

**September 8th, 1914.** --- Last night, after dinner, I trotted around and called on the wives of some of the Belgian officials to see whether there was any news of them that I could give to their husbands in Antwerp. I found Madame Davignon, the wife of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in her son's home, peacefully working away on clothes for the wounded. She told me all the news of the house so that I could repeat it to her husband. She is as calm as you please and far from despairing.

Madame de Broqueville, the wife of the Prime Minister, turned her house into a Red Cross hospital at the outbreak of hostilities; it is a beautiful big place. Of course there are practically nothing but German wounded in the house now, but the good lady conquers her natural feelings and has them as well looked after as though they were of her own race. I went in in an apologetic mood for intruding on her at so late an hour, but she had lots to say and I stayed on for a long time. It did her good to talk, and I was so overawed by her courage and poise that I sat and listened in silent admiration. The wives of the Cabinet Ministers and other officials have shown wonderful nerve and are standing right up to their duty.

Count and Countess de X----- had an interesting story to tell of their experiences when the first armies went through. When the war broke out they were at their château and were caught by the first onrush of troops. Their fine cellars were emptied for the benefit of the invader, but nothing more serious happened to them until the second wave came along. Then there was a demand for more wine. As all the wine had been carried away they could not comply. The Germans were convinced that they were being fooled, and searched the place very carefully. Finally they imprisoned the X-----'s for three days in the cellar and then brought them forth and stood them up before a firing squad and threatened to shoot them unless they told where the wine was hidden. At the critical moment a big gray military car rolled up, and to their considerable relief they saw that one of the

occupants was a German princeling, who had formerly been their guest on several occasions. They called out to him, and by his orders were immediately released. After expressing their thanks to him they went into the château to find that soldiers were engaged in packing up their fine collections of enamels and porcelains to ship them to Germany. Another appeal to the Prince, who was most sympathetic. He was a practical and resourceful man, and said:

"Of course I'll stop this, but you will understand that our men would like to keep some little souvenir of the war in Belgium. That would be hard to prevent. But I would suggest that you pick out all the pieces that you value most and pack them away in that large wardrobe. Then I'll do the rest."

Madame de X----- was, of course, delighted with this, and scurried about gathering together the finest pieces and packing them carefully into the big wardrobe. She kept it up as long as there was a nook or cranny where odd pieces could be put, and then reported progress to the Prince.

"Are you sure that all the best pieces are there?" says he.

"All that could be packed there," answers Madame de X.

"Good," says the Prince, and then turning to his orderly: "Have that wardrobe sent to Berlin for me."

The way the German army cleaned out the wine of the country was a revelation to everybody. They would not take what they needed for the day's drinking but would clear out whole cellars at a time and load what was not drunk onto carts to be carried away. The result was that people who had a little warning had recourse to all sorts of ingenious tricks to save some of their store. There was one bright man in

the province of Namur who removed his stock of wine---all except a few thousand bottles of new wine---and deposited them in the ornamental pond near his château. The Germans arrived a few hours afterward and raised a great fog because they were not satisfied with the amount of wine they found. The owner of the château had discreetly slipped away to Brussels and they could not do anything to him. However, they tapped all the walls for secret hiding places and went over the park to see if anything had been buried---all in vain. The next morning, however, the pond was covered with labels which had soaked off and floated to the surface, and after draining the pond the whole stock was carted. away.

Madame B-----, who was there, has an interesting souvenir which she proposes to keep if possible. During the first days of the war her château was occupied by a lot of officers, who got gloriously drunk and smashed up pretty well everything in the drawing-room and dining-room. One of them, with a fine sense of humour, took a piece of hard chalk and wrote on the top of her piano in large letters: *Deutschland über alles!* The crowd left the place in the morning without trying to cover their traces, and Madame B----- came in to put things to rights. The first thing she did was to get a large piece of plate glass to cover the top of the piano so that the legend would not be effaced, and over that she placed an ordinary piano cover so that no future visitor would be inclined to erase the inscription. When the war is over this will be an interesting reminder of her visitors.

