

A SERVICE OF LOVE IN WAR TIME

A VIGNETTE

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ABSTRACT: This is a discussion of Rufus Jones's classic memoir about the American Friends Service Committee during World War I, *A Service of Love in War Time*.

KEYWORDS: Rufus M. Jones, the American Friends Service Committee, Quakers, World War I, conscientious objectors

"There will be tens of thousands of books" written on the Great War, Haverford philosophy professor Rufus M. Jones (1863–1948) predicted in 1920 at the beginning of his classic memoir, *A Service of Love in War Time*, dealing with the first two years of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, later a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 after its relief of victims of a second and even greater world war). "It cannot be out of place to add to this vast literature one small volume which will tell in brief compass the story of the Mission of love and service which members of the Society of Friends maintained and carried through during the critical years of the war and afterwards."¹ This was no token mission, contrived only to get Quakers and other religious pacifists out of combat once they were drafted under the Selective Service Act of 1917. This was a massive undertaking: six hundred AFSC volunteers—mostly Quaker men but also some Quaker women, along with a handful of Mennonites and Brethren—went to France between 1917 and 1919, where they helped clothe, shelter, and feed sixty thousand French refugees in 345 villages along the Western Front.²

Born in Maine in 1863 to a family of Orthodox Quakers, Jones grew up a moderate evangelical. In his thirties, he moved permanently to Philadelphia, where Quakers were still divided after splitting in 1827 into a liberal majority who came to be known as Hicksites and an evangelical minority who came

to be known as Orthodox (the rest of American Quakerism soon followed suit). In Philadelphia, Jones assumed a professorship at Haverford College, the all-male Orthodox counterpart to the Hicksite Swarthmore just outside Philadelphia, and the editorship of a major Quaker periodical, which he soon renamed the *American Friend*. In 1897 he traveled to England, where, under the influence of English Quakers, he embraced a modernist agenda of adapting Quakerism to progressivism, higher criticism of the Bible, and the theory of evolution.³ From 1897 until his death in 1948, Jones sought in almost sixty books and in countless articles and talks to transcend the doctrinal infighting of American Quakerism by grounding the validity of religion in the social and psychological fruits of mystical experience, or direct and immediate contact with God.

Despite Jones's efforts, the war found Quakers still disunited and spiritually unprepared—but the persecution of conscience and the call to alternative service that the war visited upon Quakers brought them closer together than any book Jones ever wrote. Fittingly, his *A Service of Love in War Time* is still the best account of this time of trial and renewal for American Friends.⁴ On April 30, 1917, four weeks after President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany and eighteen days before he signed the Selective Service Act into law, Friends from all of the major American Quaker bodies gathered in Philadelphia to consider establishing a “Permanent National Headquarters” (8) to coordinate alternative service for young Friends in particular and for American Friends more generally. With the US Army about to militarize all ambulance work, that avenue of service was closed to Friends and others who were conscientious objectors to war seeking noncombatant service (9).

Happily, Wilson at the time was reorganizing the American Red Cross (ARC) to direct all American war-relief work, and the man he tapped as chief of the ARC in France, Grayson Mallet-Provost Murphy, was a graduate of a Quaker high school in Philadelphia and a former student of Jones's at Haverford. After securing Murphy's endorsement in May, the central Quaker committee, which in the meantime had assumed the name American Friends Service Committee and had appointed Jones as chairman, officially formed a Friends Unit in August as a bureau of the Civilian Department of the American Red Cross in France (10–11, 42). The ARC allowed the Friends Unit to merge with English Friends, who had been aiding victims of the war since the beginning of the conflict, to form the Anglo-American Mission of the Society of Friends—Mission de la Société des Amis (42–43).

On July 11 one hundred young men—"the Haverford Unit"—started training under Jones and Dr. James A. Babbitt at Haverford College for reconstruction work in France (21). The work was to consist largely of assembling "demountable houses" in former war zones (27). Only fifty-one of the hundred men, plus three women, sailed for France in early September, arriving in Paris on September 14, 1917 (64–65). The other forty-nine men had been drafted (25). They had to report to their designated mobilization camp and await furloughs that were long in coming (87). Most were treated respectfully at camp when they refused to drill or carry a weapon or even wear the military uniform, but some were beaten, had their eyes gouged and their ears boxed, were imprisoned and chained to their cell doors and fed nothing but bread and water for days on end, and were also psychologically abused with ridicule, threats of shooting, and never-ending argument (96). Several were court-martialed and sentenced to anywhere from a ten- to thirty-year imprisonment (103–4). Many camps segregated conscientious objectors (COs) and kept them in enforced idleness. This, according to Jones, broke some of the men, but the majority "kept the faith" to the end (104–5).

The end for all the men finally arrived in the spring of 1918 in the form of a possible furlough from the army so they could "engage in civil occupations and pursuits," without pay, in the interest of "national security and defense"—to quote the Act of Congress signed into law by President Wilson on March 9, 1918. The War Department then ruled that the AFSC's work of reconstructing French villages qualified as one such occupation and pursuit, and appointed a three-person board of inquiry to interview the COs at each camp to determine the "sincerity" of each man's conscientious objection (114). According to Jones, nearly every CO deemed "sincere" accepted service with the AFSC (116).

