

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XLV. The arrest of the burgomaster.

WHILE we were engaging in the first negotiations for the revictualling of Belgium another curious and complicated series of events was mounting to the climax that had been inevitable from the beginning ; the *duel d'esprit* between the Burgomaster and the Germans was rapidly approaching an acute phase. When M. Max's *affiche* asking his *chers citoyens* to make one further sacrifice, to take down their flags and to await the hour of reparation, was covered that night with white paper by the military authorities, this did not close the incident, for M. Max was arrested by the German authorities. The Commandant of the Place, Major Bayer, had appeared at the Hôtel de Ville with four German soldiers and informed him that he was under arrest.

" *Je m'incline,*" the Burgomaster replied ; and so went *en galant homme*, to be informed that he was a prisoner and would be sent to Germany.

M. Max bowed. He said :

"I regret, of course, that I cannot continue to discharge my duties to the end, but I must submit. However, I have the satisfaction of having done my duty. You told me at the beginning that you wished to avoid trouble and difficulty in Brussels ; I know the temper of my people better than you do, and if I had not interposed myself between you and the population of Brussels we should have had bloodshed here. Therefore I cannot regret having done what I did. I am glad, too, that up to this time, when my authority ends, we have had peace here. Now that you have made me prisoner, I find a certain relief in the fact that I shall not be responsible for what occurs hereafter."

General von Lüttwitz started ; he had not foreseen such a result. He said, "*Wait a minute*", and went away. At the end of a quarter of an hour he came back, having seen the Pasha ; he extended his hand to the Burgomaster and said :

"You are free."

The story got abroad ; M. Max expressed the resistance of the proud old city. People could liken him to St. Michael, the city's patron saint, with the dragon beat down under his feet, just as he stands for ever on the tower of the Hôtel de Ville. The town burst suddenly forth into admiration ; everywhere, there were little plaster busts and pictures of the Burgomaster, growing very popular — too popular, I feared, in my walks through the charming old streets that twisted about in the lower town, for to an old head used to politics, which are everywhere the world over the same in essence, this phenomenon had a meaning and a danger too apparent.

On the afternoon of September 26, going from the bookstalls quite deserted then — in the Galerie Borthier to the Galeries St.-Hubert, where there were more life and movement, I saw, in the Rue de l'Écuyer, a new *affiche*, and stopped to read it :

PUBLICATION

Le gouvernement allemand avait ordonné le paiement des bons de réquisition, supposant à bon droit que la ville aurait payé volontairement l'entièreté de la contribution de guerre qui lui avait été imposée.

Ce n'est qu'à cette condition que le traitement de faveur peut être justifié dont la ville de Bruxelles a joui, à la différence de toutes les autres villes de Belgique, lesquelles ne verront les bons de réquisition remboursés qu'après la conclusion de la paix.

Etant donné que l'administration communale de Bruxelles refuse le versement du restant de la contribution de guerre, aucun bon de réquisition ne sera plus payé à partir de ce jour par la caisse gouvernementale.

Le Gouverneur militaire, BARON VON LÜTTWITZ,

BRUXELLES, le 24 septembre 1914. *

Général-Major.

The announcement bore an immense significance which was not; perhaps, instantly realized by the small group that so idly perused it. The people did not, I fancied — all of them, at least — feel its dark presentiment of impending evil. I hastened home to the Legation.

On August 24 Burgomaster Max and General von Jarotsky had had *pourparlers* as to the fifty millions of francs which the Germans had demanded from the city. M. Max had declared, as he had told Von Jarotsky in the presence of Villalobar and me, that he could not procure the entire sum. However, he agreed to try to procure a million and a half, and within eight days following eighteen millions and a half; and he tried to induce Von Jarotsky to reduce the sum demanded to twenty millions. Von Jarotsky said that he had no power to do this, but he promised to use his influence with the superior officers of the army to have it done as soon as the twenty millions had been paid. The contribution, as it was so politely termed — war having need of so many euphemisms! — was subsequently reduced to forty-five million francs.

The General also agreed, at the request of the Burgomaster, that for eight days the German authorities would make no further requisitions of food or provisions, either in the city or in its *faubourgs*. This agreement was drawn up on August 25, 1914, signed by Von Jarotsky and the Burgomaster, and witnessed by Grabowsky, the *conseiller aulique* of the German Legation. And the very next day a German general passing through Brussels told the Burgomaster that he would not observe this convention unless M. Max made it possible for him to bring at once by railroad from Saint-Trond, a place north-east of Brussels, some stores of food and provisions that he had there. M. Max wrote a protest to Von Jarotsky insisting that the convention had been made without condition, and that for a German general to introduce a condition later was to break the given word and destroy confidence in a contract regularly signed by the German Government.

