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FOR WOMEN READERS

(Please, Gentlemen, draw their attention to this!)

The World Refugee Year has just ended and we are now embarked on the Free the World from Hunger Campaign. We have helped one way or another in the former, and we are vaguely wondering if and how we can help in the latter. We shall need a few convincing proposals on the wireless, and a few forceful appeals in the press before we see our way clearly as to just how we can help.

In the meantime Christmas is coming nearer, we shall buy seals in aid of one and labels in support of another charity, we shall send UNICEF Christmas cards and search our brains for something to give Auntie Polly and Cousin Harry and worry about what to send to our spoilt relatives in Switzerland, something for a change which they cannot buy there at half the money we pay here for the same article. We shall soon be immersed in recipes for a new variety of "Guezli", Christmas cake and pudding, and wrestle with tinsel and noyel wrapping paper. No doubt, we have resolved to shop early, post early, cook and bake early, and never to have that same last-minute rush again. I have learned from disappointing experience that the earlier one starts, the smaller the chance of getting it all done in good time! So we might just as well sit down in comfort for a moment now and look at this world of ours.

The happenings in the political arena have not convinced us that real lasting peace is just around the corner; on the contrary, things look very black. But it will not help us or mankind if we grow despondent. Christmas, too, will bring us its message of faith and hope. To us women has been given the privilege of homemaking. We know that a good home is the best ground in which such hope and faith and courage will grow, and something else as well — compassion and charity towards those less well endowed than we are.

During the "Swiss Fortnight" last autumn there was an illuminating exhibition at the Swiss Hostel for Girls, in Hampstead, showing the welfare activities of the Swiss Colony. Many of us saw it and were impressed by the variety of good work accomplished. This would not be possible without the unselfish work of many devoted men and women, backed by the generous donations from Swiss residents in this country. But unfortunately this Colony so dear to us is declining in numbers and fewer people are available to give financial support. On the other hand, the number of compatriots in need of assistance is growing, and so it becomes more and more difficult to make ends meet.

At the last meeting of the Swiss Benevolent Society its Honorary Treasurer had to report yet another deficit. The Churches have had to appeal for funds, and the Welfare Office has a struggle to keep going. We have heard this story so often, and we are perhaps a little tired of it all. And yet we must realize that the work is essential and has to go on if help is not to be withdrawn one day soon from our less fortunate compatriots. Most of us support one or more of these organisations already, but there are perhaps ways and means to increase our help. May I suggest that we women start a "Swiss Charity Collection Box" in our homes. There is not one of us who could not cut out a packet of cigarettes, a bar of chocolate or a magazine occasionally and put the money in the box instead, the odd pennies saved by walking instead of

taking a bus (or even a taxi!) could be put there, somebody's fourpence for the use of our phone, the odd coin found in the road — or in the pocket when cleaning the husband's trousers! Even a game of bridge or whist could be arranged in aid of our "Charity Box". The children might be induced occasionally to put a few coppers in the box, saved out of their sweet money. It is not enough to promise a special donation once the Premium Bond wins — that may never happen. But this is something we can all do here and now, and can go on doing without much effort. It is a good time to start at once, then by 1st November next year we can split the collection and send a tidy little sum to each of the various charities within the Colony, just at a moment when they are preparing for Christmas. The Swiss Benevolent Society send parcels every December into a great many homes. Some of the clothing has been made by the ladies of the Churches. (If you are not yet a member of the "Frauenverein" of the Schweizerkirche or the "Réunion de Couture" of the Eglise Suisse, why don't you join them? The meetings are very friendly.) The Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches look after Swiss people whose circumstances are not very prosperous and who may be old or lonely. Even the Welfare Office for Girls has on its lists quite a number of residents who are not only visited regularly but are also sent a little gift at Christmas time. So the contents of our collection box — however small — will be more than welcome in all quarters.

Perhaps this is also the moment to check on our subscriptions. Have we (or our husbands) sent this year's contribution to the Swiss Benevolent Society and the Churches? And what about signing those Covenants for seven years, on which the organisations can claim back from the Inland Revenue any income tax paid on those subscriptions by us?

By the way, the Swiss Benevolent Society have a special "G. E. de Brunner Christmas Cheer Fund" whose income is used to provide extras at Christmas for the pensioners and families on its books. Perhaps we could manage a small donation towards this fund this year, seeing that our collection box has not yet been started?

The Swiss Protestant Churches are holding their biennial bazaar on 12th November, and the Swiss Catholic Committee is organising a Christmas Draw, all in order to finance their essential work, both spiritual and material, amongst young and old.

This is also the time to send another parcel to the Swiss Benevolent Society. Any used clothing and shoes, well cleaned and repaired, household goods, books and toys are gratefully accepted.

And now you will say that all this comes to only one thing — give, give, give. True, but which one of us could honestly say that he has nothing else to give? Have not most of us reason to be grateful for many good things that have come our way during the past year? Measured against all our blessings, what we have contributed so far is surely not yet out of proportion, and there is still room for improvement?

But now we have sat in leisurely contemplation long enough. Let us just get a collection box ready before we resume our Christmas planning. And perhaps to-night we can even induce our husbands to put the price of a pint of bitter or an ounce of shag into it as a start!

Mariann.