CHAPTER XII

THE LITTLE GROUP OF ONE

Did you ever notice that when anything is given to a little child, his first thought is to put it into his mouth as fast as he can? When he is a few years older, he is ready to share his good things with his family, and after a while he likes to think that his city or state or his whole country is faring well. Some day perhaps, we shall learn to think of the whole world as one great family, and we shall be glad if we can help even a little in bringing it about that every one has his fair share of the good things of life. That is the deeper meaning of the Food Administration. Its present work is to feed hungry nations, but the meaning of the work is the “brotherhood of man.”

The Food Administration can only “press the button;” we, the people of the United States, must “do the rest.” Germany marched forward with a chip on her shoulder and a challenge to knock it off
if we could. The “chip” was a “dare” to keep the Allies from starving, and we helped to do it. Wars used to be won chiefly by bullets, but this war was won by bullets and work and bread. We were obliged to have enormous armies and great factories and food for millions; but after all, it was the little group of one that brought success. One man fired one gun, one man helped make munitions, one man cultivated the ground; that is the way the mighty armies, the great throngs of factory workers, and the countless bands of farmers were formed. We shall never get far beyond the verse that little children sing:

Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land.

We could not make a “mighty ocean,” but we did help to make the ocean mighty in its freedom for all mankind. We could not make a “pleasant land,” but we helped to make all lands pleasant by driving away the robber hordes that sought destruction and ruin.

With the conquered nations we must deal wisely and justly, aiming at what will be for the highest good of the world. We must do our best to help feed and reconstruct the countries that have suffered because of the war.

It is only by “a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together” that we can do these things. You know the game called the “tug of war,” in which half the
boys pull at one end of a rope and half at the other. There is no chance for any one in the middle; everybody must pull one way or the other. That is the way it is now; everybody in America is pulling in one way or the other, either to help the country or to hinder her. Not every one can buy Government bonds or many thrift stamps, but faithful work is just as helpful as money. Not long ago a newsboy carelessly neglected to deliver a paper. The subscriber telephoned to the office; the clerk reported the matter to the head of the delivery department; the head of the delivery department sent another boy by the electric car to deliver the paper. It was quite like "the house that Jack built," and it took the time of the subscriber, the telephone operator, the clerk, the head of the delivery department, and the second boy, and cost two carfares—just because one boy was not faithful. Time and faithfulness are all fully as valuable in this period of constructing the world anew as they were in the days of barrage fire and machine guns.

Did you ever realize what an honor it is to be asked to work for our country? A little child is always pleased if he can feel that he is doing something to help his father or mother. Even a little dog will try his best to understand what his master wants and is delighted if he can do it. Here is a mighty country—widespreading, prosperous, and powerful—and she says to every man and woman and to every child, "Will you do something for me?"
Now what can every little group of one do for the country? The Food Administration has shown us some ways in which we can help. We know that every garden helps to produce food to make up for that which has been destroyed or prevented from growing. We know that we ought not to waste even a mouthful of food. On the wartime bill of fare of a luxurious hotel there was printed, "Help us to observe the Gospel of the Clean Plate; please order only what you will eat."

We need this motto just as much now. We must content ourselves with simpler ways of living, and so save not only food, but also gas and coal and time and labor.

Transportation can be saved. If every family could raise all that it eats, the railroads would be immensely relieved. A garden saves transportation, so does buying food from the nearest farmer. So does shopping in your own town or even village instead of going to the nearest large city. Save express and mail. Save man power and the expense of carrying goods from the grocery or market to the house. Our grandmothers, if they happened to live in the country, would have thought it wonderfully convenient if a delivery wagon had called at their doors once a week. But now! "Some people order one-fourth of a dozen cookies in the morning and a yeast cake in the afternoon," said a grocer. To have no deliveries would be exceedingly wasteful, because it would take the time of hundreds
of customers rather than of one or two delivery men; but we can reduce their work by carrying packages home, by never ordering more than once a day, or, even better, once or twice a week, and by trying never to order anything but perishable food just before a Sunday or a holiday. Grocers usually have to employ extra help at such times, and a bit of thoughtfulness on the part of the customers would make this unnecessary.

During the last few years boys here at home have had such chances as boys never had before, because places left vacant by men were given to them. They received high wages, and they had splendid opportunities to rise. But did you ever watch them in working hours? Some of them thought they were big folk just because they had dropped into big places. Others were trying their best to fill the big places. You could almost see at a glance which ones would rise in the world and which ones would never hold such high positions again.

The verses about the hungry little French baby who couldn’t be the “hope of France,” because he couldn’t “get enough food to have a chance,” end as follows:

I wish I had a father. If I couldn’t have that, then I wish some other babies’ fathers would give me a place to stay—
A warm, light place, with persons in it while the Person in Skirts is gone all day.
And maybe they’d give me some food that wasn’t as bad as grass tea. Do you think, if their babies have plenty and some left over, the other babies’ fathers would do that for me?
This is what we are trying to do; to feed the children and the grown folks, to help the nations that are at last set free from tyranny and cruelty, and to make the world safe and happy for them and for us.

“I don’t believe you know what ‘U.S.’ means,” some one once said teasingly to a very small American boy. The little fellow drew himself up to his full height, looked the man in the eye, and said, “‘U.S.’ means us.” We are a firmly united people, striving for the right. We have a big piece of work on hand, but “‘U.S.’ means us,” and with the help of God we will carry it through.

*It is worth remembering:*

That the work of the Food Administration is to control and to save food so that every one may share it.

That in the work that lies before us each person must either help or hinder.

That it is an honor to be asked to work for our country.

That “‘U. S.’ means us.”