

**Brussels, September 1, 1914.** --- The first thing this morning I had a pow-wow with Hulse about how to handle the funds that are being gathered to relieve the enormous amount of distress that we shall have to meet here. There is a good deal of it even now. All the big factories are closed. Most of the shops have their shutters up, and the streets are filled with idle people. Importations of foodstuffs, even from the outlying districts, have stopped dead. Conditions are bad enough in all conscience, but they are nothing compared to what we have ahead, when cold weather comes on.

A lot of bankers and big business men have got together to wrestle with the financial problem. The Burgomaster has his people at work, trying to get their hands on foodstuffs and coördinate their work.

I went to the Foreign Office and talked things over with von Herwarth. He straightened out some of the tangles, and we were able to get things moving.

I have no trouble with the higher officers at headquarters, but I never go there that I do not want to murder the large brutes of non-commissioned officers who guard the door. They wear large brass plates on their chest and look like bock-beer signs. They have a free and careless way of booting everybody out the door and refusing to listen to anybody. I get fighting mad every time I go there and this morning got sufficiently roused to develop considerable fluency in German. I pictured to the large rough-neck some of the things that were going to happen to him if I was not let in; he was sufficiently impressed to permit me to stand on the sidewalk while my card was sent in. When I got in I made a few well-chosen remarks on the manners, if any, of the watch dogs of the Ministry.

From the Ministry I went to the Société Générale, where I was asked to attend a conference between the bankers of the city. There were ten of them in the big directors' room, and they worked to some purpose. M. Francqui, the director and leading spirit of the Société Générale, presided over the meeting. He explained the general situation simply and clearly, and stated what they had done and wanted to do. They had three points on which they wanted advice, and they were brought up and disposed of one at a time. By twelve o'clock I got away, and felt that the hour I had put in there had been well spent.

When I got back to the Legation, I found a nice Belgian who had no request to make of us, but wanted to tell his story to somebody, and a terrible story it was, too. He had fitted up his château near Mons as a Red Cross hospital. During the battle there a week ago, 102 British wounded had been brought in. The Germans found the château a hindrance in their operations, so got it out of the way by battering down the walls with artillery, and then throwing grenades into the building to set it on fire. There was great difficulty in getting the wounded out and hiding them in such shelter as was to be found. One man, at least, was burned alive in his bed. It seems incredible that Red Cross hospitals should be attacked, but stories come in from every side, tending to show that they are.

Beside this man's property there is a railway crossing. When a troop train passed over it day before yesterday, there was an explosion like the report of a rifle. The train was immediately stopped. The officer in command announced that civilians had fired upon his train, and ordered all the men in the vicinity taken prisoners. Then, refusing to listen to explanation or discussion, he had them all stood up against a wall and shot. When it was all over, he listened to explanations and learned that the report was that of a cap placed in the switch by the German railway men as a signal to stop the train before reaching the next station. By way of

reparation, he then graciously admitted that the civilians were innocent. But, as my caller said: "The civilians were also dead."

Another pleasant thing the Germans seem to be doing is arresting peaceful citizens by hundreds and sending them back to Germany to harvest the crops. They will also reap a fine harvest of hatred for generations to come.

Poor Bulle is in considerable doubt as to his status. For many months he has not heard from his Government, if any, and has not been able to get a word as to whether he is Chargé d'Affaires or not. I told him to-day that he had a rather unique situation as the representative of a country without a Government to a Government without a country. He extracted a chuckle from that.

Blount made up his mind to leave for America this afternoon, by way of Ostend and England. His family was all ready to start, but when he went down to headquarters to get a *laisser-passer* it was refused. Operations are apparently about to be started in *tout le bazar*, and they don't want stray civilians seeing too much. Blount will now settle down here for the present. His loss is our gain.

The Danish Minister was in again this afternoon. He is going away, and has finally turned his Legation over to us. We now have four Legations besides our own--- German, British, Austro-Hungarian, and Danish.

One little thing, the Germans have done here that is *echt Deutsch* is to change the clocks on the railway stations and public buildings to German time. Every other clock in town continues about its business in the same old way, and the change only serves to arouse resentment.

Another thing is, that on entering a town, they hold the Burgomaster, the Procureur du Roi and other authorities as hostages, to ensure good behaviour by the population. Of course the hoodlum class would like nothing better than to see their natural enemies, the defenders of law and order, ignominiously shot, and they do not restrain themselves a bit on account of the hostages. Just lack of imagination.

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 day in his *Diario de un testigo* (*La guerra vista desde Bruselas*) :

Original Spanish version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140901%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO.pdf>

French version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140901%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20INCOMUNICADO%20FR.pdf>

It would be also interesting compare with what **Paul MAX** (cousin of the *bourgmestre Adolphe MAX*) told about the same day 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](http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20Oguerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf)