

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter LIX. Herbert Clarke HOOVER.

ONE evening in November, as we were standing after dinner before the fire that blazed in the great chimney in the drawing room of his home on the Avenue Louise, M. Emile Francqui gave me, in his vivid way, a portrait of Mr. Herbert C. Hoover. It was an impressionistic portrait drawn with broad rough strokes, a portrait that impelled the admiration that seemed to inspire so much of it, and he completed it finally with a swift gesture that described a half arc under his own chin, as he said : "*Une mâchoire, vous savez !*"

The dinner had been arranged in honour of Mr. Hoover, but he had been detained at the Dutch frontier and had not arrived in time ; we were expecting him then in the morning, and we were awaiting his coming impatiently, for the great task of organization was assuming proportions that were appalling. I had never met my compatriot, and, as I have said, I knew him only as the rich American who had so ably organized the repatriation of American refugees in London on the outbreak of the war, that Dr. Page had at once suggested him to organize the *ravitaillement*, and I had of his personality only such impressions as might be derived from the two laconic dispatches he had sent me. But M. Francqui had known him fifteen years before in China, where they had been associated in one of those vast colonial enterprises for the exploitation of the kingdom. The gossips, hearing of this new relation, had it that they had not always agreed while they were in China, and that their disagreements had finally assumed the *intransigent* quality of a conflict between two inimical and indomitable wills. Fundamentally, the gossips said, they were much alike, and they were telling a romantic tale in Brussels those days of how, when fate brought them together again after so many years, they met at the American Embassy in London to organize the largest humanitarian enterprise the world had ever seen, and the only international institution then existing on the happy planet, they looked each other in the eye a moment—and shook hands. Such a scene and such a situation was one the gossips could not resist, so much of romanticism is there in all of us, and the story had not deteriorated in its engaging qualities by the time it reached occupied Brussels. I do not pretend to know the details ; all I know is that M. Francqui was a strong man who came from Belgium and spoke one language, and that Mr. Hoover was a strong man who came from California and spoke another, and that :

There is neither East nor West,
Border, nor breed, nor birth,
When two strong men stand face to face
Though they come from the ends of the earth.

M. Francqui spoke of Mr. Hoover that evening in terms of admiration ; he said that he was precisely the man for the work there was to do, and that Belgium was lucky to have him to its aid. His description, indeed, evoked a figure in such heroic proportions that I was prepared to see a man physically somewhat larger than the man I found nervously pacing the floor of my office the following afternoon when I went down in response to the card that had been sent up.

He gave the impression of being tall, though he was of medium height, because he was slender, and he had extremely small hands and feet ; his hands, however, as at that first moment, were usually in his trousers pockets, and they nervously jingled and incessantly clinked together the coins that he carried loosely there, as though he were of that generous American prejudice which scorns a purse because it suggests parsimony. He was dressed in modest dark blue serge, and wore a black cravat. His face, smoothly shaven, with a somewhat youthful air, was not at all the face of the sanguine type of business man, but a face sensitive, with a delicate mouth, thin lips, a face that wore a weary expression, as of one who dispensed too much nervous force and was always tired. It was a face which with its dark, sometimes intently scowling eyes under the livide white brow, over which the abundant black hair fell in something very nearly approaching disorder, would have marked him as an idealist, had not its dominant feature set him down indubitably as a strongwilled man of force and action. That feature was the broad, firm jaw ; one noted it instantly, and recalled the effective gesture of M. Francqui in describing the feature that naturally would impress him most. Perhaps the brow and the jaw might indicate the possession of both qualities without implying any conflict between them, for one could not talk with him long without seeing that there was great idealism there ; it showed in the first words he spoke concerning the Belgians and their sufferings. He had them on his heart already. Idealism showed too in his eyes, that were soft and pitying when he spoke of the Belgians, and it was very clear that his one idea was, in the words which Mr. Thomas Hardy had just written in his appeal for them, to soothe

these ails unmerited

Of souls forlorn upon the facing shore

Where, naked, gaunt, in endless band and band,

Seven million stand.

