

CHAPTER XXVI KEEPING BUSY

The Liberty Girls were forced to abandon their Shop when a substantial offer was made by a business firm to rent the store they had occupied. However, they were then, near the end of their resources, with depleted stock, for they had begged about all the odds and ends people would consent to part with. What goods remained to them were of inferior worth and slow to dispose of, so they concluded their enterprise with a "grand auction," Peter Conant acting as auctioneer, and cleaned up the entire stock "in a blaze of glory," as Mary Louise enthusiastically described the event.

The venture had been remarkably successful and many a soldier had cause to bless the Liberty Girls' Shop for substantial comforts provided from its funds.

"But what can we do now," inquired Mary Louise anxiously as the six captains met with Irene one afternoon following the closing of the shop. "We must keep busy, of course. Can't someone think of something?"

One and all had been thinking on that subject, it seemed. Various proposals were advanced, none of which, however, seemed entirely practical until Irene said:

"We mustn't lose our reputation for originality, you know, nor must we interfere with those who are doing war relief work as well, if not much better, than we could. I've pondered the case some, during the past few days, and in reading of the progress of events I find that quite the most important thing on the government programme, at present, is the conservation of foods. 'Food will win the war' is the latest slogan, and anyone who can help Mr. Hoover will be doing the utmost for our final victory."

"That's all very well, Irene," said Alora, "but I'm sure we are all as careful as possible to conserve food."

"Don't ask us to eat any less," pleaded Edna, "for my appetite rebels as it is."

"I don't see how we Liberty Girls can possibly help Mr. Hoover more than everyone else is doing," remarked Laura.

"Well, I've an idea we can," replied Irene. "But this is just another case where I can only plan, and you girls must execute. Now, listen to my proposition. The most necessary thing to conserve, it seems, is wheat."

"So it seems, dear."

"People are eating large quantities of wheat flour simply because they don't know what else to eat," Irene continued. "Now, corn, properly prepared, is far more delicious and equally as nourishing as wheat. The trouble is that people don't know how to use corn-meal and corn-flour to the best advantage."

"That is true; and they're not likely to learn in time to apply the knowledge usefully," commented Mary Louise.

"Not unless you girls get busy and teach them," admitted Irene, while a smile went round the circle. "Don't laugh, girls. You are all very fair cooks, and if properly trained in the methods of preparing corn for food, you could easily teach others, and soon all Dorfield would be eating corn and conserving wheat. That would be worth while, wouldn't it?"

"But who's to train us, and how could we manage to train others?" asked Mary Louise.

"The proposition sounds interesting, Irene, and if carried through would doubtless be valuable, but is it practical?"

"Let us see," was the reply. "Some time ago I read of the wonderful success of Mrs. Manton in preparing corn for food. She's one of the most famous professional cooks in America and her name is already a household word. We use her cook-book every day. Now, Mrs. Manton has been teaching classes in Cleveland, and I wrote her and asked what she would charge to come here and teach the Liberty Girls the practical methods of preparing her numerous corn recipes. Here's her answer, girls. She wants her expenses and one hundred dollars for two weeks' work, and she will come next week if we telegraph her at once."

They considered and discussed this proposition very seriously.

"At the Masonic Temple," said Mary Louise, "there is a large and fully equipped kitchen, adjoining the lodge room, and it is not in use except on special occasions. Gran'pa Jim is a high Mason, and so is Alora's father. Perhaps they could secure permission for us to use the lodge kitchen for our class in cookery."

The colonel and Jason Jones, being consulted, promised the use of the kitchen and highly approved the plan of the Liberty Girls. Mrs. Manton was telegraphed to come to Dorfield and the cookery class was soon formed. Alora confessed she had no talent whatever for cooking, but all the other five were ready to undertake the work and a selection was made from among the other Liberty Girls--of the rank and file--which brought the total number of culinary endeavorers up to fifteen--as large a class as Mrs. Manton was able to handle efficiently.

While these fifteen were being trained, by means of practical daily demonstration, in the many appetizing preparations for the table from corn-meal and corn-flour, Alora and one or two others daily visited the homes of Dorfield and left samples of bread, buns, cookies, cakes, desserts and other things that had come fresh from the ovens and range of the cooking-school. At the same time an offer was made to teach the family cook--whether mistress or servant--in this patriotic branch of culinary art, and such offers were usually accepted with eagerness, especially after tasting the delicious corn dainties.

When Mrs. Manton left Dorfield, after two weeks of successful work, she left fifteen Liberty Girls fully competent to teach others how to prepare every one of her famous corn recipes. And these fifteen, divided into "shifts" and with several large kitchens at their disposal, immediately found themselves besieged by applicants for instruction. Before winter set in, all Dorfield, as predicted by Irene, was eating corn, and liking it better than wheat, and in proof of their success, the Liberty Girls received a highly complimentary letter from Mr. Hoover, thanking them for their help in the time of the nation's greatest need. A fee, sufficient to cover the cost of the material used, had been exacted from all those willing and able to pay for instruction, so no expense was involved in this work aside from the charges of Mrs. Manton, which were cared for by voluntary subscription on the part of a few who were interested in the girls' patriotic project.

Another thing the Liberty Girls did was to start "Community Concerts" one evening each week, which were held in various churches and attended by throngs of men, women and children who joined lustily in the singing of patriotic and popular songs. This community singing became immensely popular and did much to promote patriotic fervor as well as to entertain those in attendance.

And so Mary Louise's Liberty Girls, at the time this story ends, are still active workers in the cause of liberty, justice and democracy, and will continue to support their country's welfare as long as they can be of use.

"We're a real part of the war," Mary Louise has often told her co-workers, "and I'm sure that in the final day of glorious victory our girls will be found to have played no unimportant part."

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