CHAPTER X

WHAT WE DID ABOUT IT

"What are you going to do about it?" was the question that we asked ourselves when we heard of the sufferings of the Belgians. We sent ships across the ocean loaded with food, and we sent strong, wise men to distribute it among the starving people. Hundreds of Belgian children wrote letters to us in the best English they could muster—think of their courage in writing a letter to 105,000,000 people!—and told how grateful they were. One of these letters reads as follows:

DEAR AMERICA:

I thank you because you sent great big boats over the great sea—eat-boats—rice, corn, bacon, stockings, clothing and shoes.
I know that you like the little Belgians, and I like you, too.

ACHIEL MAES.

Then came the sinking of the Lusitania, the great steamship full of people who had never struck a blow
at Germany. Of the 1,154 drowned, 114 were American citizens. Germany paid no attention to the protests of the United States and went on sinking vessels of all nations, ships carrying food to Belgium, Red Cross hospital ships, and ships of neutral countries, making no provision for the escape of the passengers, and sometimes firing at them if they succeeded in getting into lifeboats. This was rank piracy, and the United States now declared war.

There was another reason, and a strong one, for our entering the war. The United States is a democracy—that is, the people rule. Germany was an autocracy—that is, one man ruled and was answerable to nobody. The Kaiser did not formally notify his council that he had declared war until three days after the declaration was made. As country after country engaged in the war, it became a struggle between autocracy and democracy. Moreover, Germany meant to crush France, then England, and then attack the United States. For two years and a half England and France had been fighting our battles. It was high time that we took a hand.

There were three things for us to do to help free the world from the danger of autocracy. We must lend money to the Allies; we must furnish an army to help do the fighting; and we must send them food. The United States is a rich country, and there was no trouble about lending the money. It is a brave, earnest country, and soon hundreds of thousands of young men
Grandfather and Bob Shared Their Garden and Orchard with the Children of Allied Lands
were in the cantonments learning to be soldiers. To provide food was a more complicated matter.

The first food that a hungry nation thinks of is bread; and "bread" means to each one the grain to which its people are most accustomed. We should think we had no bread if we had only rice in the house; but a Chinaman would think he had no bread if he had only wheat. Some of the people in this country have always been accustomed to eating more or less rye, oatmeal, corn meal, rice, and buckwheat; but our great dependence has been wheat. Other flours will make "quick breads," but wheat is the only grain that will make the light white loaf of yeast bread that we are used to eating. This looks well and keeps well, and it has not so strong a flavor of its own as to spoil the flavor of other food.

This is the kind of bread to which the Allies are accustomed; but there was not enough wheat to supply us and them, too, with the usual quantity. The best we could do was to "go halves," while both of us made up what was lacking by using the other grains. These grains will not by themselves make a loaf of raised bread that can be baked in a bakery and kept on sale, and it is bread like this which is necessary in France. French women always buy their bread. They have no ovens, and if they had, fuel is too dear for them to dream of doing their baking at home, while the baker can with a small amount of coal bake many loaves at the same time.
It is not easy to change one’s habits of eating. Every one has whims about his food. For instance, Italians fry in oil, but many Americans still feel that the frying material must be solid like lard when it is put into the kettle, even though they know that in three or four minutes it will become liquid. If potatoes should suddenly turn blue and bread scarlet, it would be a long time before we should relish them. Those among us who found it difficult to use less wheat and more of the other cereals are the ones who ought to understand best how hard it was for the Allies to become accustomed to putting other grains into their bread. They made no complaint, however, but were grateful that the American supply did not fail them. There was wheat in Australia and New Zealand and in Argentina, but ships could not be spared to carry it to Europe. From the United States to England is not only the shortest route, but it was also the best protected from submarines. In the time that it would take a ship to go from Argentina to England, it could carry two loads of soldiers from the United States to France. It was just plain arithmetic. The shorter the voyage, the more free ships; the more free ships, the more food and soldiers carried to Europe; the more food and soldiers carried to Europe, the sooner we could win the war; the sooner we could win the war, the fewer of our own boys and of the Allies would be wounded or killed. It was worth our while to send food.