And again on the 27th, two days after the agreement made by Von Jarotsky to the effect that there would be no more requisitions for eight days, a superior officer, sent by a general in charge of an army fifty kilometres from Brussels, came to the Hôtel de Ville and ordered M. Max to furnish him with fifty pounds of yeast. M. Max again invoked the convention, but this general said that he was not bound by Von Jarotsky's word.

In the meantime M. Max had succeeded in obtaining a respite of thirty days for the payment of the forty-five million francs. It had been decided among the delegates of the various communes of the *Agglomération Bruxelloise* (Greater Brussels comprises fifteen communes, each with its Burgomaster, but the Burgomaster of the old historic Brussels has always been considered as the titular head of the whole city) that the commune of Brussels would pay twenty millions and the other communes thirty millions divided among them *pro rata* to their population. The city — that is, the commune of Brussels proper — made its payment regularly, and when September 30 came there were only 4.400.000 francs left for the city to pay. The suburban communes had not succeeded in raising their thirty millions, and the commune of Brussels itself did not possess the funds necessary to pay the part of the other communes.

On September 26, then, Baron von Lüttwitz published the *affiche* set out above. Following this and in reply to it, M. Max wrote to M. Dufaire, the director of the Deutsche Bank in Brussels, that the certificates of indebtedness which the city had given to the German authorities could not be paid on the 30th, and that he did this as a *riposte* to the Governor-General's publication.

When I returned to the Legation that evening Villalobar was waiting there to see me. We had chatted a little while when the *échevins*, Jacqmain and Steens, were announced, and M. Jacqmain came down the corridor swiftly, his dark face darker still in the stress of a vivid emotion.

"*Mauvaises nouvelles !*", he exclaimed as he entered the room. "*Max a été arête !*" He sank into a chair, wellnigh overcome ; he was perhaps the Burgomaster's closest friend.

M. Max had been arrested at 2.30 in the afternoon while at a reunion of the delegates of the *Agglomération Bruxelloise*, which was discussing the measures to be taken in view of a situation that was growing more and more alarming. Oil was difficult to obtain ; the municipal gas and electric-light plants would soon have to cease their production because coal was growing scarce ; the bakeries could no longer bake bread. It was difficult to get coal to Brussels, the railways having been taken by the German authorities for their own uses ; the canal to Charleroi was being repaired and was no longer navigable ; horses, wagons, all had been requisitioned ; the only means of transport that remained was the *tramway vicinal* — what we should call an inter-urban railway. The city fathers were discussing all these problems when a German officer appeared and ordered the Burgomaster to report to the Military Governor. There M. Max was informed that he had been relieved from his functions as Burgomaster and that he would be sent to a fortress in Germany.

At five o'clock that afternoon the *échevins* Jacqmain, Lemonnier, Maes and Steens had gone to see the Military Governor and had told him that all the administrative measures that M. Max had taken had been with the approval and with the accord of the *Collège échevinal*, and insisted that M. Max had not broken any of his pacts with the military authorities, and asked to be arrested with M. Max. General von Lüttwitz produced the letter that the Burgomaster had written to Dufaire of the Deutsche Bank — it was for that that he had been suspended ; he should have written to the authorities, said the General, not to the director of the bank. He asked the *échevins* to assume the direction of affairs of the city ; if they did not do so he would name a

German burgomaster who would take the necessary steps to have the entire amount of the indemnity of war paid. M. Jacquain proposed to General von Lüttwitz that he be held as hostage in M. Max's place, but this the General, of course, refused. Then they came to the Legation.

Villalobar and I decided to go to General von Lüttwitz, asking the *échevins* to await our return. It was half-past seven o'clock, already dark, and a chill wind blowing.

At the old Ministry for Foreign Affairs there were signs of perturbation and ill-humour ; the sentinels were nasty ; we had difficulty in getting in. The young *aide* in the ante-room was very truculent, glancing contemptuously at our cards and saying curtly : "*What do you want to see the General for ?*"

Villalobar's Spanish pride bristled at once.

"*Monsieur !*" he said in a tone that might have blasted the young fellow where he stood. The officer handed our cards back to us, saying that the General was at dinner and could not be disturbed: It was difficult to keep one's temper with such a boorish fellow as this youth, and it was unpleasant to adopt in dealing with him the only tone he understood ; perhaps it was because we could not quite do the one that we succeeded so well in doing the other : we told him that we would state our business to no one but the General, and, in short, that we were not accustomed to speaking to aides-de-camp.