Sinking into a deep chair he spoke of them in a low, agreeable voice, but was soon turning to practical ways of helping them. I could describe to him the situation and tell him of all our troubles inside, and from him learn what had been going on outside. He had had many troubles of his own, but he seemed to surmount them all bravely. He had just arrived by motor from Holland, and he was accompanied that afternoon by Mr. Shaler, Dr. Rose and Mr. Bicknell. Dr. Rose and Mr. Bicknell represented the Rockefeller Foundation and came to investigate conditions in Belgium. They began cross-examining me, and for two hours I answered questions, and when I was through I was as tired as though I had been making an argument before the Supreme Court.

The work had grown even before it could be organized. Our original conception had been that the Comité National was perfectly competent to distribute food through the communes to its own people, if it could only get the food to deliver. In my own boundless ignorance I had no notion of the quantity of food required until I read the memorandum prepared by the C.N. The war would soon be over anyway, and if we could only get through the winter all would go well. The American people would provide the food, by diplomatic negotiations we would arrange to have it pass the British blockade, and the Comité National would distribute it. But there were limits even to American charity ; and now England, who was managing that blockade, imposed restrictions and conditions ; there would have to be more delegates, scores of them, not

Belgians but Americans, to supervise the distribution and see that the guarantees were observed ; hence the Rhodes scholars, hence, ultimately, the C.R.B., that vast American organization that would work side by side with the vast Belgian organization, the C.N., each independent of the other, moving with equal dignity in their respective spheres, like co-ordinate branches of the Government under the Constitution.

This organization, as I have told, had already been functioning, but there were many defects in the C.R.B., and it was to remedy these that Mr. Hoover had crossed the North Sea and come to Belgium.

Only a few days before, in the course of a conversation that Villalobar and I were having with the *Geheimrath* Kaufman, I had remarked that already the American organization had arranged to import £ 2.700.000 for Belgian relief, and when he had translated this into German terms — 54.000.000 marks — the *Geheimrath* dropped his lead pencil on his desk, fell back in his chair and exclaimed : "*Sapristi !*"

Sapristi, indeed ! But that was only a beginning ; a mere drop in the bucket.

The next morning we all went with M. Francqui in the dismal rain to visit the soup-kitchens — Mr. Hoover, Dr. Rose, Mr. Bicknell, Consul-General Watts, and others. It was natural that Mr. Hoover and the representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation should be impressed by the organization which the Belgians, who are famous organizers, had already set up in their efficient, human way. They could see the effect of it in the great once used by an express company, in the days when there was use for express companies, as a hangar, where that morning a score of cooks were brewing the soup in great cauldrons. They could note it in that station in the Rue Blaes, near the Boulevard du Midi, in the very midst of the Quartier des Marolles, where the soup was served to the long line of hungry in waiting. The station had lately been a concert-hall, and its garish decorations were still clinging in mockery to its walls. The people of the Quartier stood in a queue that trailed its misery clown the sidewalk. They stood with the divine patience of the poor, there in the cold raie, shivering in shawls and old coats and wooden shoes, with bowls or pitchers and each with his number and his card issued by his commune. The long line advanced a step at a time into the station, and paused by the tables where each received his — I wish we had a neuter pronoun, it was so mach oftener her ! — bit of coffee and bit of chicory, which the Belgians, unfortunately, like to mix with their coffee. He received, too, his pot of soup and his loaf of daily bread, which, in answer to the old prayer that had suddenly acquired such significance, came so mysteriously from that far, dim America across the sea. The numbers were checked off, the lines inspected by persons acquainted with the neighbourhood. If one was missing the absence was instantly detected : "*Où est Jeanne aujourd'hui ? Est-elle malade ? Ou quoi ?*"

They came, hundreds and hundreds of them, in silence, received their rations, paused to make a formal bow, said "*Merci*" and passed out.

That "*Merci*" somehow stabbed one to the heart, and brought an ache to the throat and a most annoying moisture to the eyes. One felt very humble in those human presences. It was a sight that I could not long endure, and I knew what was going on in Mr. Hoover's heart when he turned away and fixed his gaze on something far clown the street . . .

The time came when, if visiting Americans asked to see the soup lines, I sent some one to show them ; I could no longer bear to go myself.

