

August 5th.---Yesterday morning we got about early and made for the Chamber of Deputies to hear the King's speech. The Minister and I walked over together and met a few straggling colleagues headed in the same direction. Most of them had got there ahead of us, and the galleries were all jammed. The Rue Royale, from the Palace around the park to the Parliament building, was packed with people, held in check by the Garde Civique. There was a buzz as of a thousand bees and every face was ablaze---the look of a people who have been trampled on for hundreds of years and have not learned to submit. The Garde Civique had two bands in front of the Senate, and they tried to play the Brabançonne in unison. Neither of them could play the air in tune, and they were about a bar apart all the time. They played it through and then began to play it over again without a pause between. They blew and pounded steadily for nearly half an hour, and the more they played, the more enthusiastic the crowds became.

When I saw how crowded the galleries were I thought I would not push, so resigned myself to missing the speech and went out onto a balcony with Webber, of the British Legation, to see the arrival of the King and Queen. We had the balcony to ourselves, as everybody else was inside fighting for a place in the galleries to hear the speech.

When the King and Queen finally left the Palace we knew it from a roar of cheering that came surging across the Park. The little procession came along at a smart trot, and although it was hidden from us by the trees we could follow its progress by the steadily advancing roaring of the mob. When they turned from the Rue Royale into the Rue de la Loi, the crowd in front of the Parliament buildings took up the cheering in a way to make the windows rattle.

First came the staff of the King and members of his household. Then the Queen, accompanied by the royal children, in an open daumont. The cheering for the Queen was full-throated and with no sign of doubt, because of her Bavarian birth and upbringing---she is looked on as a Belgian Queen and nothing else.

After the Queen came a carriage or two with members of the royal family and the Court. Finally the King on horseback. He was in the field uniform of a lieutenant-general, with no decorations and none of the ceremonial trappings usual on such occasions as a speech from the Throne. He was followed by a few members of his staff who also looked as though they were meant more for business than for dress parade.

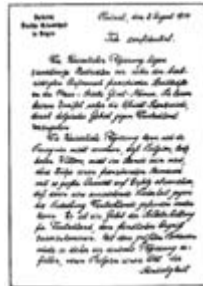
As the King drew rein and dismounted, the cheering burst forth with twice its former volume; and, in a frantic demonstration of loyalty, hats and sticks were thrown into the air. Two bands played on manfully, but we could hear only an occasional discord.

Just as the King started into the building an usher came out, touched me on the arm and said something, beckoning me to come inside. One of the galleries had been locked by mistake but had now been opened, and Webber and I were rewarded for our modesty by being given the whole thing to ourselves. In a few minutes the Bolivian Chargé came in and joined us. Our places were not ten feet from the Throne, and we could not have been better placed.

The Queen came in quietly from one side and took a throne to the left of the tribune, after acknowledging a roaring welcome from the members of the two Houses. When the cheering had subsided, the King walked in alone from the right, bowed gravely to the assembly and walked quickly to the dais above and behind the tribune. With a business-like gesture he tossed his cap on to the ledge before him

and threw his white cotton gloves into it---then drew out his speech and read it. At first his voice was not very steady but he soon controlled it and read the speech to the end in a voice that was vibrating with emotion but without any oratory or heroics. He went straight to the vital need for union between all factions and all parties, between the French, Flemish, and Walloon races, between Catholics, Liberals, and Socialists in a determined resistance to the attack upon Belgian independence. The House could contain itself for only a few minutes at a time, and as every point was driven home they burst into frantic cheering. When the King, addressing himself directly to the members of Parliament, said, "Are you determined at any cost to maintain the sacred heritage of our ancestors? " the whole Chamber burst into a roar, and from the Socialists' side came cries of: "At any cost, by death if need be." It was simple and to the point---a manly speech. And as he delivered it he was a kingly figure, facing for the sake of honour what he knew to be the gravest danger that could ever come to his country and his people. When he had finished he bowed to the Queen, then to the Parliament, and then walked quickly out of the room, while the assembly roared again. The Senators and Deputies swarmed about the King on his way out, cheering and trying to shake him by the hand---and none were more at pains to voice their devotion than the Socialists.

After he had gone the Queen rose, bowed shyly to the assembly, and withdrew with the royal children. She was given a rousing ovation as everybody realised the difficulty of her position and was doubly anxious to show her all their confidence and affection. The whole occasion was moving, but when the little Queen acknowledged the ovation so shyly and so sadly and withdrew, the tears were pretty near the surface---my surface at any rate.



Fac-simile of the first page of the German ultimatum to Belgium



Pass issued by the Belgian military authorities to enable Mr. Gibson to enter the German Legation at Brussels.



Maître Gaston de Leval, legal adviser to the American Legation in Brussels

For several minutes after the Queen withdrew the cheering continued. Suddenly a tense silence fell upon the room. M. de Broqueville, the Prime Minister, had mounted the tribune and stood waiting for attention. He was clearly under great stress of emotion, and as the House settled itself to hear him he brushed away the tears that had started to his eyes. He began in a very direct way by saying that he would limit himself to reading a few documents and hoped that, after hearing them,

the House would consider the Government worthy of the confidence that had been reposed in it and that immediate action would be taken upon matters of urgent importance. He first read the German ultimatum,(1) which was received quietly but with indignation and anger which was with difficulty suppressed. Without commenting upon the German note, he then read the reply which had been handed to the German Minister.(2) This was followed by a final note delivered by the German Minister this morning stating "that in view of the refusal of the King to accede to the well-intentioned proposals of the Emperor, the Imperial Government, greatly to its regret, was obliged to carry out by force of arms the measures indispensable to its security." After reading these documents he made a short and ringing speech, full of fire, which was repeatedly interrupted by cheers. When he came down from the tribune he was surrounded by cheering Senators and Deputies struggling to shake his hand and express their approval of his speech. Even the Socialists who had fought him for years rose to the occasion and vied with their colleagues in their demonstrations of enthusiasm. Broqueville rose again and said: "In the present crisis we have received from the opposition a whole-hearted support; they have rallied to our side in the most impressive way in preparing the reply to Germany. In order to emphasise this union of all factions, His Majesty the King has just signed a decree appointing Monsieur Vandervelde as a Minister of State." This announcement was greeted by roars of applause from all parts of the House, and Vandervelde was immediately surrounded by Ministers and Deputies anxious to congratulate him. His reply to the Prime Minister's speech was merely a shout above the roar of applause: "I accept."

As we came out, some of the colleagues were gathered about debating whether they should go over to the Palace and ask to take leave of the King. They were saved that labour, however, for the King had stepped into a motor at the door and was already

speeding to the General Headquarters which has been set up nobody knows where. That looks like business.

When I got back to the Legation I found von Stumm, Counselor of the German Legation, with the news that his chief had received his passports and must leave at once. He had come to ask that the American Minister take over the care of the German Legation and the protection of the German subjects who had not yet left the country. I said that we could not undertake anything of that sort without authority from Washington, and got the Minister to telegraph for it when he came in from some hurried visits he had made in search of news.

While we were snatching some lunch, von Stumm came back with the German Minister, von Below, and said that some provisional arrangement must be made at once as the staff of the Legation would have to leave for the Dutch frontier in the course of the afternoon---long before we could hope for an answer from Washington. We did not like the idea of doing that sort of thing without the knowledge of Washington, but finally agreed to accept the charge provisionally on grounds of humanity, until such time as we should receive specific instructions as to who would be definitely entrusted with the protection of German interests. In case of need, we shall be asked to take over certain other Legations and shall have our hands more than full.