Just at this time the AFSC's own executive secretary, Vincent D. Nicholson, was drafted and was unable to secure exemption; he languished in a military camp until the Armistice. So, the AFSC turned in August 1918 to Wilbur K. Thomas, of Boston, who led the AFSC in its great postwar work in Germany—where the AFSC fed over five million children between 1920 and 1924—and elsewhere in Europe and Russia (116–17). "Long ago in a beautiful story," Jones concludes, "Tolstoy insisted that Love is 'what men live by.' These various missions here reported have been trying to demonstrate that." Jones wrote the book to communicate "that *idea*" (265; emphasis in original). He succeeded.

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AMERICAN FRIENDS RELIEF
WORK IN EUROPE, 1917-1919

BY
RUFUS M. JONES
Author of "The Inner Life,"
"The World Within," etc.



New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1920
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FIGURE 1 Title page of *A Service of Love in War Time*.

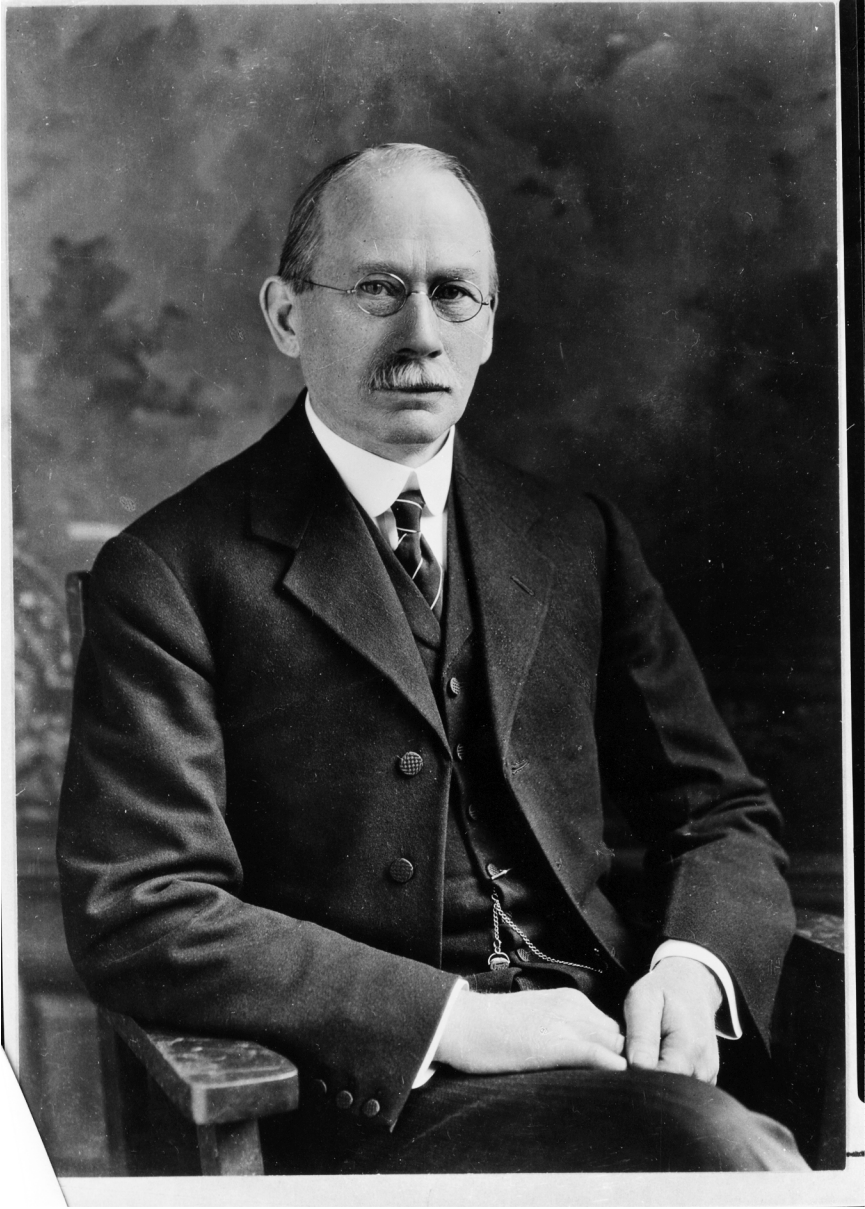


FIGURE 2 Portrait of Rufus Jones. Courtesy of the American Friends Service Committee Archives.

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NOTES

1. Rufus M. Jones, *A Service of Love in War Time: American Friends Relief Work in Europe, 1917–1919* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1920), 1. All in-line page numbers refer to this work. An online version is available at: <https://archive.org/details/serviceofloveinwoojone>.
2. Caroline G. Norment, “American Food Served in Germany’s Schools,” box General Administration 1920, Foreign Service: Country-Germany: List of Cities Where Child Feeding Occurred to TB Materials, American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, PA.
3. Thomas D. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800–1907* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1988), 147–48, 171–72. The still-standard biography of Jones is Elizabeth Gray Vining, *Friend of Life: A Biography of Rufus Jones* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1958).
4. Leading American Quaker historian J. William Frost, in “‘Our Deeds Carry Our Message’: The Early History of the American Friends Service Committee,” *Quaker History* 81, no. 1 (Spring 1992), writes on page 51, “The best source for understanding the early AFSC remains Rufus Jones, *A Service of Love in War Time*.” Frost’s assessment still holds true.