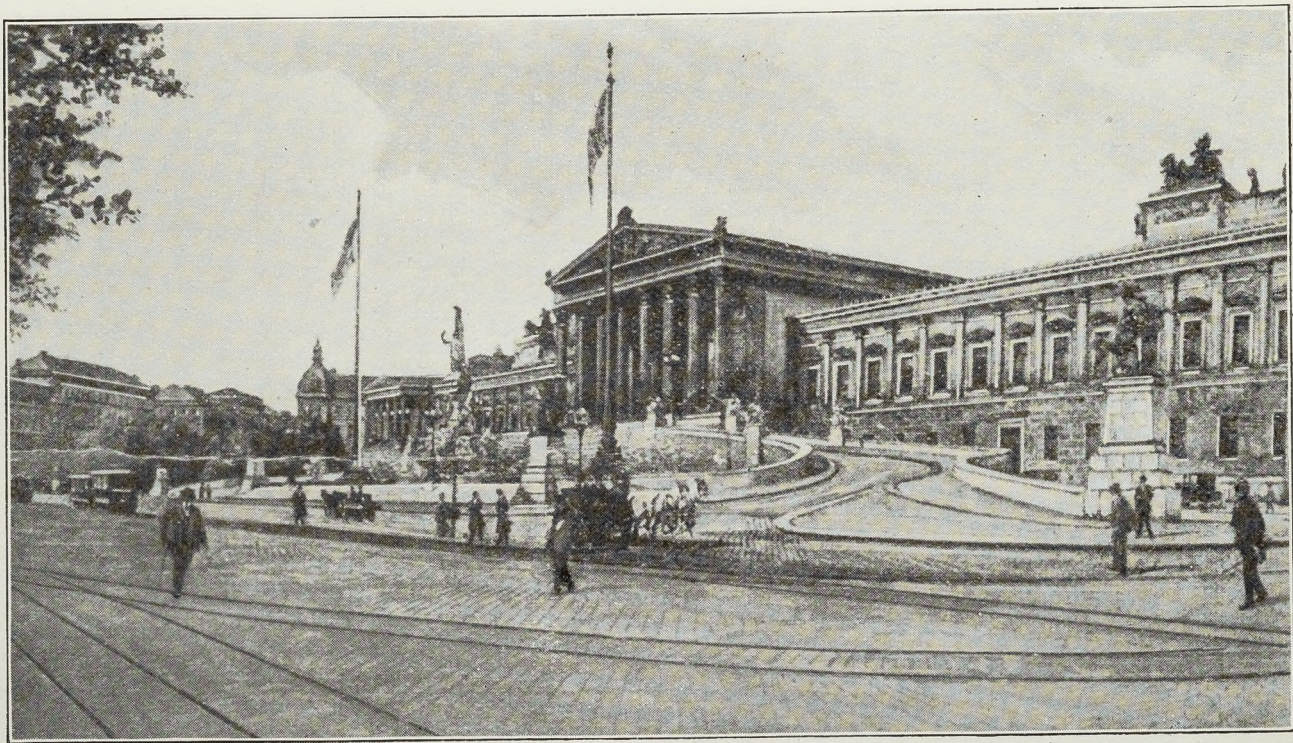
Before translating this speech, Frau Freundlich said she would like to explain a little about the Guild, and she told the delegates how in 1916 when the Austrian Co-operative women passed a resolution in favour of peace and appealed to the women of all countries to support their efforts, the Guild alone had responded; how the Guild had been the first organisation in the countries of the Entente to protest against the use of black troops in the occupied regions of Germany, and of what the Guild had done this last summer to prevent war against Russia on behalf of Poland. As she translated what had been said, they seemed very attentive, and at the end there was quite an ovation.

The concluding speech by Dr. Renner was one to be long remembered. He spoke of the power of Co-operation ; he was proud that after these years of strife it should be the Co-operative Movement which had succeeded in uniting round one table so many different nationalities ; he touched on the problems which faced the Co-operators of Austria, on the trials and sufferings through which poor broken Austria was passing. " But amidst all our sufferings and difficulties and losses, we are happy because we have so many friends."

Excursions and Entertainments.

