

HOW WAR PRISONS ARE MANAGED

Camps and hospitals for prisoners of war are prominent features of Germany to-day. They number 247, some of which contain between 10,000 to 20,000 prisoners. The latest information give the number of prisoners interned as 900,000.

The lot of a prisoner is something like that of a Mexican peon or a Virginia slave in the old slavery days. He has a sort of communal life. He is not confined to a cell, but his freedom of movement is restricted to a camp compound.

If he choose labour, he is sometime contracted out to an employer for a pittance of 12 or 25 cents a day. He is fed and clothed and housed by people who grudge him the scraps they fling him, and his lot is an unenviable one.

A neutral correspondent in Germany has written an interesting article account of one of these prisoners' camps. It is usually surrounded by a high wooden fence, surrounded in turn by an outer bristling web of double barbed wire. Between the two fences there is a passage for the guard. Along one side run the guard houses and offices, the kitchens, canteens, bath houses for the prisoners, and then the prison barracks proper. There are no windows, only skylights in a sloping roof. On a layer of tarred paper wooden berths are built along the walls, leaving room for a passage in the middle. This is in the newest camps; in other camps prisoners sleep on sacks filled with wood shavings, which are raised up along the walls during the day.

Food regulations are much the same in all camps. The basis for the distribution of food is 2700 calories (heat units) declared by German science to be necessary for the maintenance of a tolerable existence.

This is administered in the form of black bread and soup, a diet which gives the Canadian prisoner an acute sense of starvation. If he has money he is allowed to buy extra food and tobacco in a canteen. The prisoners themselves do the work in the kitchen, serve the food and perform all the other menial tasks in the camps. They are allowed to amuse themselves as best they can by primitive theatricals and some games.

"When I asked how they were treated," says this correspondent, I received conflicting answers. One general conclusion, I drew, however, namely that many are without friends to send them gifts of food, clothing and other necessities. I was much impressed by the desirability of one central organization for the distribution of gifts to British prisoners."

Such an organization is to be found in the Red Cross of which thousands of grateful prisoners of war can say with truth "I was in prison and ye came unto me."

The concern of the Red Cross is, however primarily with the wounded. It is only the overflow of its treasury that it can devote to prisoners of war.

The Canadian Red Cross has a special department in London, which has been sending 300 parcels a week to prisoners camps. This amount is of course insufficient but it can only be increased by an increase in public subscription.

A year ago the detention of a dozen Canadian in peon camp in Mexico would have set Canada in a blaze of indignation. In spite of the many claims on the public purse it is to be hoped, however, that the thousands of Canadians now languishing in Germany will not be forgotten.

If you wish to "Come Unto Them" in their prison, you can do so by means of the Red Cross.

Subscriptions should be sent to 77 King St. East, Toronto.