

**Brussels, October 14, 1914.** - We are quite up in the air about what we are to do next. Monday afternoon I went around to headquarters to get a *laisser-passer* to take Harold Fowler back to England. While the matter was being attended to, an officer came in and told me that Baron von der Lancken wanted very much to see me. When I went into his room, he said that there was nothing in particular that he wanted to see me about, but that he thought I would be interested in hearing the news and in telling him something of my trip. We talked along for some time about things in general, and then he told me that the movement of troops toward the coast was progressing rapidly and that the Belgian Government would soon be driven from the country. Then putting the tips of his fingers together and looking me coyly in the eye, he inquired: "And then my dear colleague, what will be your position?" He elaborated by pointing out that the Government, to which we are accredited, having left the country, we would be merely in the position of foreigners of distinction residing here, and that we would have no official rank or standing. The idea evidently is that they do not care to have us around any longer than they can help.

I later learned that Villalobar had been more ready than I with his retort. In the course of a call later in the afternoon, Lancken had talked the same matter over with him, and had wound up with the same genial question: "And then my dear colleague, what will be your position?" Without any hesitation, Villalobar replied: "My situation will be just the same as yours. We are both representatives of our country in a country not our own. We shall continue to owe each other respect, and to make the best of conditions."

The latest news we have this afternoon is to the effect that the Government has been driven from Ostend, presumably to the Isle of Guernsey. It would be pleasant, in a

way, to retire to a retreat of that sort for a few months' rest, but I fear there is nothing of that sort in store.

To-day I ran across an order from the Governor-General forbidding civilians to ride bicycles. The order concludes as follows:

Civilians who, in spite of this, continue to ride bicycles, expose themselves to being shot by German troops.

If a cyclist is suspected of planning to damage railroad, telegraph or telephone lines, or of the intention of attacking German troops, he will be shot according to martial law.

Apparently it is no longer necessary to go through the forms of proving that the cyclist had any evil intention. The mere suspicion is enough to have him shot.

In the course of a visit to General von Lüttwitz to-day, one of the colleagues remarked that the Germans must keep the Belgians alive, and could not allow them to starve. Lüttwitz was not at all of that mind, for he said with some show of feeling:

"The allies are at liberty to feed the Belgians. If they don't, they are responsible for anything that may happen. If there are bread riots, the natural thing would be for us to drive the whole civil population into some restricted area, like the Province of Luxembourg, build a barbed wire fence around them, and leave them to starve in accordance with the policy of their allies."

And as the German policy is more or less frankly stated as a determination to wipe out as many of the enemy as possible without regard to what is or has been considered as permissible, it is quite within the realm of possibility that they would

be prepared to let the Belgian people starve. In any event, you can't gamble with the lives of seven millions of people when all you have to go on is the belief that Germany will be guided by the dictates of humanity.

Fowler was to have left yesterday morning, and had engaged a seat in a new motor that is being run out by way of Maestricht. It was to have called at my house at seven o'clock yesterday morning, and we were up and about bright and early. We waited until a little after nine, when Eugène turned up to say that the chauffeur had been arrested and put in jail for having carried correspondence and having been caught nosing around one of the forts at Liège. The service is now suspended, and we don't see any prospect of his getting off before Friday, when we are sending a courier to the Legation at The Hague.

Yesterday afternoon we went up to Antwerp to see how our old motor-car was getting along. It was out of whack, and we were obliged to get another to come back to Brussels. I took the big car and organised an expedition of Monsieur de Leval, Fowler and a German official named Conrad, who went along to help us over the rough places. It is the first time for weeks that the direct route has been feasible.

I have had enough of ruined towns, and was not able to get the awful sights out of my head all night, but spent my time in bad dreams. From Vilvorde right into Antwerp there is not a town intact. Eppeghem, Sempst, Malines Waehlem, Berchem---all razed to the ground. In Malines a good part of the town is standing and I suppose that the Cathedral can be restored, but the other towns are done for. There were practically no civilians in any of them---a few poor peasants poking dismally about in the ruins, trying to find some odds and ends that they could save from the general wreck. There were some children sitting on the steps of deserted

houses and a few hungry dogs prowling around, but no other signs of life. All the way from the outskirts of Brussels straight through to Antwerp, the road was lined with empty bottles. They gave a pretty good idea of what had gone on along the line of march.

The bombardment of Antwerp lasted from the afternoon that we left up to Friday noon. The damage is pretty evenly distributed. Houses here and there in every street were badly smashed and the whole block across the street from the Hôtel St. Antoine, where we stayed, was burned to the ground. The Cathedral was not damaged.

When we were there last week, the streets were thronged with people and with motors. Yesterday there was not a soul to be seen for blocks together. The town was practically deserted.

The garage where I had left my car had been taken over by the military authorities. The car was put away on the second floor undamaged, but also unrepaired, so we shall have to wait until things settle down a little and---we can get some work done. I shall have to go back to Antwerp a little later and attend to that. There is some comfort in the fact that the car has not been smashed.

This morning the Committee for the Provisioning of Brussels came in, and asked whether I was prepared to go to London for them and endeavour to arrange for some sort of permanent agreement with the British Government for the provisioning of the civilian population of Belgium. I am willing.

In the course of some errands this afternoon, I dropped in on Baronne Lambert for a cup of tea. The Baron came in and then Villalobar. About two minutes later, Lambert was called out of the room to speak with a German officer, who demanded

that he accompany him to headquarters. Villalobar went with him to see what was up, and I stayed behind to see if I could be of any use. We stood by for a little over half an hour, and then when Mme. Lambert could stand it no longer, I jumped in my car and went down to see what was happening. I found Villalobar on the sidewalk, getting into his car. He was depressed and said that he had been obliged to leave the Baron with the Germans; that he was suspected of nobody would say what, and that the Germans were going to search the house. I went back and had them all ready for the shock of the invasion. They were standing by for the search party, when in walked the Baron, smiling broadly. They had sent him home under guard of two armed men, and were to search the house in the course of a few minutes. While he was telling about it, two officers arrived, profusely apologetic, and asked to be shown over the Red Cross hospital, which had been installed on the ground floor. They were taken all through the place, and found only a lot of German soldiers carrying off the beds and other belongings. Then they searched the Baron's private office and that of his son, and withdrew after more excuses.

There was nothing to show for the whole performance, and nothing had been accomplished beyond making a lot of people nervous and apprehensive. That is the sort of thing that everybody is subject to these days, without any hope of redress. And, of course, this was the least serious thing that could happen.

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/19141012%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO.pdf>

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19141013%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO.pdf>

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19141014%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO.pdf>

French version :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19141012%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20FR.pdf>

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19141013%20PAYRO%20DIARIO%20DE%20UN%20TESTIGO%20FR.pdf>

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/19141014%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%20guerre\\_de\\_Paul\\_Max\\_bdef.pdf](http://www.museedelavilledebruxelles.be/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/Fichier_PDF/Fonte/Journal_de%20guerre_de_Paul_Max_bdef.pdf)