The Austrian Co-operators did everything possible to make our visit enjoyable as well as useful, and many delightful excursions were arranged for us, not only to Co-operative undertakings but to places of historical and national interest. We had a charming drive up the Danube from Linz to a neighbouring monastery, and another with the Swedish and our C.W.S. delegates to the little village of St. Florian, where there is a most beautiful and interesting church. These enabled us to see something of the countryside, though it was difficult to judge of its prosperity in November, as this district is devoted entirely to crops. We saw no sheep or cattle, but in the little inn at St. Florian we had a glass of milk, the only fresh milk we saw in Austria. One thing that struck us was that during the whole of our stay we never saw a single boat in motion on the Danube, which used to be the greatest waterway in Europe.

In Vienna we were taken to the State Theatre,



AUSTRIAN HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, VIENNA.

and to the Opera—the most celebrated in the world—where we sat in what before the Republic had been the Royal box. We spent an afternoon in the Parliament listening to a heated discussion on the bad bread. And we walked with Frau Freundlich up the Karlberg—a wooded hill from which we looked down on the whole city of Vienna.

The Real Conditions in Austria.

But all the pleasure of our visit, the merriment of a festive occasion like the Congress, and the gaiety which is characteristic of the Austrian people, did not prevent our seeing the real misery underneath. Indeed, a very slight peep beneath the surface is enough to reveal much. In the rich quarters of Vienna, where our Hotel was, people go about in furs and fashionable clothes as elsewhere. But after a few days one begins to realise that “best clothes” do not exist. Even among the well-to-do it is careful brushing, turning, mending, altering that has kept many of them fashionable though threadbare. In the less wealthy districts everyone is shabby, while the poor are in rags. At first one does not fully realise the meaning of the woman with a tattered skirt, a shawl over her shoulders, no hat, and shoes from which the soles are half off, who gets into the tram. We, too, have our poor in England. But as the tram goes on and passes, not one or two, but scores of similar figures, one understands that the clothes in Vienna are worn out and there are no more.

In the hotels there is plenty of food to be had—by paying for it, and we with our English money could get practically anything we wanted except

fresh milk. But to the Austrians prices are prohibitive, and such food is only for the war-profiteer and the foreigner. The Government has done its best to ration, but with famine in the country it has been impossible to control and undesirable to stop the “smuggle trade” which has in some ways relieved the situation. But the great majority must live on their rations—if they can afford them—and these are wholly insufficient.

The bread is abominable—at any rate in Vienna, where it is 50 per cent. maize, and the smell of the dough in the Co-operative Bakery which we visited was almost too much for us. Two pounds of bread and 1lb. of flour per week for each person is the ration. Meat is allowed once a week; fresh milk only for children under a year. The coffee, which takes the place of tea with us, is made out of beech leaves. We were entertained one day to the midday meal at the Wholesale—a meal shared by the whole staff and the managers. It consisted of a large plate of thin soup with sago in it, a large plate of what looked like butter beans and gravy, but turned out to be potatoes and a kind of sauce, and a piece of pastry with something sweet in it. The very best was made of the poor ingredients, for the Austrians are excellent cooks, but there was no nourishment in them. And this was a typical meal—at the Wholesale.

The very poor are almost entirely dependent on the food which they receive free, or far below cost, from the American and English Relief Missions. A war widow whom we visited, who had four children at school and one at work, explained that the younger

children were well because they got their dinner at school every day through the American Relief Mission ; she was also able to buy some food from the American kitchen, and showed us the soup she had got that day. For the rest she had the bread and flour ration, but could not afford her other rations. The flour she cooked with water as she could not afford even the tiny ration of fat allowed. This woman received a pension for herself and the four younger children, amounting to 15 kronen a day, and earned 24 kronen a day more by making shirts, giving a weekly income of about 270 kronen.

We walked through the market, where the ordinary articles of food are sold. A pound of margarine cost 96 kronen, 1lb. of imported beef (the cheapest meat) about 60 kronen, 1lb. of rice 33 kronen, 1lb. of cheese 97 kronen, a 2lb. loaf is 6½ kronen, 2lbs. of potatoes 7½ kronen. Even to skilled workers in regular employment such prices mean semi-starvation apart from rationing restrictions. The bakers at the large Co-operative Bakery which we visited in Vienna earned, we were told, 900 kronen a week. What would an ordinary dinner, such as we are accustomed to, cost for a household of five ?

