

REPORT ON JOURNEY TO HENDAYE FEB 3rd 1938.

I have just returned, with two others, from taking 64 Spanish children and four Senoritas back to their native land. For eight months they had made England their adopted home, and I know that for the rest of their lives they will remember the English as the people who saved them when death took many of their friends.

Last Wednesday was a rough day to cross the channel, and the excited chatter of the children stopped as soon as we sailed. They were nearly all sick - quietly and without fuss. One little girl knelt in her bunk, weeping and praying instead. But before we reached Dieppe all were talking incessantly again - high spirits which lasted as far as the Spanish frontier.

At Dieppe we got into our reserved third class coach, and settled down for the 21 hour journey to Hendaye. There were ten children to a carriage, so for the night the little ones tucked up in the luggage rack (I found myself that it was the best place). Even so, only between two and five a.m. was there comparative silence; at dawn all were awake, and calling out at each station "Do you speak Spanish?" When we told people we were bound for Spain, "Poor children!" they said.

We reached Hendaye at midday on Thursday. Red cross nurses offered the children milk, but few drank it. Then, as, under an escort of French soldiers we walked onto the international bridge between peaceful France and warring Spain, all were suddenly silent. French people at their windows watched, silent too. At the Spanish end of the bridge were many well-armed sentries and officers. A

woman came forward and gave the fascist salute. A few children's hands went up; "All!" she shouted; some bundles were dropped and childish arms raised raggedly. The guards stood with emotionless faces, grim, bored, their bodies bristling with weapons of war. Between them passed the silent children: two little girls were carrying cradles with dolls in them - relics of gentleness in England, the country where there was no war.

Children and Senoritas received no smile of welcome - no one to meet them but these humourless officials; no receptions or bunting for them, and, it appeared, no dinner. What a change from the fuss that was made of the first five hundred who went home! We English were left outside the barrier with various questions unanswered. We wanted at least to say good bye to the children, and although permission for this was at first refused, we persisted and it was eventually granted. We stepped five yards onto Spanish asphalt, and for the first time since they left the station the children spoke again: "Good-bye! thank you for everything! Adios!" We knew the sincerity of those words. Tears were dropping silently down the cheeks of the elder children. "You may kiss the boys" said one officer. We declined the offer; we did not want to cause a scene.

Three depressed English people we were who walked back into France. It was sad to think that those children were afraid to return to their home country. Theoretically their parents would be ready to receive them in Bilbao; but why was no English person allowed to go there and witness the reunion?

Next day the frontier was entirely closed. When it reopens

another party of children will go from England. A thousand have already gone, but there are nearly three thousand left. The English public has done much in keeping the children till now, but people are giving less now, and all parents now in Bilbao are being asked to take their children back if they possibly can. General Franco is also keen to get the children back.

Our support of the children who are homeless is now a matter of life and death to them. Most of those now in England have ~~sixth~~ parents either lost, imprisoned in Bilbao or refugees in Eastern Spain. Such children cannot go to Bilbao; if funds give out they will join the millions of refugees in Eastern Spain, to be half starved and bombed. A group of 120 such children were killed in Barcelona a week ago.

Eight children from Penstone will go to Bilbao in a few weeks. The rest cannot go. Our headquarters, having subsidised us for five months, asks us now to become self-supporting again; otherwise our home may be prematurely closed. Cannot we do this? In the towns of the North, with much poverty, there are self-supporting homes for Basque children. Worthing has done so much for the children; we do not want the lives of the children we cared for to be lost now. We want another £10 a week to be given locally. 10/- a week "adopts" a child. Who will preserve a future mother of Spain?