It was perhaps more touching at those kitchens where the children were fed. This part of the work had been admirably organized by the Petites Abeilles, a society of Brussels women who had long worked among the children of the poor. Dr. Caroline Hedger, that noble Chicago woman whose life has been a blessing to countless thousands of children in that city, spent long weeks working in Belgium that winter, rendering noble service in the cause of humanity, and her admiration of the Petites Abeilles was to me the final proof of their effectiveness. We went to the child's feeding-station in the Rue Royale, out near the church of Sainte-Marie, where the long line of women with their children was filing by. Each child in the neighbourhood was examined by a physician, the kind of nourishment it required almost scientifically determined, and this noted on cards of different colours, each colour representing a certain ration. They were given milk, usually a liter a day, a ration of bread with jam, and phosphatine or chocolate, or something of that sort.

We went to one of the stations where clothes were distributed, under the management of Madame Phillipson-Wiener ; the same admirable Belgian organization, the same Belgian economy. There were new clothes and old clothes ; all the principles of modern hygiene observed, each garment disinfected, washed, examined, necessary repairs made, pressed and sent out. If beyond repair it was made over into something similarly useful ; even old socks were used to make caps for children.

And what we had seen that morning was being repeated all over Belgium, in every town in the occupied portion, the synthesis of that perfect organization which, based upon the Belgian commune and impossible without the Belgian commune, had been evoked by the genius of M. Emile Francqui.

Then in the afternoon there was the meeting of the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation, convoked in honour of the patron Ministers and of Mr. Hoover and of the representatives of the Rockefeller Foundation, there at the bank building of the Société Générale in the great room of the directors, an imposing hall with marble busts of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth, and long portraits in oil of King William of Holland, who had founded the Société Générale, and of Léopold I and Léopold II. The members of the Comité, representing the best of Belgium that remained inside the line of steel, were gathered around an enormous green table, and they rose when the Americans entered, and when the Spanish Minister entered, and when, with strict deference to the protocol, we were all duly seated, M. Solvay, the president, read a touching allocution to thank the Americans. When he came to the words "*We are a little nation*", his voice broke, and he could not proceed for a moment — a moment of impressive silence, and not a dry eye there.*

The Marquis said a few words and I spoke on behalf of the Americans.

We were all very tired that night after a day of so many emotions. It had been a doleful morning's business, though not without its reassurance of the goodness that still was in human nature.

Mr. Hoover went away, but Dr. Rose and Mr. Bicknell remained, and joined by Mr. Henry James, also a representative of the Rockefeller

Foundation, went on a tour of Belgium and even of the invaded portion of Northern France, or so much of it as then was accessible. And we resumed the interminable discussions of the organization of the interior work of the C.R.B. The distribution had been thus far directed by Mr. Heineman from his private office there in the Rue de Naples, but it was becoming evident that the work would have to take on a larger scope, and M. Francqui finally put at the disposal of the C.R.B. those ample suites of offices in the building across from the Société Générale in the Rue des Colonies. And when the C.R.B., getting thus duly under way, needed some one acquainted with the languages, I had an inspiration, the thought of little Bulle — Hermancito — and just as he was about to go away I suggested him to Mr. Hoover, and we had not only the benefit of his services but the pleasure of keeping him with us in Brussels.

Finally the Rhodes scholars began to arrive, clean young fellows whom one could admire unreservedly. They came as volunteers, to work for no other reward than the satisfaction of helping in a great humanitarian cause. The work never could have been done without them, or half so well by men who had been paid for their labour. I suppose the world has never seen anything quite like their devotion ; it used to amuse when it did not exasperate us, to see the Germans so mystified by it ; they could not understand it, and were always trying to find out the real reason for their being there. *Messieurs les militaires* could never get out of their heads the suspicion that they were spies, and now and then they treated them as such. The son of the Governor-General, like Walt Whitman's learned astronomer, "*lecturing with much applause there in the lecture-room*", explained to his auditors that the Americans were growing rich out of the work ; but possibly he could imagine no other motive for maintaining it. It was, in fact, as fine an example of idealism, and, I am tempted to add, of American idealism, as, in its ultimate organization and direct management, it proved to be of American enterprise and efficiency. The young men were under the heaviest adjurations from all of us to maintain a strict neutrality, and this they all did. Not one of them was ever guilty of an incorrection, not one of them ever brought dishonour upon the work, or upon their nation, or its flag, or upon the various universities whose honour they held in their keeping and on which they reflected such credit. They showed remarkable tact, and they were all neutral, "*strictly neutral*", as their coterie phrase had it. Raymond Swing, a newspaper correspondent, observing them at their work, remarked, however, that some were born neutral, some achieved neutrality, and some had neutrality thrust upon them. The provocation was often very strong, what with the scenes they had to witness and that odour of invasion in which they lived. But they kept their opinions to themselves with a remarkable discretion, and expressed themselves, in public at least, only in the diplomatic phrases befitting neutrals, though I think that the classic phrase of neutrality was pronounced at my own table by Colonel Soren Listoe, our Consul at Rotterdam, who came into Brussels on one of those lace days of that dark December. He, too, was under the injunction to observe a strict neutrality, and was determinedly doing so. When I asked him what he thought about the war he visibly wrestled with his feelings for a moment and then, after swallowing once or twice, with admirable restraint and sure of the mastery over himself, said : "*Well, if this war ends in the way some hope that it will, the other side will have to pay a very large indemnity !*"