This morning I was ready to start for Antwerp. My *laisser-passer* had been promised for ten o'clock. When it did not come by that hour, I went up to see Baron von der Lancken who had agreed to attend to the matter. He received me most graciously, told me how delighted he was to see me, how it pleased him to see that we came to him with our little troubles, etc. He kept off the subject of the *laisser-passer* as long as he could, but when he could stave it off no longer he said that he

must ask me to see von Herwarth, who had been placed in charge of all matters regarding passports, etc. I made a blue streak over to Herwarth's office, and saw him after a little delay. He kept me as long as he could, and told me all that he knew about the war and perhaps a great deal more. When we got down to the subject of my visit he said that von der Lancken was mistaken, that passports could be granted only by Colonel von Claer who had his office about a block away. I began to smell a rat about this time, but kept plugging away. I spent an hour and a quarter in the antechamber of the Colonel, being unable to get to him or to any of his officers. It was all part of a game. Both von der Lancken and Herwarth harped upon the danger of the trip to Antwerp, advised against it and told how terribly they would feel if anything were to happen to me. I asked each of them point blank if they contemplated an attack while I was there. They both avoided the subject, but said that with the situation as it was now it was impossible to tell from one moment to another what might happen. I saw that they were undecided about what was going to happen next, and that until they did know they did not intend to let me go. They naturally do not wish to have anything happen to me or anyone else connected with the Legation, so I feel entirely safe about going.

After lunch I went back to the siege and stayed until my friend, the Colonel, left by the fire-escape or some equally desperate way so as to avoid seeing me.

Von der Goltz had sent word to the Minister that he was coming here for tea this afternoon, and wanted to meet the Spanish Minister. That was our opportunity, and the Minister was all primed with what he was to say to the old chap. They beat us to it, however. The problem had evidently been decided since I saw von der Lancken in the morning, for he greeted me with the news, that the *laisser-passer* would be around in the course of the evening. He added that the General was anxious to send one of the Belgian Ministers of State to Antwerp, and would appreciate it if I would

take him with me. He is Count de Woeste., the man who has always fought against having an army, on the ground that Belgium was so fully guaranteed by her treaties that it was unnecessary. Baron von der Lancken says that they will make out a *laisser-passer* on which he will be included, and that the military authorities will mark out the route by which we had best go, so as to avoid running into trouble. I imagine it will take us by way of Termonde and St. Nicolas.

The crowd that came to tea included von der Goltz Pacha, Baron von der Lancken, Herr von Sandt, and Count Ortenburg---a scion of a mediatised Bavarian family. They told us of all the glorious triumphs of the German army, and of the terrible drubbing that was in store for their enemies. They stayed on for about an hour.

When they left, I escorted the old man to his car. Before he climbed in, he looked me over curiously and remarked: "*Tiens, c'est fous qui faites ce foyage a Anfers! Fous afez peaucoup de gourage. Che tâcherai d'arranger un petit entr'acte pour fous être agreable. Mais il vaut referin aussitot gue bossible!*" They evidently intend to hold off for a day to await certain developments, and I am to get the benefit of the delay.

The Marshal also told us that Maubeuge had fallen, and that they had made forty-five thousand prisoners. It seems almost incredible that the French and English would have left that many men at Maubeuge when they knew that it was bound to fall.

Perhaps we shall find that this is not altogether accurate. They say nothing about what is happening in Austria. The news from England and Antwerp is to the effect that the Russians are giving the Austrians a hard time of it.

This afternoon the German headquarters issued an order prohibiting the bringing of newspapers to Brussels from the outside world, and announcing that any one who brings newspapers here or is found with papers in his possession will be severely punished. Two German papers will be distributed by the authorities, and everything else is taboo. They evidently intend that their own version of passing events shall be the only one to get out here.

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://idesetautres.be/upload/19140908%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO.pdf>

French version :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/19140908%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%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)