

Pictures from a Children's Hospital

My duty is from 3 until 11. I come to my department (ward), it is truly hell. Sick children suffering from measles, two or three on the beds, all with the measles rash, red and purple, with tearful eyes, shaved heads and covered with scabs around which lice are crawling. "Careful [Polish]," says my friend/fellow, I shouldn't get too close to the children. I and a serving girl tended to 50 children. We go crazy from the work – what to do first? Distribute the medicines, give injections, give out food, put bandages on their heads so that the lice will [not sure about this expression]. The telephone rings, hello! In the reception room ten children are waiting, someone has to be sent down to them. I wring my hands with a bitter heart. I have no beds, no linen, no blankets, no covers. I call the head sister, ask her what am I to do with the children who are waiting down in the reception room? Where will I put them and with what will I dress them? The answer is short: where there are two children in a bed, put three, and that's that. Very simple. I send off the serving girl to collect the children. She drags up a new transport. I take a look at the papers and there is already a third Punkt [refugee point] with [an outbreak of] measles, that is Kałuszyn. All of them [the children] are naked. We have no linens [can be underwear or sheets]. The laundry is not working, there is no coal. It is terribly cold in the rooms, they huddle under the blankets and the fever causes them to shake. Tired and hungry, blue with cold, they fall asleep. I don't want to, but I must wake them. The creatures look at me with astonished expressions, asking why I don't let them sleep. They see the needle, there is a [Polish word] of terrified shouts, screams. One cries, "I want to go home!". "Where is your home?" "There, far away." "Where are you from?" "From Kałuszyn, they drove us out." A second, "I want my clothes, I want my suit of clothes. I don't want to be naked, I am embarrassed/ashamed." There is cry from the other room: "??[Polish]..." I go from bed to bed checking the cleanliness and arranging the beds so that they can go to sleep. Beginning with a bed in which are three 2 year old children I feel unwell, I hold my nose, I am choked, the whole bed is soiled, all three children are crying and I can't tell which one did this. These situations happen more than once. In the corridor a five year old child is lying swollen from hunger. He is dying from hunger. He came to the hospital yesterday. [He has] two swollen eyes, hands and feet like balloons. All possible tests have been done, maybe the kidneys, maybe the heart. But it is not the kidneys and it is not the heart. The child continues to

move his lips and begs for a piece of bread. I try to give him something to eat, perhaps he will take something down, but sadly his throat is closed up, he can't take in anything, too late the doctor asks him: "Did you get anything to eat at home?" No! "And now would you like to eat?" Yes! A few minutes later he utters for the last time, "A piece of bread" and falls asleep with this phrase on his lips, "a piece of bread". Dead for [want of] a piece of bread.

The ten year old refugee from Piaseczno. Arrived at the hospital filthy, abandoned, sick with TB and his legs sprained. Now he lies here, bathed with clean linen, on a clean bed, with 15 other children sick with the same disease. I take over duty from the previous person no duty. We go from bed to bed and I am told about the condition of each child's health. I am now standing by the bed of the refugee from Piaseczno. His name is Ziegler, Abramek, sick with granitis TB. He came from a Punkt for the refugees from Piaseczno. I want to look at his face but it is impossible. He has pulled the blanket up over his head. I take off the blanket and try to ask him something, he suddenly starts to shout and scream as if he was being slaughtered. "What happened to you?". "I have nothing to live for," he says, "I want to die already." "Why?" "Because my father is at a Punkt and they give you nothing to eat. I would rather go hungry but be together with my parents." A few days later, "So, unfortunate one," I say, "Do you want to go to the Punkt to your father, is it so bad here?" "No," he says, "I just pity my father and my mother who have nothing to eat while I eat five times a day. Could you maybe take to my mother a bit of my food?" The time arrived for Abramek to be discharged from the hospital. "So Abramek," I said, "tomorrow you will be going to your father." He doesn't answer and his face clouds over, as though it gives him no pleasure whatsoever that he had to go back to the dark poverty. The day that Abramek was supposed to leave the hospital his temperature chart noted that his fever had risen. When his temperature was taken it was normal and it became apparent that Abramek himself had "improved" his temperature by 2 degrees on the card from 37 to 39 so that he wouldn't be discharged from the hospital so quickly. But it didn't help. Abramek had to leave the hospital with a sad expression on his face.

CONTINUATION

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In the Reception Room

The duty doctor who receives the children in the hospital is terribly agitated. There sits a mother with a child who has only a few minutes to live. Her only hope is that the hospital will save him. She must pay 15 zlotys for funeral costs, since the child is extremely ill and the hospital has no money to cover funerals. The mother has been deported. Now she lives in a Punkt and has no money at all. Her child cannot be admitted to the hospital if she doesn't have the 15 zlotys to pay. She lets loose on the doctor all the suffering and pain which that has accumulated inside her from the

beginning of the war, "You are no doctor, you are a murderer, you are murdering my child, you have no heart, no feelings, no humanity if my child must die because of 15 zlotys. I am dragging myself, with the child, to the fourth place to which we've been deported, from where should I have any money now?" The mother's heart quivers with tears. The child lies on the table, blue and wheezing, choking and breathing his last breath. The doctor really cannot watch and runs from the room, the mother remains alone with the dying child, screaming helplessly until the [janitor] comes in and asks her to leave. She takes the child and swears with bitter curses. "This is a hospital, may it burn down. Doctors without hearts, murderers, robbers". Such scenes repeat themselves often.

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My duty for typhus is at 8 o'clock in the evening. It seems like I might be able to catch my breath, my 60 children have calmed a little, having eaten supper has calmed the hunger then they doze off and it becomes quiet in the rooms but sadly [the phone] rings. "Hello! What is it?" I must prepare 8 beds for 8 children from the Nizka-Stawki Punkt, the epidemic is spreading. I already have enough work. The children who come to us with spotted typhus are bathed and deloused in the reception room, also for a second time in the department. The 8 children are already in the ward and I set myself to preparing to bathe them again. "Hello", the doctor rings me, "Sister! Please pay attention when bathing the children they have a lot of lice. I grind my teeth and set to work. The first little patient is Abramek, five years old, I place him cautiously in the bath and think to myself that one bite from a louse and I will be ill with spotted typhus. I don't have to search for long, his head is one big scab [armor] and from underneath the scab wander around the lice which pass on the fearful disease to so many people. Bathed again, wearing clean underclothes, I must wash and clean his head, cut with the machine around the scabs, he wriggles with pain but I must be indifferent, because I have an order to obliterate the muck, where the lice multiply. By now blood is flowing from his head, the scab removed, then I put on him the proper bandage with salicin and lie my patient down in the bed. I must perform the same task with the others and afterwards set about registering them and filling out the proper cards for each child. At this opportunity each child tells me where he comes from. "We were deported from the fifth place, from Lodz to Konstantunow, from Konstantynów to Łowicz, from Łowicz to Głowno, from Głowno to Skierniewice, from Skierniewice to Warsaw. And every time a bit more of our things were taken from us. And on the way my father was beaten so badly by the German that he was taken to the hospital and he is no yet healthy. And on the way from Skierniewice to Warsaw my sister fell from the wagon and was killed. Now we live in a Punkt for a few days, with no bed to sleep in and we eat a bit of bread with black coffee and my mother does not cook lunch." I give them food and their little hands, shaking, take the bowls of soup, I want a bit more, but sadly I have no more. The hospital does not have the power to quiet the hunger of all the deported children who have not eaten and

been sated for months. And when they spot the bread and the pot with soup, dozens of little hands stretch forth and the little bodies shake as though in a fevered desire to eat.