The Rockefeller Commission returned from their tour and I suppose there is no harm now in saying that they did not come back in a very neutral frame of mind. I had the impression that the entire fortune of their eminent patron would not have paid for a single day the interest on the indemnity they would have liked to collect from the other side if the war ended as they hoped it would. They had seen such sufferings in Belgium and Northern France as made them weep, and they urged that the work of the Commission be extended at least to that little strip of Northern France which thrusts itself up into Belgium there by Givet and Philippeville, where people were actually starving.

We were already having appeals from other lands that lay outside Belgium. My colleague, Count d'Ansembourg, *Chargé d'Affaires* of Luxemburg, was asking us to extend the work of *ravitaillement* to the little duchy, and one morning the Mayor of Maubeuge and one of his *échevins* came in to ask us to help them revictual that city.

And then Mr. Hoover, to our relief, came back. He had had difficulties in London ; there were folk there, as elsewhere, who took the view that the *ravitaillement* in Belgium was an unneutral act, that it was indirectly an aid to the Germans, and some of them had even made the cynical statement that if the Belgians were to be left to starve it would require more German troops to subdue the revolutions that would break out as a result of hunger, and thereby by so much weaken the German forces. But he surmounted this obstacle, as he had so many others, and he remained long enough in Brussels to install the C.R.S. in its new offices and get in motion the machinery that had been functioning with so many halts and so much creaking. He had Mr. A. N. Connett coming from America to act as manager, and in the meantime Captain J. M. Lucey, who had been directing the Rotterdam office, came to relieve Mr. Heineman, who had so unselfishly sacrificed his own affairs to this cause.

And so, as the short December days were declining with the year, the great work was set in motion, with infinite toil and pain, with many a psychological problem, with such delicate management and humouring of human feelings, jealousies, susceptibilities, and, what is worst of all in this world to endure, the irritations of *grands faiseurs de petites choses*.

The Belgians do not make as much of Christmas as we do, or as do the English. With them the great fête-day of the children falls on December 6, and the night before children lie awake in the excitement of the mystery of the coming of Saint Nicolas on his ass, for which they place a carrot on a plate. I suppose they celebrate that day in order to give him time to cross the ocean and be ready to descend our chimneys a fortnight or so later. The children could not be sure that he would come that year of 1914, for there were none but sad homes in Belgium ; and yet something of the spirit of the time was abroad too, for when I asked for a *Passierschein* for a little girl of four years one of whose grandfathers was our famous General Logan, and whose other grandfather was my friend M. St-Paul de Sinçay — I had no trouble whatever in procuring it.

We were loath, all of us, to see the baby go. She used to come to see me, and only a day or so before she went she had come expressly to whisper to me a most important secret, which I am now at liberty to divulge, though that is more than I can say of many

another secret whispered to me in those days by lips not quite so innocent : the secret was that she had two chocolate bonbons hidden in her muff, one for her and one for me . . . She had been almost an international incident. Several times Mr. Herrick had sent for her to come to Paris, and Mr. Walter van R. Berry had once made the trip especially to escort her out, but there were always dangers and complications . . . The motor-car that finally took her to the Holland frontier could not cross the border, but there was another car waiting on the other side. And in her little white hood and coat, with her little white muff, she walked the road or two alone, with no fear of the German sentinel standing there or any thought of him as an enemy ; and in passing, just at the frontier, she gave him her hand with the gesture of a queen, and, smiling, he handed her gently across.