As in the case of wheat, meat could not be carried
to Europe from distant countries for lack of ships. Meat is the best protein for transportation. Beef contains much protein, keeps well, and is condensed food. Pork is particularly valuable because it provides both protein and fat. In Ireland people used to call the pig “the gentleman that pays the rent.” “The gentleman” does more than that in these days, for he has been trying his best to support the country.

In 1917 not nearly so many pigs were kept as usual. This was alarming, because pork can be raised more quickly and easily than other meats. Hogs multiply rapidly, and have sometimes ten or twelve little pigs at a litter. The “keep-a-pig” movement had been started some years before, and now it took a new life. An effort was made to make people understand that a pig-pen need not be a bad-smelling place, that a pig likes to wallow in mud on a hot day, not because he is naturally dirty, but because the mud is as great a comfort to him as a cool bath is to people. The pig is by nature a cleanly animal, and he appreciates fresh water and good food.

Boys on farms became interested. “Have you bought a pig?” became almost as common a salutation as, “How do you do?” Before long the magazines began to print pictures of remarkably small boys grouped with remarkably large pigs. The problem was solved; and in March, 1918, we sent across the water six times as much pork as our ordinary export.
WHAT WE DID ABOUT IT

The men going "over the top" needed fat not only for energy, but because it would keep them from feeling hungry so soon, and that was an important matter when the time of their next meal was a question that no one could answer. In this country we use a great deal of fat, and if you should make a list of all the food that you eat during the day, and then cross off every article that contained fat or was cooked or eaten with fat, very few would be left. Before the war, England used, according to her population, nearly as much fat as the United States. Quantities of butter were sold to her by Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and Russia. The Russian supply soon failed. Holland, Denmark, and Sweden were neutral countries, but they needed Germany's coal, and Germany would not send it to them unless she could receive butter in return. England made much oleomargarine, but even with this her ration of fat was only one-fourth of a pound per week; and often this small amount could not be bought.

As to sugar, this is to us an agreeable luxury in a convenient form. A bright man once said, "Give me the luxuries and I will dispense with the necessities:" and when we were asked to use less sugar than was our custom, it really seemed to trouble us more than saving fats or wheat. Sugar has been very cheap, and we had fallen into the habit of using much more than we need and more than is good for us. Even in 1917, when we all thought ourselves so economical, we used an amount
that the Allies would have looked upon as luxury. What was used in preserving, however, was “good business,” for much fruit was saved that would otherwise have gone to waste. There was no danger of our suffering for sweets, since we had honey, molasses, corn sirup, and maple sugar, to say nothing of our sweet fruits, like plums, peaches, apples, and berries. We had dried fruits, like raisins, dates, and prunes, that are even sweeter. When you feel hungry for candy, eat some one of these, and candy will not seem half so attractive. On an average every person in this country spends about four cents a week for candy. In six months enough money goes into it to feed the hungry people of Belgium for a whole year. That looks as if we could get on very comfortably with less than our usual amount.

One year before the close of the war, our Food Administration was formed. It is not easy to realize the full meaning of a statement whose numbers go up into the millions, but sometimes it is worth while to try. Here is what the Food Administration has led us to accomplish in that one year.

It was at first calculated that we must export to Europe 100,000,000 bushels of wheat. Then the wheat failed which we had expected could be carried to the Allies from other countries. The Food Administration explained the difficulty and asked us to use only two-thirds of our usual amount. By doing so we were able to send to Europe 141,000,000 bushels of the year’s
crop. Of beef we had been accustomed to export one or two million pounds a month; but during this year our largest export in any one month was more than 96,000,000 pounds. Our export of pork increased from 50,000,000 pounds a month to 308,000,000 pounds in the month during which we sent most. Before the war, the United States and Canada together were accustomed to send to the countries of the Allies 5 per cent. of their food. During the closing year of the war we sent across the Atlantic eleven and three-fourths million tons of food, that is, 50 per cent., or one-half of their food deficit. This was done "by the willing service of a free people," but some one had to tell us how. Some one had to learn what were the best foods to send, to ascertain how much food was in this country, how much could probably be raised within the year, how much we needed to keep us and the Allies well and strong, how much we wasted, and how much we could save if we tried. We could not wait quietly till a starving country should say, "I need wheat, or meat, or fats;" we must learn the needs of the hungry lands and, just as far as possible, keep a steady stream of supplies flowing to them.

This was not easy. It is true that any one who goes through our markets or sees our wide-spreadening fields of grain might fancy that we had food enough for at least one world; but as a matter of fact, we have not, even in ordinary times, so very much more than we ourselves use. Yet the Allies must have their grain,
their meat and other protein foods, their fats and their sugar. We must have ours, too. There would be no fairness in sending our troops "over there" only half fed; and it would take the courage out of the bravest of our soldier boys to know that their families at home were needing food. Here was a puzzle that demanded brains and wisdom, a wide view of every question that might arise, and a big supply of good practical common sense. That is why our Food Administration was organized. Its prime object was to make sure that more food was produced, that it was fairly distributed, and that our soldiers, the Allies, and we ourselves, would have enough to eat. Its aim was not to make food cheap, for if food is too cheap, less will be produced. No one would buy cows, for instance, have all the trouble of feeding and caring for them and disposing of the milk, unless he could count upon a fair profit for his labor. No farmer would plough and plant and cultivate and gather in crops, unless he was reasonably certain that he would receive a fair price for what he had done.

Our wheat crop of 1917 was one-third below the normal quantity, and the Food Administration set to work energetically to see what could be done. In the first place, the Food Administration and the Department of Agriculture worked together—and worked hard—to induce the farmers to plant much wheat. They sent agents through the wheat country to make addresses at granges; they helped the farmers select
the best seed and fight the insects and diseases that might lessen their crop. The newspapers worked loyally and gave up column after column of their valuable space.

But the farmers had a good reason for hesitating. It was possible that the war might come to an end somewhat suddenly, leaving more wheat on hand than would be needed; prices would go down and they would lose. To prevent this, the Government promised them a minimum price of $2.00 a bushel for the crop. The President, however, increased this price to $2.26 a bushel at the Chicago market, whether the war ended in 1918 or not. For this purpose the Food Administration Grain Corporation was formed which became a buyer and seller of grain. It either bought wheat or arranged for its purchase for the Army and Navy, the Allies, and some of the neutral countries that depended upon us for food.

The Food Administration also organized a plan by which the buying for all the Allies was done through one source. To buy a few pounds of meat, for instance, is not difficult, but to buy millions of pounds is a different matter. At first each country bought for itself. Each of the buyers was afraid his own country would go hungry, and they sometimes bid against one another. A better arrangement was now made. Never was so much attention paid to beeves and hogs. Men who knew the meat business through and through decided how much the man or boy who raised the hog ought
to have, how much the packer, how much the storage warehouse, and finally how much the Allies should pay. This plan made sure that every man who had anything to do with the meat should have good pay, but that no one should make exorbitant profits out of the needs of his countrymen or the Allies.

Of course much more food had to be exported from the United States than ever before, nearly twice as much. Could this be done? In an autocracy the ruler could say to his subjects, "Raise more food and eat less," and they would have to obey. All the Allies were rationed; but in a democracy, and especially in a land as large as ours, to enforce such a law would need a whole army of officials and would be exceedingly expensive. Moreover, although it might be done in the cities, it would be almost impossible in the country, where people raise so much of their own food. The Food Administration believed that just as soon as Americans understood the situation, they would "play fair," and would use in their households only a fixed amount of the foods of which we had not a large supply. It explained the situation and asked every American to help.

"Don't waste," it said, "and don't hoard. Even if there is plenty of some one kind of food and you intend to use it very economically, don't store up more than you need at the time. If you do, more will have to be brought for other people, and our railroads have all they can do to bring what is absolutely necessary."
Use food that is nearest and save transportation. Plant a garden and raise your own food."

The people of the United States responded most willingly to these requests. Clubs of all sorts were formed whose object was either to increase the production of food or to save food. There were pig clubs, corn clubs, and canning clubs; there were war gardens and school gardens. Everybody who had a bit of land did his best to raise vegetables to supply his own table and to sell. Long before the war, the Garden City movement began, and now the boys and girls set to work with double energy. Many of them canned their spare produce. In some places these "young citizens" gave a Thanksgiving dinner of their own raising to a group of children who had had no opportunity to make gardens of their own. "And I tell you it was some dinner," said one of the boys enthusiastically.

An even wider movement than the Garden City is the School Garden Army. The name tells in part what it is; but it does not tell that it is recognized by the President of the United States as a real army, which has already more than 1,500,000 enlisted soldiers. "They really will be soldiers, although not old enough to fight," says Secretary Lane. Every "garden soldier," boy or girl, is entitled to wear a little bronze bar with the letters "U. S. S. G. A." on it; and any one can guess what that means. The Army was organized early in the spring of 1918, and in its first season it has produced millions of dollars' worth of food stuffs.
One of the slogans, or rather, the war cries, of this Army is,

Uncle Sam's in need,
Pull the weed,
Plant the seed.

So it was that Americans justified the confidence of the Food Administration and, what is more, they did it good-naturedly. Everybody knows the merry little rhyme beginning:

My Tuesdays are wheatless,
My Wednesdays are meatless,
I'm getting more eatless each day.

The Germans got hold of it and translated it, leaving out the fun, and published it as a bitter complaint of the Americans because of the rapidly increasing shortage of food!

In war time prices always rise, sometimes because for one reason or another there is a smaller supply; but sometimes because the fact that one thing rises is made an excuse for increasing the price of others. Suppose there was only one bicycle in a place and ten boys wanted to buy it. The one who could pay most would be likely to get it. The price of wheat was fixed by Congress. The result was that, while in the Spring of 1917 flour cost $16.75 a barrel wholesale, flour from the 1917 wheat crop was sold at $9.80; and the farmer received a much larger share of the price than the previous year. The Government has re-
quired men who dealt in food for people or animals to any extent to take out a license. If they did not do this, they had to pay a penalty. Dealers who charged more than the lawful price were severely punished by fines or by having their stores closed for a certain number of days or weeks. People who buy in large quantities know what they are paying; but people who buy in small quantities do not always stop to reckon what a barrel of flour would come to if paid for at the rate that they pay for a few pounds. For instance, it was found that a dealer who had been selling flour a few pounds at a time was charging at the rate of $20.00 a barrel. He was punished by being forbidden to open his store till the end of the war. The Government issued licenses to dealers in certain foods, and the Food Administration was sometimes able to control prices by making agreements with those who sold them. During our Civil War, sugar cost at one time thirty and one-half cents a pound wholesale; and it would have surely gone as high as that during this war if the price had not been fixed and dealers forbidden to go beyond it.

The Food Administration kept in touch with all changes of situation and told us what was necessary to be done to meet every emergency. Supposing, for instance, that 100,000 hogs were ready for market and a heavy storm put the railroads in difficulties for a number of days, telegrams flashed over the country would ask people to use less pork. When the railroads were again in running order, there might be for a little time
too much pork for the storehouses and ships; so people
were then told that they did not need to do without
pork. There were constant changes in the requests of
the Food Administration; but this was not because its
"forethought came afterward," but because it watched
the changing conditions of the country so closely and
advised so wisely.

The Food Administration was of course looking out
as carefully for us as for the Allies. Our railroads were
overwhelmed with war work. They had enough to do
in time of peace, but during the war they were called
upon to transport ammunition, guns, machinery, food
for "over there," all sorts of supplies, and the troops
themselves. Each of the countries had to receive, as far
as possible, its proper share of the various kinds of
food. Even if this food had been safely put up in store-
houses, the question would still have been a large one;
but when plans had to be made, much of it was still
growing in the fields or running about on four legs.
The probable amount of it had to be estimated, and
crops are rather uncertain things to deal with. Too
much rain, too little rain, or some new species of insect
may easily make a difference of millions of bushels in
the harvest.

Not guns only, but guns and work and food were
what won the war. "I'm tired of using substitutes
and hearing so much about saving food," said a thought-
less woman; but did it tire her to hear that we were vic-
torious? The Germans hoped that we should all get
“tired of using substitutes” and so help them to win; but that is not the American way.

*It is worth remembering:*

That in an autocracy one man rules; in a democracy the people rule.

That the work of feeding the Allies fell largely upon North America as the nearest country.

That the Food Administration was formed to make sure of greater production of food and a fair distribution of it.

That under the guidance of the Food Administration our exports of food to Europe were almost doubled; and that this was done “by the willing service of a free people.”
With All Able-bodied Men at the Front French Women Have Had to Raise the Crops for Their Homes and Their Armies as Well