2lbs. imported beef	120	kronen.
2lbs. potatoes	7½	„
1lb. carrots.....	3½	„
¼lb. rice (cooked with water) ..	8	„
Jam or stewed fruit, about	10	„
	149	„

—one-sixth of the week's income gone on one meal.

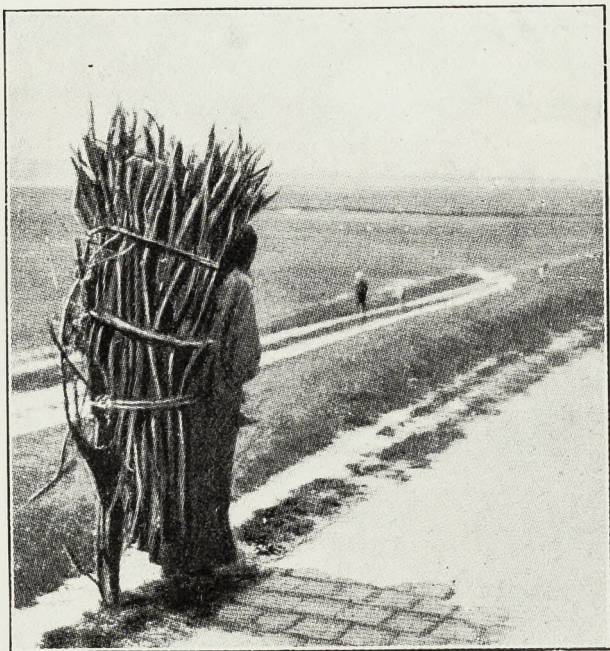
And with clothes, fuel, household requisites such as soap, and everything else at similar prices it is impossible to know how the people live.



THE MARKET, VIENNA.

The Austrians were always a sociable people, and the Vienna cafés are famous. They are still crowded every evening, and at first one wonders whether a people that spends so much on sociability can be really starving. But a cup of coffee costs less than

coal. In the cafés are light and warmth. The coal ration is only 14lbs. a week. Wood is burnt as far as it is procurable, and in the country districts round Linz we saw the people sawing and gathering wood and packing it into bags which the women carried home on their backs. In Vienna, too, we often met women



A WOMAN CARRYING WOOD.

and children struggling home with great bundles of wood. But all they can get hardly meets the barest needs.

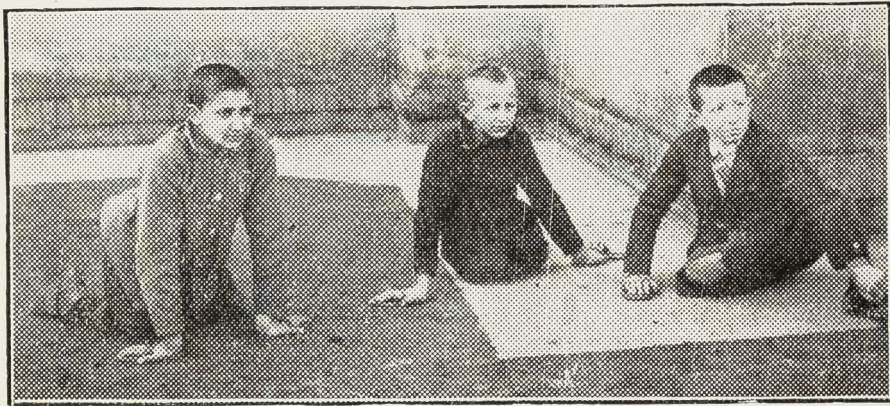
We spent an afternoon with Frau Freundlich and one of the Labour women visiting some working-class families in one of the poor quarters of Vienna. The houses we visited were large blocks of municipal

flats, which are only let to people with families. In one neat little flat of two rooms lived the widow already mentioned with five children. Her sister, also a widow, with eight children, had another flat in the same block; but we learnt that in fact they all lived in one, so that they could share the fire.

In another lived six children, whose parents were both in hospital. The younger ones had their mid-day meal at school, and the eldest, a girl of 16, had to provide for the rest by what she earned from picking up coke from the neighbourhood of a disused factory. This occupation was affording a miserable livelihood to many of the unemployed in these buildings. The field had apparently been used as a slag heap, and the people were now digging it over to extract the coke, of which they sold the larger lumps and used the tiny pieces themselves. By hard work, we were told, they could make as much as 70 kronen a day in this way.

At the time of our visit to the first house it was growing dusk. As we went into one after another we realised that after 5 o'clock the people sat in darkness; for there was no gas or electric light in these working-class houses, they were only allowed about a tumblerful of paraffin a week (if they could afford it) and candles, too, were very dear. In the last flat a woman with a nine-months'-old baby on her knee and two or three other children standing round her, was sitting on the sofa, hardly visible by the moonlight through the door as we entered. "Have you no light?" asked Frau Freundlich. The woman explained that she had no money till her

husband came in but would then send for a candle, which she did. It cost $3\frac{1}{2}$ kronen—2s. 11d. at the pre-war value of the krone. This darkness was to us perhaps the most depressing thing in Vienna, and we could understand the feelings of utter hopelessness and indifference that must often creep over the hearts of these people as they sit through the long dark hours, hungry and cold. "There is nothing left in Vienna to wish for, except to die," one woman said to us on another occasion.



AUSTRIAN BOYS CRIPPLED BY STARVATION.

Another tragic sight was that of the little children in the Meidling Hospital, which is largely maintained by the Friends' Mission. Here we saw the tiny children with their old faces, of which we had seen pictures; the poor little things with rickety legs, and big, misshapen heads; the flabby, tuberculous children with their deceptive pink cheeks. But here there was hope, for the devoted doctor was working wonders with the 200 little creatures under his care.

He knew the family history of every one, and they all loved him. "This little boy's father is in hospital, and the mother was going to throw herself into the river with four children," he explained of a little newcomer. "This is a real hunger-child," he said of another pale, languid little girl who was sitting up in her cot and whose story he told us. "She would like to eat all day. Are you hungry, little girl?" She nodded and he smiled. "Yes, she is hungry; when she wakes in the night she still says she's hungry."



FAMINE BABIES.

We came to a pathetic little boy whose withered legs had been operated upon for rickets. "We had to break them three times," said the doctor; "but he is getting on well now," and he held out his hand for the boy to slap—his way of testing the strength of his little patients. A tiny girl—the size perhaps of a child of 10 or 11 months, but thin—had pulled herself up in her cot and was standing by the rails. "When she came to us three weeks ago," the doctor said,

“she could not sit up, but now she can stand.” We asked how old she was. “Three years and three months.”

Austria's Difficulties.

The work of the various relief missions has done much to mitigate the suffering in Austria, and, indeed, they alone have made life possible for many thousands of people. Terrible as we found things in Vienna, we were told that they were much worse last winter. But Austria cannot go on for ever living on charity. It is a bitter thing for anyone to have to live on other people's charity, and responsible people in Austria realise too that it is demoralising. What the Austrians want above all things is to be given the opportunity to help themselves—to work out the salvation of their country even if it means, as it were, starting again from the very beginning. And to a great extent it does mean a new start, because the Austria of to-day is so different from the old Austria. And that is one of the great difficulties.

The Peace Treaty has cut the old Austria to pieces. Out of it have been carved, to begin with, the new States of Czecho-Slovakia, and Hungary. Part, too, has been given to Poland; part to Rumania, part with Serbia forms the new State of Jugo-Slavia; part has gone to Italy. The new Austria has been left like an island in the middle of these surrounding states. It has no port. The coal and iron mines which used to supply its factories are now in Czecho-Slovakia. The rich agricultural lands are now in Jugo-Slavia and Hungary.

What remains to Austria besides a few small towns, is a certain amount of agricultural land, a larger amount of forest land, and the great city of Vienna—like a head without a body. In and around Vienna were the great factories, depending for their work on supplies drawn from all parts of the old Empire and beyond. In Vienna was the centre of the great railway system of old Austria. In Vienna were the head offices of all the financial and commercial businesses which usually centre in the capital of a great country. In Vienna was a great university, and all the institutions connected with the science and art for which Vienna was famous. In Vienna were the Government offices to be found in the capital of every country.

But such a great city is not wanted in a tiny country, and one of Austria's chief problems is what to do with Vienna. About one-sixth of the whole population of Vienna at the time of the armistice were employed in administrative work in connection with the Government departments or great businesses. But new Austria needed much smaller staffs in her Government offices, while many of the businesses transferred their headquarters to the capitals of the new States. What was to be done with the people? Some have been absorbed into the police force, which we observed was very numerous; but though this gives them wages, it does not help to increase the food and clothing which Austria needs. It is, indeed, impossible to turn most of these people to productive work, for Government and business officials cannot be turned into factory hands all at once, nor teachers

and scientists into agricultural labourers, nor artists and musicians into railwaymen. And it would be a terrible waste of human powers if such an attempt had to be made.

Moreover, the factory workers in Austria are not much better off, for factories are idle through want of coal and raw materials. The mines which formerly supplied them with coal are in Czecho-Slovakia, which is not merely a separate but a hostile State. It is difficult to understand the lengths to which their hostility carries these new States. We were told, for instance, that Czecho-Slovakia had large supplies of sugar to dispose of, but refused to sell it to Austria. Czech Government regulations prevent the Austrian Wholesale from obtaining jam from their factory in Czecho-Slovakia. Jugo-Slavia again has large quantities of grain, but would only consent to sell any to Austria on condition that with the good she bought a quantity that was so bad as to be practically useless.

Not only coal but raw materials have to be imported, and Austria's money is of so little value in other countries that it is almost impossible for her to pay for the materials she needs. This is the greatest of Austria's difficulties, and it is part of a vicious circle from which it is hard to find an escape. Because the Peace Treaty put Austria into the position of having to import while having little to export in return, her money ceased to have much value to other countries. Yet she is obliged to go on importing, and the more she imports the less grows the value of her money, and the more she has to pay for

what is imported. Not only this; the value of her money is not the same from one day to another. Before the war an English pound was worth 24 kronen. The day we arrived in Austria it was worth 1,900 kronen, five days later it was worth 1,600, and the day we left—a week afterwards—it was worth 1,800. This means that no one likes to trade with Austria, because they never know if they are going to make a profit or loss on the transaction.

The Patience and Enterprise of the Austrians.

Two things struck us continually wherever we went—the extraordinary patience with which the people bore their sufferings, and the determination to find a way out of the difficulties if the necessary help could be given. In spite of the most fearful misery there has been no violent revolution in Austria, and we never met a trace of the bitterness which might have been expected towards those who were responsible for the cruel peace.

Their greatest difficulties are beyond the power of the Austrians themselves to remedy. But the practical problems they are tackling with energy. Last winter the coal situation was sprung upon them by the Peace Treaty without time to prepare; this year they have organised a wood supply which, they anticipate, will provide for domestic needs during the coming winter. They also began immediately to work the few "brown" coal mines which Austria possesses. This coal is not properly "ripe," and looks something like peat. It gives much less heat than black coal, but this is what we saw in use in all

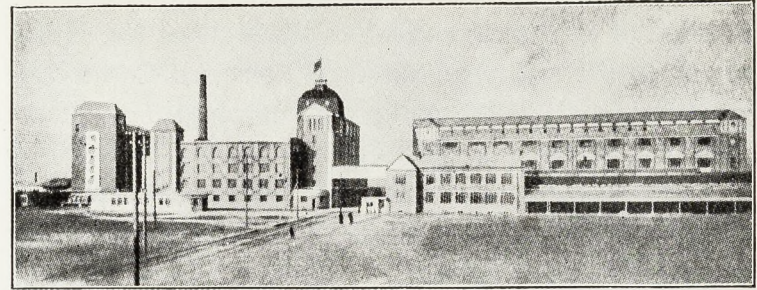
the factories we visited. Another indication of their efforts is the enormous number of allotments in and around Vienna. Every available space seemed to have been turned to some use. We noticed, for instance, a man digging over a little patch where a house had been pulled down.