A flush of rage reddened the young cheeks that were scarred by the *balafres* of the student duels, but the phrase did its work, and young jackanapes clicked his heels and went in ; came slamming out presently, shouted angrily to us that *Monsieur le Général* wished us to wait, clicked his heels again, and flung out of the room in a fine show of temper.

"*Quelle politesse !*" said the Marquis.

We sat down and waited, cooling our heels if not our tempers, while the General finished his dinner. We waited long. German generals are good trenchermen, and the wine that poor Davignon had left behind in his cellar was excellent. But all things come to an end, and finally the General came in. He had dined well, of course, and we had not dined at all. He came in, very friendly and with a certain loud, laughing geniality, begged our pardon for having kept us waiting, and showed us into his — or into Davignon's — private room. We spoke of the arrest of the Burgomaster.

"*Qu'est-ce que ça peut bien vous faire ?*"

It was, of course, none of our business, as we admitted, but our good offices were at his service in the exigency.

Then he told us the whole story. It was, he said, the third serious difficulty that he had had with M. Max, and when he mentioned M. Max's name he had to restrain his feelings ; he said that the difficulty was that M. Max had been growing too popular and that his popularity had gone to his head, in the intoxicating way that popularity will at times.

"*That man has never written me a letter*", he said, "*in which there was not concealed some sharp-pricking point*", and he gave a vicious stab with his finger in the air to illustrate the effect of M. Max's piquancy.

"I said this to him the other day", he went on, "*Monsieur Max, do you know what I think you are trying to do ? I think you are trying to become the first president of the Belgian Republic !*" "

He spoke then of the first disagreement with M. Max, the affair of the famous *affiche*. "*I had no intention of repeating what Max told me*", he went on, "*but I felt in duty bound to report it to my Government. They told it to the Commandant at Liège, who affixed it.*"

Then he spoke of the next *affiche*, the one concerning the Belgian flags, which was subsequently covered with white paper, and at last came to the case under notice, his own latest *affiche*, and M. Max's letter to Dufaire of the Deutsche Bank.

"*There was nothing left for me to do but to arrest Max*", said General von Lüttwitz. His face grew very hard as he sat there and very red, his grey hair giving him a distinguished look.

"*One or the other must rule here?*" he exclaimed "*he or I, and I am put here to rule. When this house burns I'll burn with it, under the ashes of the door-sill*". He clenched his fist, then gave a rather harsh laugh. We made a last effort to get him to reconsider his decision and to release M. Max, but he shook his head determinedly.

"*He has already been sent away*", he explained. "*I gave him a fine dinner*", he concluded, as though even a burgomaster could ask no more, and relaxed more comfortably in his chair. He added that M. Max would be sent to a fortress at Namur, in honourable confinement.** That seemed to close the incident.

He was prepared for trouble when the fact became known — he had posted guns everywhere ; but he hoped to avoid it. He wished the *échevins* to continue in their functions, and he asked us if we could help him by any suggestions.

"*If the Brussels police continue at their posts and maintain order*", I asked, "*will you leave that work to them ?*"

"Yes", he said. "*If we can keep order for three days the worst will be over.*"

We left him then and returned to my Legation. It was about nine o'clock, and *Messieurs* Jacquain and Steens were still waiting. We asked them to get M. Lemonnier and meet us again at the Legation at half-past ten.

M. Lemonnier was a lawyer in Brussels and the ranking *échevin*. At the time M. Max had been named Burgomaster M. Lemonnier had been indicated, by reason of his length of service, for the post, but M. Max had been chosen instead. There were, therefore, certain points of delicacy in the situation. According to precedent M. Lemonnier, as ranking *échevin*, would become acting-Burgomaster in M. Max's absence, but when he arrived, at the hour fixed, with his colleagues, he was reluctant to assume the duties of *Bourgmestre faisant fonctions* precisely because of the old ambition to fill that very post ; he had a delicacy that did him honour, and a reluctance to seem to profit by the misfortune of his ancient rival. He was a large man and determined, and he seemed fixed in his determination. It was a position, under the circumstances, doubly difficult for him, and one could sympathize with

his reluctance. And yet there were interests at stake larger than any one man's delicacy, however creditable it might be to him ; if local self-government could be maintained, so much at least might be saved,

Sitting there around that long table where so many problems were to be discussed during the troubled months and years of the future that was so kindly hidden from us, my thoughts went suddenly to another city far across the sea, and to its problems, which in coming to Brussels I had too fondly hoped to escape. It was a lucky thought, for all suddenly there flashed into my mind the peculiar coincidence that here was the same old problem that would not down, the old ineluctable struggle of the city to be free. The free city ! And Brussels was one of the oldest free cities in the world !