We came at last to Christmas Eve — the eve of the saddest Christmas, in some ways, I had ever known. The Germans had forbidden the sale of the little buttons bearing the pictures of the King and Queen, and the throngs that moved through the streets were depressed. There, from the Montagne de la Cour, where I used to love to look out over the lower city, its roofs touched by the soft glow of the setting sun, the spire of the Hôtel de Ville was beautiful as ever, and yet over the whole city there brooded a sadness. In the Parc Royal there was an enormous tree blazing with thousands of electric lights in coloured bulbs, like the one in Madison Square at that season, and German soldiers gathered around it and sang their choruses. There were little Christmas trees in all the blazing windows of the *ministères* in the Rue de la Loi ; at the King's Palace at Laeken a great dinner for the officers. For weeks they had been cutting down the fir-trees in the Belgian woods for their Christmas trees ; there were celebrations for the soldiers everywhere. I do not know how many were required for the Germans at Brussels, in order that they might fittingly celebrate the coming to this earth of the lowly Nazarene, the advent of peace on earth and the impulse of goodwill toward men, but each company had to have one, and at Liège alone seven hundred trees were required.

But our work was organized at last, and on that Christmas Eve at the Legation, the Marquis of Villalobar and Mr. Hoover, Baron Lambert, M. Francqui, and I were agreed finally on the last, or what seemed then the last, of the troublesome details, and when we had agreed M. Francqui leaped up, crying in his amusing way, " *V'Zà, v'là, v'là, v'là* " and, bending his stout form over the table, wrote it down before any of us could change his mind again.

Mr. and Mrs. Hoover, Dr. Rose, Mr. James, Mr. Bicknell, Frederick Palmer, and Gibson were there to dinner that night. After dinner Dr. Rose drew me aside, with many expressions of appreciation and kindness, saying that the Rockefeller Foundation was prepared to aid the *ravitaillement* to the full extent of its resources ; that he and his colleagues had been everywhere in Belgium, had seen everything, had taken no man's word for anything, had been in the homes of the poorest — and he spoke with tears in his eyes of their sufferings, their patience, their forbearance, and their charity. Not a whimper anywhere, no unkindness ; only that superb fortitude, that splendid faith and unwearied resistance that marked the Belgian nation then as it marks it still. I was moved and grateful, and we were all relieved by the thought that the *ravitaillement* was assured until September 1.

Christmas Day was stinging cold and sharp, the trees all white with hoar-frost, and there was something of the traditional spirit of the festival in the air, because the young Americans who had come to work for the C.R.B. tried to make the day happy for the children. Mr. Lewis Richard, who lived in Brussels, had a Christmas tree in his home at Forest for the children of the commune ; they came, six hundred of them, clattering along in wooden shoes, while the orchestra played "The Star-spangled Banner," a tune that all Brussels musicians were practising in those days. There were screams of childish surprise and delight at the Christmas tree, the top of which brushed the high ceiling of the drawing-room, and chocolate and cake — real cake, *gâteau de beurre* — and gifts of clothing and candy and toys, and a little tot in white breathlessly reciting a little speech to express "*la reconnaissance la plus profonde de toutes les petites abeilles, vos protégées !*"

Brussels children, too, were all excited by the reports of the Christmas ship that had arrived from America with gifts for them all. There had never been a public reference in Belgium to what America was doing ; there was not a word of it in any one of the journals that were springing up to replace those Belgian newspapers that had made it a point of patriotism not to appear while the Germans were there, but the news had got abroad and was known everywhere. There was even a message from M. Max in his prison at Glatz, in Silesia. And the day was profoundly touching and significant, so many and so beautiful were the expressions of gratitude and goodwill that came pouring in.

The toys which the American children had sent in the Christmas ship to the Belgian children were to be distributed on Sunday, and when M. Lemonnier, the acting Burgomaster, came to tell me of it, and added that the people of Brussels wished to make a manifestation in honour of America on New Year's Day, I was aghast at the idea of seeing the Rue Belliard and the Rue de Trèves crowded, and urged M. Lemonnier to suppress both manifestations, explaining that the time was not yet ripe for such expressions ; and so it was arranged that the distribution of toys should be made quietly in the schools.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

* M. Solvay's speech was as follows :

Messieurs les Ministres, cher Monsieur Hoover et chers Messieurs Rose et Bicknell, c'est en votre honneur, mus par des sentiments de gratitude, que nous nous réunissons en ce moment.

