CHAPTER XI

WHAT WE HAVE YET TO DO

When the armistice was signed, we promptly celebrated in all sorts of ways. These ranged from long processions and the firing of great cannon to the method of one man who, as a sign of the return of peace and plenty, joyfully dropped into his coffee two lumps of sugar instead of one.

At the very first, most of us thought of nothing except that the war was over and the boys would come home. There would be no more “substitutes,” and the sugar bowl would again hold the place of honor on our table. But the more thoughtful among us realized that, although we need no longer fight to free the nations crushed by Germany, we had still to wage a battle with hunger. If you should learn that one person in the house next to your own had died of hunger, it would seem to you a terrible thing. You can hardly imagine the horror of learning that one out of every four among
your neighbors had been starved; but in Poland one person out of every four has died for lack of food; in Serbia one out of every two; and in Armenia more than half of the people have perished of hunger.

Peace has come, but it has not brought food to the hungry. Look at the Hunger Map (see Frontispiece) and remember that every little country on the page is not merely an outline, but represents millions of people who are suffering from hunger. Those still alive in Poland, Roumania, and Serbia, in Armenia and Finland, are starving. So they are in large parts of Russia which were shut off from our help before the Germans were forced to depart from them. Not one country in Europe has food enough to keep its people from going hungry. France, Italy, and the British Isles have not as much as they actually need. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Spain, and Portugal have to get on with much less than their usual supply. We have helped to rescue the people of Belgium from starvation, but even the Belgians have had only just enough to save their lives. Surely, the coming of victory ought at least to bring them food enough to make their lives endurable. Then, too, there are the people of Bulgaria, Turkey, and other conquered nations. Many of these will starve unless given help. They have had to make an unconditional surrender, and we are in honor bound to make it possible for them to buy food.

There is another reason why we must send food to Europe. We have sacrificed the lives of thousands of our
men, and we have spent many billions of dollars that the world might be made safe. We are longing for a world of peace and order, a world in which a man shall be free to do his best work under the best conditions. Starving people have little regard for law or the rights of others. Lawlessness spreads rapidly. Two or three selfish, disagreeable boys will spoil a whole playground; and in the same way a few millions of hungry, unhappy, discontented people will spoil a world. To protect ourselves, we must do our best to protect those who are in need of our help. To refuse would be to undo the good work already done.

The people of the hungry countries will do for themselves all that any one could do. They will be saving of food of course; but they must have food to save. They will cultivate the ground, but they must get their ground into proper condition to cultivate. Just imagine trying to make a war garden in a field that had been torn up by shells and shrapnel, a field that was "nothing but a network of holes," as one of the soldiers said. And it is in such fields that hundreds of thousands of people will toil to produce their bread. It is no wonder that they need help.

There is still another difficulty. Many of the men who would have done their best to cultivate these shell-torn fields have been killed or wounded. All who return will be more or less weakened by the long struggle. There will be a shortage of workers, and there will be a vast amount of work to be done. Think what you
would have to do if you had come back to your home after four years of war and had found the house, and perhaps the whole village or city, nothing but a mass of stones and ashes and cinders. Think of coming back to a farm and finding the fields torn up, the buildings burned and the cattle gone. Then you will realize what so many people in Europe have to meet, and you will see why they must have good nourishing food and plenty of it in order to reconstruct—to build again—their homes and their lives.

In this splendid work the United States must have a generous part. Now is our opportunity to prove that we are more eager to give than to gain. The people of Europe will do their best, and next autumn they will perhaps be able to provide the greater part of their own food. Meanwhile we must help them as we should wish to be helped if we were in want and there were a great land of plenty just across the ocean.

What we shall need to send will vary from time to time. Wheat will soon be brought to Europe from India and Australia. In less than a week after the signing of the armistice Australian ships were already on the way. Both wheat and meat will come from Argentina. Sugar will come from Java. When there are more refrigerator ships, we can send more meat. Some countries will need more wheat, some more fat, and some more sugar than others. To learn beforehand what kinds of food each will require will be in the hands of the Food Administration; and we shall look to it
for guidance, as we have done ever since it was established.

Many people have questioned, "After the war is over, shall we go back to our old careless, extravagant ways of living? Shall we begin again to leave sugar in the bottom of the cup and fill the garbage can to overflowing? No. Surely, after having once learned a better way, we cannot go back to the old fashion. While we may not need to put substitutes into our bread or to go without meat or to divide our teaspoonfuls into halves and quarters, we shall need to live simply. We shall have plenty of food to keep us well and strong, but we shall not have any to waste—if any of us are so foolish as to desire to waste.

Another part of the work of the Food Administration will be to see that food is properly distributed both here and abroad. The old way of distributing food was to send it wherever the highest price would be paid, and sometimes to destroy it rather than sell it for a more reasonable price. The new way, the way of kindness—and of good sense, too, for that matter—is to send it where it is needed to enable people to do their share of the world’s work.

So it is that we willingly bear the burden of aiding our brothers across the sea. Long ago it was said that the United States is

The hope of all who suffer,
The dread of all wrong.
We may well be proud of our country because she is powerful; but we love her because she is kind and generous and thoughtful of those who without her help would surely perish.

*It is worth remembering:*

*That even the coming of peace has not brought food to the hungry.*

*That no country in Europe has enough food.*

*That for the hard work of reconstruction nourishing food will be especially necessary.*

*That the United States will share generously in providing food for those who are in need.*