At five o'clock we went over to the German Legation, which we found surrounded by a heavy detachment of Garde Civique as a measure of protection against violence. We drew up, signed and sealed a protocol accepting what is known as *la garde des clefs et des sceaux*, until such time as definite arrangements might be made. The Minister and von Stumm were nearly unstrung. They had been under a great strain for some days and were making no effort to get their belongings

together to take them away. They sat on the edge of their chairs, mopped their brows and smoked cigarettes as fast as they could light one from another. I was given a lot of final instructions about things to be done--- and all with the statement that they should be done at once, as the German army would doubtless be in Brussels in three days. While we were talking, the chancellor of the Legation, Hofrat Grabowsky, a typical white-haired German functionary, was pottering about with sealing wax and strips of paper, sealing the archives and answering questions in a deliberate and perfectly calm way. It was for all the world like a scene in a play. The shaded room, the two nervous diplomats registering anxiety and strain, the old functionary who was to stay behind to guard the archives and refused to be moved from his calm by the approaching cataclysm. It seemed altogether unreal, and I had to keep bringing myself back to a realisation of the fact that it was only too true and too serious.

They were very ominous about what an invasion means to this country, and kept referring to the army as a steam roller that will leave nothing standing in its path. Stumm kept repeating: "Oh, the poor fools! Why don't they get out of the way of the steam roller. We don't want to hurt them, but if they stand in our way they will be ground into the dirt. Oh, the poor fools!"

The Government had a special train ready for the German diplomatic and consular officers who were to leave, and they got away about seven. Now, thank goodness, they are safely in Holland and speeding back to their own country.

Before leaving, Below gave out word that we would look after German interests, and consequently we have been deluged with frightened people ever since.

All the Germans who have remained here seem to be paralysed with fright, and have for the most part taken refuge in convents, schools, etc. There are several

hundreds of them in the German Consulate-General which has been provisioned as for a siege. Popular feeling is, of course, running high against them, and there may be incidents, but so far nothing has happened to justify the panic.

This morning a Belgian priest, the Abbé Upmans, came in to say that he had several hundred Germans under his care and wanted some provision made for getting them away before the situation got any worse.

After talking the matter over with the Minister and getting his instructions, I took the Abbé in tow, and with Monsieur de Leval. went to the Foreign Office to see about getting a special train to take these people across the border into Holland and thence to Germany. At first, the suggestion was received with some resentment and I was told flatly that there was no good reason for Belgium to hand over special trains to benefit Germans when every car was needed for military operations. I pleaded that consideration must be shown these helpless people and that this course was just as much in the interest of Belgium as of anybody else, as it would remove the danger of violence with possible reprisals and would relieve the overworked police force of onerous duties. After some argument, Baron Donny went with me to the Sûreté Publique where we went over the matter again with the Chief. He got the point at once, and joined forces with us in a request to the Minister of Railways for a special train. We soon arranged matters as far as the Belgian frontier. I then telephoned through to The Hague, got Marshal Langhorne and asked him to request the Dutch Government to send another train to the frontier to pick our people up and send them through to Germany. He went off with a right good will to arrange that, and I hope to have an answer in the morning.

We plan to start the train on Friday morning at four o'clock, so as to get our people through the streets when there are few people about. We are making it known that

all Germans who wish to leave should put in an appearance by that time, and it looks as though we should have from seven hundred to a thousand to provide for. It will be a great relief to get them off, and I hold my breath until the train is safely gone.

The Belgian Government is making no distinction between Germans, and is letting those liable for military service get away with the others.

Wild stories have begun to circulate about what is bound to happen to Americans and other foreigners when hostilities get nearer to Brussels, and we have had to spend much time that could have been devoted to better things in calming a lot of excitable people of both sexes. I finally dug out the plan of organisation of the foreigners for the Siege of Peking and suggested to the Minister that, in order to give these people something to do and let them feel that something was being done, we should get them together and appoint them all on committees to look after different things. This was done to-day. Committees were appointed to look for a house where Americans could be assembled in case of hostilities in the immediate vicinity of Brussels; to look after the food supply; to attend to catering; to round up Americans and see that they get to the place of refuge when the time comes; to look after destitute Americans, etc. Now they are all happy and working like beavers, although there is little chance that their work will serve any useful purpose aside from keeping them occupied. We got Mrs. Shaler to open up the Students' Club, which had been closed for the summer, so that the colony can have a place to meet and work for the Red Cross and keep its collective mind off the gossip that is flying about.

