

**Brussels, Christmas, 1914.** --- This is the weirdest Christmas that ever was---with no one so much as thinking of saying "Merry Christmas." Everything is so completely overshadowed by the war, that had it not been for the children, we should have let it go unnoticed.

Yesterday evening there was a dinner at the Legation---Bicknell, Rose and James, the Hoovers and Frederick Palmer. Although there was a bunch of mistletoe over the table, it did not seem a bit Christmasy, but just an ordinary good dinner with much interesting talk.

Immediately after lunch we climbed into the big car and went out to Lewis Richards' Christmas tree. He has a big house at the edge of town, with grounds which were fairy-like in the heavy white -frost. He had undertaken to look after 660 children, and he did it to the Queen's taste. They were brought in by their mothers in bunches of one hundred, and marched around the house, collecting things as they went. In, one room each youngster was given a complete outfit of warm clothes. In another, some sort of a toy which he was allowed to choose. In another, a big bag of cakes and candies, and, finally, they were herded into the big dining-room, where they were filled with all sorts of Xmas food. There was a big tree in the hall, so that the children, in their triumphal progress, merely walked around the tree. Stevens had painted all the figures and the background of an exquisite *crèche*, with an electric light behind it, to make the stars shine. The children were speechless with happiness, and many of the mothers were crying as they came by.

Since the question of food for children became acute here, Richards has been supplying rations to the babies in his neighbourhood. The number has been steadily increasing. and for some time he has been feeding over two hundred youngsters a

day. He has been very quiet about it, and hardly anyone has known what he was doing.

It is cheering to see a man who does so much to comfort others; not so much because he weighs the responsibility of his position and fortune, but because he has a great-hearted sympathy and instinctively reaches out to help those in distress. Otherwise the day was pretty black, but it did warm the cockles of my heart to find this simple American putting some real meaning into Christmas for these hundreds of wretched people. He also gave it a deeper meaning for the rest of us.

### **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 :

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<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/191412J%20PAYRO%20PEREGRINACION%20A%20LAS%20RUINAS.pdf>

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French version :

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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*) :

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