CHAPTER VIII

HUNGRY EUROPE

In one of the magazines published during the war there are some verses in which an American baby is supposed to speak. He tells of the good times that he had and at the end he says:

I’m fat and rosy and stuffed and pampered and happy, and maybe there’s anything you can think of better to be than an American baby.

Then another little one speaks, a French baby, thin and troubled, and with sad questioning eyes. His father has been killed in the war, and he tells what a lonesome time he has while his mother is gone to work all day. He tells of the miserable grass tea that is all she has to give him to eat. Then he says:

Once in a blue moon, there’s a large, deep-voiced Person in Black Called the curé, who brings me real milk—just a little, but, oh, isn’t it fine!
And when I see it coming, warm and white, I'm in such a hurry that I whimper and whine.
For pure joy, and the Curé smiles a bit, watching me, and says
I'm the hope of France;
But how can a chap be the hope of France when he can't get enough food to have a chance?

Before the war, the little French babies had enough to eat, most of it raised at home and not brought in from other countries. France contains a large number of small farms, and nearly every one of them was cultivated by the family that owned it. These farmers were anxious of course to have as good crops as possible. They were in general wide-awake people, and had no idea of carrying on their farms just as their grandfathers had done. They kept their eyes open for new methods and as soon as they found one that was an improvement on their own, they adopted it. The result was that France raised more of her own food than any other of the western Allies. She raised more than one-third as much wheat as the United States, and she cultivated great quantities of sugar beets. She raised horses and sheep, but grass land was not ample enough to feed large numbers of cattle. There were, however, vineyards without number; there were peaches and cherries and oranges and lemons, and wherever nothing else would grow, there were chestnut trees, and of the chestnuts some of the thrifty French people made an excellent flour. The French are never wasteful, and they do much with a little. France was well-fed, busy, and happy.
Then came the war, and everything was changed. In 1917, France raised less than half as much wheat as usual, less than two-thirds as many potatoes, and only one-third as much sugar. Her numbers of cattle, sheep, and hogs had greatly decreased. How did the war bring this about?

In the first place, there were no men to work in the fields. All able-bodied Frenchmen were either fighting, making munitions, or helping to transport soldiers and guns and supplies. The men left at home were those who were too old and feeble to do much work, the wounded soldiers, and the sick. Then, too, there were not so many fields as formerly. Some of the richest land in the country was either in the hands of the Germans or had been overrun by them.

War always means destruction, but military commanders of other nations are proud of not injuring non-combatants and of doing no harm to the country through which they pass other than that which will be of military value to them. Roads and railroads must often be destroyed, wires and cables torn down, sometimes wells blown up; but the Germans set to work deliberately to do as much harm as possible. They demolished famous buildings and works of art; they burned villages and towns; they bombed hospitals; they cut down fruit trees and vineyards; they poisoned wells, and did many other cruel things. The result is that people who struggled back to their old homes found only cinders for houses and waste land for cultivated fields.
These people shelter themselves as best they can, but it is easier to put together something for a rough protection against the weather than to raise wheat in a field that has been torn to pieces by shells. But the French women have done wonders. Wherever it was possible, a woman has always been ready to take the place of a man so that the man might help to defend the country. The women have cared for their children and the sick, they have toiled at all kinds of labor in factories and workrooms, caring not what it was or whether it was hard or easy, if only it would help France. They have ploughed and planted and reaped. Sometimes a few soldiers could be allowed to come home to help in harvesting, and sometimes prisoners of war have been of service in the farm work; but the greater part of the labor of raising food has been done by the French women with the aid of the aged and the children.

France needed more food than before. The bravest troops cannot do their best when they are hungry, and whoever went without, the soldiers had to be fed. And then there were the Frenchmen who had been captured and who were starving in German prison camps. Food had to be sent to them if their lives were to be saved. The weather was unfavorable and the crops failed, but still the brave French women kept on, weary and suffering, but not complaining.

In France to-day, butter, cheese, meat, and even potatoes are enormously dear. The only food that
everybody can afford to buy is bread. The Government has kept the price of bread low; but it is rationed, and a ten-ounce ration card does not always mean that its holder can get in exchange the full ten ounces. In some of the mountain districts, what bread can be bought is black and has a disagreeable odor. It is made of chestnut flour mixed with oats, barley, and a little buckwheat.

There have been no invaders on English soil as on that of France, but the British have been in the trenches, or on warships in the North Sea, or convoying troops, or making munitions in one or another of the 5,000 war factories of England. Here, too, as in France, women have stepped into the vacant places. They have acted as conductors on trains, as porters at railroad stations. They have toiled in munition factories. The petted daughters of noblemen have worked twelve hours a day side by side with women who have known nothing but toil all their lives; and they have all lived together in little villages built close to the factories. The beautiful velvety turf of England has been ploughed up and the great parks turned into potato fields; and here too, women have been hard at work. In spite of the labor shortage more food was raised on English soil the last year of the war than ever before.

Nevertheless, food is not plentiful. One sort of food after another has grown scanty, then disappeared. Fats in general are scarce. There is only a little milk, and that is saved for the children and the sick. Turn-
ing grass land into potato fields is better to supply food for the people, but it is not good for the keeping of cows, and many have been killed.

Everyone knows the brave and victorious struggle that Italy has made at the front, but not everyone realizes that her fight with hunger has been just as brave. Even to-day, her bread and meat and sugar—what she can get of them—are of poorer quality than is common in any other of the Allied countries. She needs coal almost as badly as food, for part of the time coal has cost $110 a ton; and even at that price, the railroads could hardly get enough to keep running. If she only had plenty of coal, what food there is could be distributed over the country; but as it is, even if there is sufficient of any kind of food in one part of the land, there is often no way of getting it to the other parts.

Belgium was far more helpless than were these other countries. Belgium was what is called a neutralized state. The little country is not one-fourth as large as the State of New York, but it is so situated that any country controlling it could, if she chose, do great harm to England, France, or Germany. That is why these countries, as well as Austria and Russia, all signed a treaty declaring that, no matter what wars might break out, no one of them would ever attack Belgium. Belgium, on her side, promised that she would never favor any one country to the loss of any other.

Everybody knows what happened when, in 1914,
hundreds of thousands of German troops suddenly swarmed out of the trains at Belgium’s frontier and demanded a passage through the country. But Belgium refused to break her promises. She marched out her little army, and how they did fight! Of course they could not drive the hordes of Germans back, but they did delay them two full weeks. France and England had time to get some troops into the field, and Germany’s plan to dash into France and perhaps capture Paris before the French could get their troops into position was spoiled.

Everyone knows, too, how the German armies behaved after they had made their way into Belgium; how they murdered and tortured and looted and destroyed; how they shelled magnificent old buildings that had been for centuries the pride of the country; how they burned village after village because some one person was perhaps accused of firing a single shot at them. They seized the railroads, telephones, and telegraphs, the canals, the cars, and the mails. Every little village was cut off from every other. They stopped all business; they carried off to Germany all that there was in the country of oil, wool, copper, rubber—anything they could make use of; and then they tore away from their homes thousands of men, women, boys, and girls and carried them away to toil in the mines and factories of Germany, manufacturing articles that would be used to help overpower their own people. Of course the Germans wanted only the well and
strong; the old and feeble were allowed to remain. Little food could be left in Belgium after such treatment, and this was quite according to the plans of the Germans. They were not unwilling that the Belgians should starve. The more that died the better; then the land would be free for them to occupy.

Americans promptly sent food to the Belgians, and four months after the beginning of the war the Commission for Relief in Belgium was formed. The wise work of this Commission and the generous sympathy of the American people and the Allies saved Belgium from starvation. “Never has a country had such friends,” said the Belgian minister. But at best the Belgians have had only just enough to keep them alive. More than half of them are still in soup lines. If means of industry and happiness are to be restored to their country, food must be provided in generous quantities.

Roumania, Serbia, and Poland are starving; so are Armenia, Finland, and some parts of Russia. Germany swept through Roumania, driving the Roumanians into a small corner of their land, the least fertile of all. They had no hope of resisting their foes, for enemies were on all sides, and they yielded. But they might almost as well have struggled till every Roumanian had fallen, for here, as well as in Serbia and Poland and Russia, the German troops seized everything in the shape of food that they could find. They searched not only storehouses and stores, but all the little cottages, and carried away everything that could be eaten.
The German governor-general of Poland commanded that every able-bodied Pole should go to Germany to work for his conquerors. This meant that for each Pole one more German would be set free for the army. If a Pole dared to refuse, it was forbidden for any other Pole, even his own brother, to give him a mouthful of food.

War is always terrible, and some years ago representatives of the different nations of the world met at The Hague in Holland and signed an agreement never to do certain things which added to its horrors. One of these things was that no conquering army should take supplies from the land it had captured unless it paid for what it took and did not leave the country in want. Germany signed this agreement, but, as every one of the lands that she has overpowered has learned, she did not keep it. In all these countries food for man and beast was seized, horses were carried off, and cattle and hogs either driven away or killed for food to supply the invaders.

These are the reasons why so much of Europe is suffering from hunger, why the countries that have been crushed by Germany are more helpless than countries have ever been before, and why they appeal to those who are in comfort and plenty for a share at the “common table.”

*It is worth remembering:*

**That France formerly raised more of her own food than any other of the western Allies.**
That much of the fertile land of France was overrun by the Germans.
That England, in spite of her labor shortage, has actually increased her production of food, though she still needs to import a great deal.
That Belgium, swept clean of food, raw materials, and machinery, and with her people weakened by captivity, is still in sorest need of a helping hand.
That Italy needs food, and also coal to help distribute what food she has.
That many other countries of Europe must have help to keep their people from starving.