Last night our cipher telegrams to Washington were sent back from the telegraph office with word that under the latest instructions from the Government they could

not be forwarded. The Minister and I hurried over to the Foreign Office, where we found several of the colleagues on the same errand. It was all a mistake, due to the fact that the General Staff had issued a sweeping order to stop all cipher messages without stopping to consider our special case. It was fixed after some debate, and the Minister and I came back to the shop and got off our last telegrams, which were finished at three this morning.

I was back at my desk by a little after eight and have not finished this day's work, although it is after midnight. I have averaged from three to five hours sleep since the trouble began and, strange to say, I thrive on it.

I have called several times to-day at the French and British Legations to get the latest news. They keep as well posted as is possible in the prevailing confusion, and are most generous and kind in giving us everything they properly can.

There seems to have been a serious engagement to-day at Liège, which the Germans are determined to reduce before proceeding toward France. The report is that the attack was well resisted and the Germans driven back with heavy loss. A number of prisoners have been taken and were being brought into Brussels this evening along with the wounded. In the course of the fighting there was a sort of charge of the Light Brigade; one squadron of Belgian Lancers was obliged to attack six times its number of Germans and was cut to pieces, only one officer escaping. The morale of the Belgians is splendid.

This afternoon as the Minister and I were going to call on the British Minister, we passed the King and his staff headed out the Rue de la Loi for the front. They looked like business.

Several times to-day I have talked over the telephone with the Embassy in London. They seem to be as strong on rumours as we are here. One rumour I was able to pass on to Bell was to the effect that the British flagship had been sunk by German mines with another big warship. Another to the effect that five German ships have been destroyed by the French fleet off the coast of Algeria, etc., etc.

The Red Cross is hard at work getting ready to handle the wounded, and everybody is doing something. Nearly everybody with a big house has fitted it in whole or in part as a hospital. Others are rolling bandages and preparing all sorts of supplies.

The military attachés are all going about in uniform now. Each Legation has a flag on its motor and the letters C. D.---which are supposed to stand for Corps Diplomatique, although nobody knows it. I have seized Mrs. Boyd's big car for my own use. D. L. Blount has put his car at the disposal of the Minister and is to drive it himself.

There is talk already of moving the Court and the Government to Antwerp, to take refuge behind the fortifications. When the Germans advance beyond Liège, the Government will, of course, have to go, and the diplomatic corps may follow. It would be a nuisance for us, and I hope we may be able to avoid it.

Germans are having an unhappy time, and I shall be happier when they are across the border. Nothing much seems to have happened to them beyond having a few shops wrecked in Antwerp and one or two people beaten up here. One case that came to my knowledge was an outraged man who had been roughly handled and could not understand why. All he had done was to stand in front of a café where the little tables are on the sidewalk and remark: "Talk all the French you can. You'll soon have to talk German." Of course there are a lot of Belgians, Swiss and Dutch who rejoice in good German names and they are not having a pleasant time. One

restaurant called Chez Fritz, I saw when coming along the Boulevard this evening, had hung out a blackboard with the proud device: "*Fritz est Luxembourgeois, mais sa Maison est Belge.*" He was taking no chances on having the place smashed.

In GIBSON, Hugh (Secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, 1914) ; *A journal from our Legation in Belgium* ; New York ; Doubleday, Page & Company Garden City; 1917 :

<http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/memoir/Legation/GibsonTC.htm>

Footnotes.

It would be interesting compare with what **Roberto J. Payró** told about the same days in his *Diario de un testigo* (*La guerra vista desde Bruselas*) :

Original Spanish version :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/19140804%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20DESDE%20BELGICA.pdf>

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/19140805%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20DESDE%20BELGICA.pdf>

French version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140804%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20DESDE%20BELGICA%20FR.pdf>

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140805%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE>

[%20UN%20TESTIGO%20DESDE%20BELGICA%20FR.pdf](#)

It would be also interesting compare with what **Paul MAX** (cousin of the *bourgmestre Adolphe MAX*) told about the same days in his *Journal de guerre* (*Notes d'un Bruxellois pendant l'Occupation 1914-1918*) :

(http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20Oguerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf)