

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

**Brand WHITLOCK**

### Chapter **XXXIII**. The press-gangs : **Mothers**.

(...) I often thought, yield to the constant and importunate temptation to cry out against it, in some hot flash of rage and indignation, to have done with the too polite expressions of diplomacy, to call things, for once in the world, by their right name, and, when one meant **slavery** to say **slavery** instead of deportation. (...) (page 269)

There was another protest, addressed to the American Minister at Brussels, the most touching in many respects of all, because it was signed by authorised representatives of all the women's societies in Belgium. It spoke out of the hearts of the mothers of the land (note 9, page 342) and represented a refined culture beyond the imagination of the power whose cruelties it condemned.

These protests themselves tell the whole story of the shameless and wicked business, and I have given perhaps, in dwelling so long on personal events of far less importance than the great tragedy to which they were ancillary, some glimpses of what was going on in those obscure villages where the slave-gangs were plying their hideous and heinous trade. We ourselves had had,

indeed, only glimpses, for news, when it dealt with German deeds, travelled slowly and circumspectly in Belgium in those days, and the details were long in reaching us. They came in slowly, bit by bit, and even then did not tell half of the dreadful story that some day will be told in Belgium.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

**Translation :**

To His Excellency Mr. Brand Whitlock,  
Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary  
of the United States of America.

Brussels, November 18, 1916.

Mr. Minister :

From the depths of our well of misery our supplications rise to you.

In addressing ourselves to you we denounce to your Government, as well as to the women of the nation which you represent in our midst, our sisters, the criminal abuse of force of which our unhappy and defenseless people is a victim.

Since the beginning of this atrocious war we have looked, impotently and with our hearts torn with every sorrow, at terrible events that put our civilization back into the age of the barbarian hordes.

Mr. Minister, the crime that is now being committed under your eyes, the deportation of thousands of men compelled to work on enemy

soil against the interests of their country, can not find any shadow of excuse on the ground of military necessity, for it constitutes a violation by force of a sacred right of human conscience.

Whatever be the motive it can not be admitted that citizens be compelled to work directly or indirectly for the enemy against their brothers who are fighting.

The Convention of The Hague has consecrated this principle.

Nevertheless the occupying Power is forcing thousands of men to this monstrous extremity which is contrary to morals and to international law; these men who have already been taken to Germany and those who to-morrow will undergo the same fate if, from the outside, from Europe and from the United States, as neutrals, no help is offered.

Oh ! The Belgian women have also known how to carry on their duty in the hour of danger; they have not weakened the courage of the soldiers of honour by their tears ; they have bravely given to their country those whom they loved. The blood of mothers is flowing on the battlefield.

Those who are taken away to-day do not go to carry on our duty of glory. They are slaves in chains, who, in a dark exile, threatened by hunger, prison, death, will be called upon to perform the most odious work, service to the enemy against the native land.

The mothers can not stand by while such an abomination is taking place without making heard their voices in protest.

They are not thinking of their own sufferings, the abandonment and the misery in which they are to be placed with their children.

They address you in the name of the inalterable rights of honour and conscience.

It is said that women are "*all-powerful suppliants*";

We venture to make use of this word, Mr. Minister, to extend our hands to you and to address to your country a last appeal.

We trust that in reading these lines you will feel at each word the unhappy heart-beats of the Belgian women and will find in your broad and human sympathy imperative reasons for intervention.

The united will of the neutral peoples, energetically expressed, alone can counterbalance that of the German authorities.

This assistance which the neutral nations can, and therefore must, lend us — will it be refused to the oppressed Belgians ?

Pray accept, Mr. Minister, the homage of our most distinguished consideration.

Baroness C. de Broqueville,  
Countess Jeanne de Mérode,  
Madame Charles Graux.

Representatives of all the Women's Societies in  
Belgium

**(Twenty four signatures)**

Pour l'Union Patriotique des Femmes belges, Jane Brigode.

Pour le Féminisme chrétien de Belgique, Louise Van Den Plas.

Pour la Fédération des Femmes catholiques, H. de Trooz.

Pour l'Assistance Discrète, Comtesse de Grunne.

Pour le Secrétariat général des Syndicats féminins chrétiens de Belgique, Victoire Cappel.

Pour la Ligue Constance Teichmann, M. Baert.

Pour les Arts de la Femme, M. Philippson.

Pour le Comptoir de l'Oeuvre du Travail, C. Meeûs Male.

Pour la Fédération nationale des institutrices chrétiennes de Belgique, Gabrielle Fontaine.

Pour le Comité National des Fédérations des Cercles de Fermières de Belgique, Baronne Rotsart de Hertaing.

Pour l'Union des Anciennes Elèves de l'Ecole Normale de la Ville de Bruxelles, B. Leysens.

Pour la Ligue belge du Droit des Femmes, Marie Parent.

Pour le Comité des Dames patronnesses de la Ligue nationale belge contre la Tuberculose, Comtesse John D'Oultremont.

Pour les Femmes socialistes belges, Maria Tillemonde.

Pour l'Alliance des Femmes contre l'Abus de l'Alcool, A. Boch.

Pour l'Union des Femmes belges contre l'Alcoolisme, Laure Levoz Hauzeur.

Pour la Ligue des Femmes chrétiennes, Marquise du Chasteler.

Pour l'Oeuvre des patronages de Jeunes Filles, Baronne Hermann de Woelment.

Pour le "*Boerinenbond*" Belge, M. Lemaire.

Pour l'Entr'Aide, Comité d'Assistance d'Oeuvres sociales, Madame Léo Errera.

Pour le patronage "*Réunions Amicales*", Comtesse Hélène Goblet d'Alviella.

Pour l'Union Post-Scolaire de l'Ecole Mayenne C (filles), L. E. Carter.

Pour les Cercles d'études féminines de Belgique, Madeleine de Roo.

Pour le Lyceum, Marthe Boel de Kerchove de Desterghem.

### Footnotes.

*Belgium under the German Occupation : A Personal Narrative* ; London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919, 2 volumes. See chapter (« The Press-gangs», sometimes with title « *Documents in evidence* » in other editions), volume **2**, pages 268-344 (**76** pages). About this letter and the English translation : pages 342-344 (**Very partial**) French translation : «*Les enlèvements*» in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre XXVI (1916) in *La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles* ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 383-391.

It would be 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)

It would also be interesting compare with what [Louis GILLE](#), [Alphonse OOMS](#) et [Paul DELANDSHEERE](#) told about the same days in *50 mois d'occupation allemande* (Volume 2 : 1916) :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>

It would also be interesting compare with what Charles TYTGAT told about the same days in *Journal d'un journaliste. Bruxelles sous la botte allemande* :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/?p=ides&mod=iea&smod=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>