Nous n'oublierons jamais l'émotion qui nous prit quand tout au début de notre action, on nous fit part que Messieurs les Ministres d'Espagne et des États-Unis, confiants en notre oeuvre et en sa constitution, voulaient bien consentir à la patronner en la faisant devenir également leur oeuvre, et en s'entourant à cet effet de collaborateurs dévoués.

Cette émotion, nous l'éprouvâmes encore lorsque, au retour du voyage à Londres de nos dévoués collègues, MM. le Baron Lambert et Francqui, ce dernier, ne réprimant pas sa vive satisfaction, nous dit : "*Nous avons la bonne fortune d'avoir à la tête de la commission de Londres, un homme d'action, dans toute l'acception du terme, M. Hoover. Grâce à lui, nos affaires, j'en suis convaincu, marcheront.*" Et l'affirmation de M. Francqui est maintenant devenue un fait absolument avéré, une réalité qui nous débarrasse de poignants soucis.

Cette même émotion, toujours, se renouvelle encore aujourd'hui, en voyant ici devant nous, d'une part Mr. Hoover lui-même, d'autre part les membres de la Commission Rockefeller, MM. Rose et Bicknell.

Nous sommes un petit pays, nous avons du courage, mais la force nous manque. Et vous comprendrez, chers Messieurs Américains, combien nous devons vibrer de satisfaction, par sécurité, quand nous voyons votre grande et libre nation apprécier nos souffrances et, subissant toutes les impulsions spontanées de la

solidarité et du coeur, venir à nous d'enthousiasme naturel pour nous aider à les supporter, pour nous empêcher d'être terrassés par la faim et le froid,

C'est noble, messieurs.

Vous, qui formez un peuple pratique autant que généreux, vous vous êtes fait de l'humanité la pure et haute conception qui doit correspondre à la poussée de notre époque, celle qui créera bientôt la conscience active mondiale devant permettre aux véritables éprouvés de partout de pouvoir espérer en croyant au Droit.

Chers Messieurs les Ministres et chers Messieurs les Américains, merci. Merci pour nous tous, et du fond du coeur, de ce que vous voulez bien nous continuer votre indispensable appui en ne cessant d'être, avec conviction partout et toujours avec nous. Nous vous en exprimons notre profonde reconnaissance, et d'avance, la reconnaissance historique d'un pays qui connaît le devoir.

Translation

Messrs. Ministers, Mr. Hoover, Mr. Rose, and Mr. Bicknell,—It is in your honour that, moved by sentiments of gratitude, we are at present assembled.

We shall never forget the emotion we experienced when, at the beginning of this movement, we learned that the Ministers of Spain and of the United States, relying upon our work and its organization, were willing to serve as patrons, making it thereby their own and engaging themselves as earnest fellow-workers for the purpose.

Our emotion was again aroused when, upon the return from London of our devoted colleagues, Messrs. Lambert and Francqui, the latter, without restraining his extreme satisfaction, said to us : "*We are so fortunate as to have at the head of our organization in London a man of action in every acceptation of the term, Mr. Hoover. Thanks to him our affairs, I am convinced, will be well directed.*" This assertion of M. Francqui has now become an established truth, a reality that relieves us of pressing anxiety.

This emotion is renewed to-day in seeing Mr. Hoover himself, and the members of the Rockefeller Foundation, Messrs. Rose and Bicknell.

We are a little nation, we have courage, but we have no power, and you, Gentlemen of America, will understand with what satisfaction we observe the manner in which your great and free nation appreciates our suffering, and, in obedience to a spontaneous and heartfelt impulse, comes with a native enthusiasm to aid us in bearing them and to prevent us from being overpowered by hunger and cold.

It is noble of you, gentlemen. 'You, who are a practical as well as a generous people, possess that pure and lofty conception of humanity which expresses the best thought of our time, and that conception will very soon create a vital world conscience that will everywhere permit true and tested souls, believing in the Right, once more to hope.

Gentlemen, thank you, and again thank you for all of us, from the bottom of our hearts, for your willingness to continue to lend us your indispensable support, and to be everywhere and always with us. We express to you our deep gratitude, and, in advance, the historic gratitude of a country that knows what Duty means.