

SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN.

Donington Hall, near Derby, famous in both world wars as detention place of German-officer-prisoners, is now given over to the care of refugee children. Thirty-boys from camps for displaced persons are learning to speak and write English. 21-year-old Sally Aldred is one of their teachers. She works for a nominal wage, instructing Poles, Estonians, Latvians, who didn't know a word of English when they arrived here. Now, for them, has come release from the European Refugee camps in which their parents, if still living, must drag on their hopeless existence. No wonder the boys bless the Ockenden Venture.

Venture House is where it all began. Here, and in three other houses in Woking, 38 children enjoy the kind of benefits provided at the Donington Hall, a branch of the Ockenden Venture. They know little of the normal domestic life at those blots of our civilisation, the camps for displaced persons.

Tall Halina, who's only 12, was born in Belsen of Polish parents. When she knows enough English, and all the children with her will go to ordinary schools. But today, a party; and film star Richard Todd is the guest of Miss Joyce Pearce.

Joyce Pearce founded the Ockenden Venture six years ago, beginning with five refugee girls. Last August, Richard Todd broadcast an appeal, for the Venture, raising £4,000. In 1952, Miss Pearce and two colleagues used their own money to rescue children from these camps, where still today, hundreds less fortunate are fed little better than animals. What ghastly holes these are for a start in life! It seems incredible that governments do so little to help. How merdiful that a few private individuals care for the little children. And so, a few hitherto unwanted in the whole world, find in human kindness a passport to a brighter home.

So more children have come to Ockenden.

Guardamen played outside Drury Lane for a matinee in aid of refugees, sponsored by St. Martin-in-the-Fields and the Variety Club.

What a day it was for forty children of the Ockenden Venture, to be taken to the Lane and be in the audience. For most of them it was their first time in a theatre. And if that is an experience no child can ever forget, what must Miss Pearce's little charges have felt as they watched a Nativity Play, on that famous stage?

So close to Christmas, how fitting it was that the audience should see enacted the most moving story of all, the coming to earth of the infant Saviour, the Prince of Peace.

Across Trafalgar Square, with its Norwegian Christmas Tree, St. Martin in the Fields welcomed the Ockenden children to a party, of the kind that is almost the birthright of every Christian child, and yet a birthright withheld from hundreds in the camps for refugees. But there was no sorrow here. The crypt of St. Martins knew only happiness.

The Vicar, Austen Williams, wears the mantle of the great Dick Sheppard, and rejoiced with his little flock. Yet these happy few might have lived on, in the misery so lately theirs, but for the compassion of the founder of the Ockenden Venture, Joyce Pearce. To all of us, how noble is the example she sets.