The Co-operative Movement.

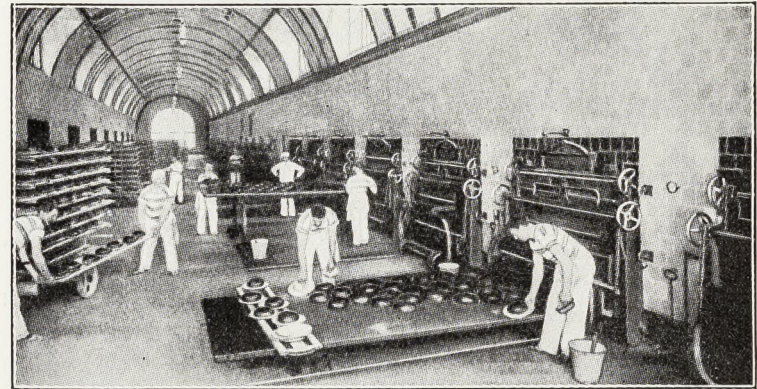
Foremost in effort and enterprise is the Co-operative Movement. Indeed, the very strong impression left by our visit is that it is only the Co-operative Movement that can save Austria.

Of the 6½ million inhabitants of the present Austria the Co-operative Movement supplies about 2 millions; that is to say, it bears about the same proportion to the total population as our own. There is a Union, with District Union Committees corresponding to our Sectional Boards, and a Wholesale; but they are much more closely united than in our own movement, for the committees of the two are composed of the same persons, though they have different presidents and secretaries. It is hoped some day to have only one body, but at present this is not legally possible. The 16 members of the Wholesale Board are not paid by the Wholesale, like our Directors, but are mostly managers of Societies and retain their positions in their own Societies, the actual work of the Wholesale being entrusted to five paid managers.

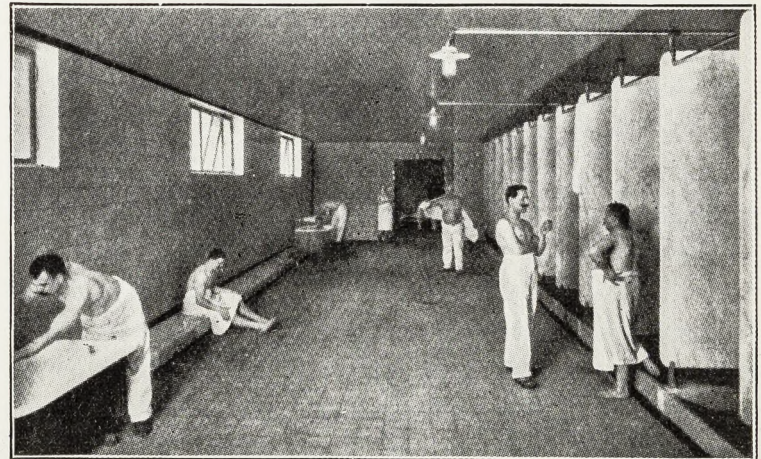
We were puzzled at first to know how it happened that the members of the Wholesale Board and the Union were always the same, till we learnt that the



THE "HAMMER WORKS," MILL AND BAKERY.

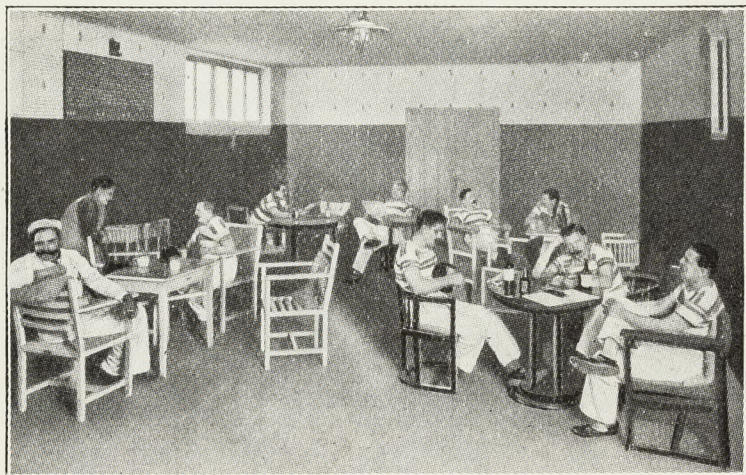


THE OVEN ROOM.



