

Brussels, September 19, 1914. --- This morning our Vice-Consul came in from Ghent bringing with him a pouch and a huge bag of letters and telegrams. These had been got through to him from Antwerp yesterday, and he made a run through the lines early this morning, having been turned back several times on account of small engagements between Belgian and German outposts.

This morning a Dutchman came in to see me, and after showing me a lot of papers, to establish that he was somebody entirely different, told me that he was a British spy. He then launched into a long yarn about his travels through the country and the things he had seen, unloading on me a lot of military information or misinformation that he seemed anxious to have me understand. After he had run down I asked why he had honoured me with his confidence, and was somewhat startled to have him answer that he had no way of getting it out and thought that inasmuch as we were charged with the protection of British interests I might have an opportunity to pass it on where it would do the most good. He seemed rather pained at my remarks, and was most reproachful when I threw him out on his head. Yes, my shrewd friend, it has also occurred to me that he may have been a German spy just trying to find out whether we were indulging in dirty work. It would not be the first time that that sort of thing was tried on us.

Monseigneur N----- came around this afternoon and asked me to take him to Antwerp on my next trip. I told him that I could not, as I had already promised to take some other people, and that my car would be full. He said that he had his own car, and that he would ask me to convoy him; he had heard that I had "*beaucoup de bravourr, tandis que moi je n'ai pas de bravourrrr et j'aimerais me mettre sous votre protection.*" I sent him to see von der Lancken, and he came back in a little while to say that he was told that the only safe way was to go by Namur, Liège and Holland, entering Antwerp from the north. He evidently insisted on a perfectly safe

route, that could be guaranteed, and they told him a story that they thought would dissuade him from making the trip. They do not like to have a lot of people coming and going.

We have no more news from the outside world; the battle still rages all along the line in France (according to what we hear), but we have no inkling as to whether the German retreat still continues. The only thing we are told at headquarters is that the outcome is as yet undecided, but that the Germans are in a favourable position, and that they will be victorious in a few days. I would give a good deal for a little real news as to how things are going.

This morning Major Langhorne, our Military Attaché from Berlin, breezed in upon us. He is travelling around with six other Military Attachés, seeing as much of the field of operations as the German officer who personally conducts them will permit. They got in this morning, and left about one, so we had only a few minutes' visit, and he carried off all our good wishes and New York papers.

The German *affiche* of yesterday, ordering the Belgian flags taken down, has made everybody furious. and for a time we thought there might be trouble. If the flags had been ordered down the day the Germans came in there would not have been half as much resentment, but, on the contrary, they began by proclaiming that the patriotic feelings of the people would be scrupulously respected. Max, the Burgomaster, got out a little proclamation of his own which served to soothe the feelings of the people. After expressing some views as to the German order, he says:

I ask the population of the town to give a fresh example of self-restraint and greatness of soul which it has already so often shown during these sad days.

Let us provisionally accept the sacrifice which is imposed upon us; let us take down our flags in order to avoid conflicts, and patiently await the hour of redress.

Soon flags were coming down all over the city, and there was not a murmur. An hour after Max's proclamation was posted, however, German soldiers were running about covering them with sheets of white paper. The Military authorities were furious, because Max had intimated in his poster that the present situation would not endure forever, and that the Belgian flag would fly again over Brussels. In their unimaginative way they sent down a squad of soldiers and arrested him. He was taken to headquarters, and brought before von Lüttwitz, who told him that he was to be taken as a prisoner of war to Berlin. Max replied that he bowed before superior force; that he had done what he knew to be necessary for the preservation of order in his city, and that he was ready to accept the consequences of his act; that at any rate he would have the satisfaction of having maintained order here up to the minute that he was sent to Germany, and that he could not be held responsible for what might happen after his departure. General von Lüttwitz sat up and took notice of the last part of this and rushed off to see von der Goltz. In ten minutes he came back and told Max that he was free and that the Field Marshal desired that he should continue to act as Burgomaster as though nothing had happened. Why don't people have a little imagination?

The town is still bottled up, and troops are being marched back and forth across it, as, I believe, purely for the purpose of impressing the population with the belief that they are far more numerous than they really are. Late this afternoon I took a drive to the edge of town, and we were stopped half a dozen times and had our papers examined. From all I can gather it would seem that the Germans are entrenching themselves as solidly as they can so as to be ready to resist another sortie without sustaining the terrible losses they suffered last time. They cannot be very happy

over the way things have been going in France, although they have this afternoon announced a great victory on their right wing.

One of our friends who has just come back from the coast reports that there were a lot of French troops marching through Belgium on their way from Dunkerque to Lille---evidently an attempt to turn the German right wing. We have heard nothing more about it.

The food supply of the country is being rapidly exhausted and there is urgent need for importations. The public knows little about the situation, but a serious shortage threatens and we must have a considerable stock from abroad. The Brussels committee has raised a goodly sum of money and hopes to get food from Holland and England to meet present needs. Similar committees are being formed in other cities, and they, too, will require food from abroad. The local committee has asked Shaler to go to Holland and from there to England to purchase as much food as possible, make arrangements for sending it across the frontier and investigate the chances of getting future supplies. The German authorities have given assurances that they will not requisition any of the supplies imported for the use of the civil population. They are to issue placards signed by the Military Governor ordering the military authorities to respect our purchases. These placards are to be affixed to the cars and barges bringing in the supplies and we are inclined to believe that they will be effective.

After hurried preparation Shaler got away this afternoon with young Couchman by way of Liège. I went out to lunch with him and see him off. It is not an easy task he has ahead, but he went to it with a good heart.

Yesterday evening the Minister had an interview with Baron von der Lancken about the question of my making a statement as to what I saw at Louvain. I naturally am

very reluctant to be brought into the affair, but the Germans have been very insistent, and finally von der Lancken said that he was confident that if he could talk with me for a few minutes he could arrange the matter to the satisfaction of everybody. He asked that I go to see him at the Ministry at half past six. I hurried home and dressed for dinner, so as to be able to go straight to Mrs. Z.'s, and then run over to the Ministry on the minute. The office of von der Lancken was dark and empty. I waited in the chilly corridors for twenty minutes and then went my way.

This morning one of his minions was here on another matter and I took occasion to mention the fact that he had not been there when I called. He came right back with the statement that they had come back from the field particularly early, on my account, and had waited for me in vain for nearly an hour. I assured them that I had been there on the minute and had been in the office, and that there was no one there. Mystery! By way of clinching it I said that the office was dark as the tomb. Then a ray of light struck the German, and he said: "Oh, I see, you came at half past six, Belgian time! Of course von der Lancken expected you at half past six, German time!!!" When he asked me when I would call I felt inclined to set eleven in the morning and then wander over at three in the afternoon, with the statement that, of course, I did everything according to New York time.

I had an hour's talk with von der Lancken about noon, and finally got off without testifying, which is a great comfort to me. He knew from their own troops that I had been in Louvain during the fighting, and had already reported that to Berlin. I finally prevailed upon him to let it go at that.

After we had settled our business, von der Lancken talked to me for half an hour or so about the war in general. He said they had just received a telegram that Reims is in flames, cathedral and all. It is a terrible thing to think of, and I suppose may turn

out to be another Louvain before we get through. Von der Lancken explained it on the ground that French troops had come up and occupied the town, and that it was necessary to take it by storm---that troops could never operate against a position of that sort until artillery had cleared the way. I don't know just how far that sort of an explanation explains.

The Germans got out an *affiche* of news this morning, stating that "*les troupes Allemands ont fait des progrès sur certains points.*" It does not sound very enthusiastic.

People coming in from Mons and Charleroi yesterday and to-day say that the German rear guard has fallen back on villages near those places and ordered the inhabitants to leave; the idea evidently being that they are preparing to resist any further advance of the allies.

After lunch, Baron de Menten de Horne was brought into the Legation again. The Germans seem anxious to get rid of him, and have finally turned him loose. I cannot very well make out their object in setting him free without getting a German officer in exchange, but they were keen to get him off their hands and wanted us to take cognisance of the fact that they had accorded him his liberty. This we have done. I shall be curious to see whether there is any sequel to this case.

Late this afternoon we got a telegram from the Consul at Liège. stating that Shaler and Couchman had been arrested in that city because they were carrying private letters to be posted when they got to England. They had taken a certain number of letters, all of them open and containing nothing but information as to the welfare of individuals here. They were on a mission of interest to the German authorities---getting foodstuffs to prevent a famine here. The Minister got off an urgent telegram to the Consul to get to work and have them released, and also saw von der Lancken

about it, with the result that the wires are hot. I hope to hear to-night that they are free. These are parlous times to be travelling with correspondence.

I may have to get away any minute for Antwerp, to see if we cannot arrange to get flour down here for the city. There is enough for only a few days now, and there will be trouble when the bread gives out.

We have now been charged with Japanese interests; that makes six Legations we have to look after.

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/19140919%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO.pdf>

French version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140919%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20FR.pdf>

Original Spanish version about Adolphe MAX :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140916%20PAYRO%20UN%20CIUDADANO%20EL%20BURGOMAESTRE%20MAX.pdf>

French version about Adolphe MAX :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19140916%20PAYRO%20UN%20CIUDADANO%20EL%20BURGOMAESTRE%20MAX%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