THE BATHROOM.

method of electing committees throughout the Movement is different from ours. A Selection Committee is first elected, which makes the nominations; if the members do not like the list of names put forward by the Selection Committee, they can refer it back, or ask for any individual name to be withdrawn. The list is then voted upon.



THE RECREATION ROOM.

In addition to the productive work carried on by the Wholesale there are a number of special Societies for productive purposes, of which the retail Societies are the members. At Vienna, for instance, the great "Hammer" works mill and bakery which we visited, the largest in Austria, belong to such a federation of Societies. At Linz we visited a very interesting poultry and fruit farm, for which also a special Society had been formed by the Societies in the neighbourhood. In the same way the new

bakery and furniture factory, which are shortly to be opened at Linz, will be run by special Societies.

There is also a strong agricultural Co-operative Movement in Austria, with a Wholesale of its own, with which for certain purposes the Consumers' Movement is working in close connection.



POULTRY FARM, LINZ.

There is no Women's Guild in Austria like ours, with its own subscriptions and its own officers. Regular monthly meetings of women are held for propaganda and educational purposes, the funds for

which are supplied by the Societies and the Union ; but these meetings are arranged by the Society's Educational Secretary in conjunction with the woman member of the Management Committee. For at a recent Congress a resolution was adopted by which there must be at least one woman on every committee in the movement. Often there are more, but this rule secures what we have so often striven for, that not only shall the door be open to women but that they shall find at least one seat free. But the women are not able to influence the policy of the whole movement as our Guild does, as they have never developed an organisation with a policy of its own working through Societies like ours.

At Vienna a special meeting of Co-operative women had been arranged for us, and nothing in our visit brought us quite so near to the Austrian people as this meeting. The differences of language, nationality, customs seemed to disappear. We were just Co-operative women speaking to Co-operative women. We almost felt, as we spoke, that they knew what we wanted to convey, even though they could not understand our language. It was just like speaking to one of our own Guild branches. There were about 100 women present sitting at long tables. Frau Freundlich, who presided, introduced us and translated our speeches, and we noticed the women taking notes of what we had said. Afterwards they all came and shook hands with us, thanking us again and again, and sending many messages to the members of our Guild. " You will greet the English women for us, won't you ? " " Be sure and give



CENTRAL PREMISES OF THE VIENNA SOCIETY.

our greetings to the English women." "Tell the English women how glad we are that you came."

This meeting took place at the central premises of the Vienna Society, which, by the amalgamation of the three working-class Societies of Vienna in April last, became the largest retail Society in the world, with a membership of over 100,000 and 145 branches. We were taken over part of the fine premises—the bakery, the sausage factory, the egg-preserving department. Before the war, we were told, 250 to 500 pigs a day were killed in the Society's slaughter-house. Now it is *one in 10 weeks!* Nothing brought home Vienna's famine more clearly than these figures and the sight of the almost empty rooms. A few sausages, of which the Austrians are very fond, were still being made from imported beef. We saw some of this and thought it looked very unattractive. Of eggs there were very few, and they cost now 10½ kronen each in the Stores (13 kronen in a private shop)—175 times what they cost before the war. One per family per week is the ration allowed.

On another occasion we were shown over the offices of the Union and the Wholesale, which are in the same building in a central part of the town, and had the opportunity of learning something about the different departments of the Wholesale and their activities. Our guide on this occasion was Frau Feilnreiter, who is Secretary of the Credit Union of Austria (a kind of bank)—a remarkable post for a woman to hold. One of the chief departments of the Wholesale is now their great timber department, which has been developed within the last year to



A BRANCH OF THE VIENNA SOCIETY.

provide fuel for their members and wood for their furniture factories. For this purpose the Wholesale have bought two forests. But the most important is naturally the grocery department, and we had a most interesting talk with one of their chief buyers. The Wholesale has been entrusted by the Government with the entire distribution of the extra rations allotted under certain conditions, and co-operates with the State in the import of various foodstuffs; for the Co-operative Movement in Austria has taken its stand as having a right, not merely to equal treatment with private traders who seek their own profits, but to special treatment as a democratic organisation working in the interests of the whole community. On this ground it claims special privileges, such as that of being used by the Government in preference to capitalist organisations, and of buying land and buildings from the Government at reduced prices. At Linz, for instance, buildings and a large estate are being acquired from the State and municipality, and we were told that the Co-operators expect to secure them on particularly favourable terms. Here, in addition to the bakery and furniture factory already mentioned, are to be a Wholesale warehouse and houses for the employees, forming a regular co-operative village.

What impressed us most, however, is all that the Wholesale is doing for the reconstruction of Austria in conjunction with the Agricultural Wholesale, the State, and the Trade Unions. With the Agricultural Wholesale it has formed a joint organisation for increasing agricultural production, so as to provide

more home-grown food. "Labour Stations" have been opened in various parts of the country provided with motor ploughs, tractors, threshing machines, &c., and from these the farmers can hire machines which are too expensive for them to buy, and such labour as they need for special pieces of work. Attached to them are repairing shops, where the farmers can get their repairs done. The organisation also aims at supplying clothing and household goods to the farmers, and by all these means encouraging them to produce as much as possible. For the farmers had begun to think it not worth while to grow more than they needed for themselves, because they had such difficulty in buying from the towns all the things they wanted in exchange for the food they sold.

Under Dr. Renner's Government a socialisation law was passed which greatly helped and strengthened co-operation. Under this law various undertakings have been started by the State and Co-operative Movement together. The most important is a big cotton business in which the State, the Wholesale, and the Agricultural Wholesale are all associated, but the real control of which is in the hands of the Co-operative organisations. This joint body buys raw cotton, gets it manufactured by private factories since the Wholesale has none of its own, and sells it through the two Wholesales. In the same way the State, the two Wholesales, and the Trade Unions concerned have formed another joint body for the manufacture of boots and leather goods. The Wholesale had one boot factory of its own, two others belonging to the War Office have been transferred to the new

organisation by the State, and the three are now under the management of the Wholesale, through which all the products are sold. Several other similar undertakings are being planned.

We came to the conclusion that in Austria the Co-operative Movement has a position and importance which it has hardly reached in any other country. It has the support of the State on the one hand and the Trade Unions on the other. It has among its responsible officials some of the ablest men and women in Austria. It has a great constructive policy. It has the opportunity of being able to control a very large part of the industry of the country. But it cannot succeed alone. It asks the Co-operators of this country to help it to fulfil these great possibilities ; to help it to save the unhappy people of Austria from further suffering, and to build up this broken nation again, not on the old capitalist lines, but as a State in which Co-operation has the leading part.

The help that is most needed is not charity, though that, too, is necessary* temporarily. The help for which the Austrian Co-operators ask is, first of all, a real understanding of the conditions of Austria as we have tried to describe them—of the misery in which the people are living, of the difficulties which have to be met, of what the Co-operative Movement in Austria is trying to do. And, secondly, they ask us to help them by trading with them—not

* We are glad to think that our Austrian friends will have received the gift of 3,600 articles as well as the rolls of flannel, calico, &c., purchased with the £54 collected by Guild members.

at some distant date in the future, but now at once. For unless they can command supplies from abroad their great undertakings cannot succeed. This trade could not be quite on the ordinary lines, because, as we have explained, their money is almost worthless in England. It would be necessary that the Austrians should pay, not in money, but in goods.

It was not the part of the Guild delegates to go into details of possible trading transactions. But what we wish to convey to our fellow Guild members is a sense of the eager hope with which our Austrian comrades are looking to the movement of this country, and of the responsibility which rests upon us all to find some way of giving them the help they ask. International trade has long been an aspiration ; to-day we must make it a reality. And we must do so quickly. There is no time to go on talking about it. " We have had so many discussions with so many different people," the Austrians told us, " but nothing ever comes of it. We are tired of *talking* about trade ; we want to trade." Let us show them that their faith in the Co-operators of England is justified, and that we mean not only to talk but to act.

M. E. FERGUSON,
A. HONORA ENFIELD.

December, 1920.