I leaned forward toward M. Lemonnier. In Belgium there is one chord in every citizen that vibrates instantly to the touch, and that is the chord of the old city spirit. It seemed strange to be stating the argument in another tongue, but I did the best I could, and I said to M. Lemonnier:

"This is not the first time that the city of Brussels has been occupied by a foreign Power. To-day it is the Germans, not so long ago it was the Dutch ; before that it was the French and the Austrians, and the Spaniards." The Marquis smiled and bowed. *"Before that it was the Duke of Brabant with whom you struggled. But during all those occupations, during all those changes, there was one thing that did not change, one flag that always floated over the Hôtel de Ville down there in the Grand' Place : that was the city of Brussels, that flag was the red and green."*

M. Lemonnier did not wait for me to finish ; he leaned forward out of the deep chair where he sat.

"I'll do it !" he said.

And so it was settled. There were a few details to arrange. Would the police obey him ? Yes.

The *échevins* prepared an *affiche* informing the people that the *Collège* would continue in their functions, would maintain order.***

Villalobar and I wrote a note then to Von Lüttwitz asking him to post this *affiche* ; and he thanked us for suggesting it. It was after midnight.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

*** PUBLICATION**

The German Government ordered the payment of *bons de réquisition*, having good reason to suppose that the city would voluntarily pay the whole of the war contribution that had been imposed upon it. It was only on that condition that the exceptional treatment which the city of Brussels has enjoyed could be justified, in contradistinction from all the other cities in Belgium in which the *bons de réquisition* would not be paid until after the conclusion of peace. Now that the city administration of Brussels refuses to turn over the balance of the war contribution, from this day forward no *bons de réquisition* will be paid by the Government treasury.

The Military Governor, BARON von Lüttwitz,

Brussels, September 24, 1914.

Major-General.

**** VILLE DE BRUXELLES**

AVIS

Le bourgmestre Max, ayant fait défaut aux engagements encourus envers le gouvernement allemand, je me suis vu forcé de le suspendre de ses fonctions.
M. Max se trouve en détention honorable dans une forteresse.

Le Gouverneur militaire, BARON VON LÜTTWITZ,

BRUXELLES, le 26 septembre 1914.

Général Major.

BEKANNTMACHUNG

Ich habe mich genötigt gesehen, den Bürgermeister Max wegen dienstwidrigen Verhaltens von seinem Amte zu suspendieren. Er befindet sich in ehrenvoller Haft in einer Festung.

Brüssel, den 26. Septembre 1914.

Der Militär-Gouverneur,

Freiherr von LÜTTWITZ,

Generalmajor.

AVIS

Le Bourgmestre Max, ayant fait défaut aux engagements encourus envers le Gouvernement allemand, je me suis vu forcé de le suspendre de ses fonctions. Monsieur Max se trouve en détention honorable dans une forteresse.

Bruxelles, le 26 septembre 1914.

Le Gouverneur Militaire,

Baron von LÜTTWITZ,

Général.

*** AVIS

Pendant l'absence de M. le bourgmestre Max, la marche des affaires communales et le maintien de l'ordre seront assurés par le Collège échevinal.

Dans l'intérêt de la cité, nous faisons un suprême appel au calme et au sang-froid de nos concitoyens, Nous comptons sur le concours de tous pour assurer le maintien de la tranquillité publique.

BRUXELLES, le 27 septembre 1914.

LE COLLÈGE ECHEVINAL

<p>ADMINISTRATION COMMUNALE DE BRUXELLES</p> <hr/> <p>AVIS</p> <p>Pendant l'absence de Monsieur le Bourgmestre Max, la marche des affaires communales et le maintien de l'ordre seront assurés par le Collège échevinal.</p> <p>Dans l'intérêt de la Cité, nous faisons un suprême appel au calme et au sang-froid de nos concitoyens. Nous comptons sur le concours de tous pour assurer le maintien de la tranquillité publique.</p> <p>Bruxelles, le 27 septembre 1914.</p> <p>Le Collège Echevinal.</p> <p><small>Bruxelles. — Typ. et lith. E. GUYOT, rue Pachéco, 12.</small></p>	<p>GEMEENTEBESTUUR VAN BRUSSEL</p> <hr/> <p>BERICHT</p> <p>Gedurende de afwezigheid van den Heer Burge-meester Max, zullen de gemeentezaken bestuurd en de orde gehandhaafd worden door het Schepencollege.</p> <p>In het belang der Stad, doen wij een hoogst-dringend beroep op de kalmte en de koelbloedig-heid onzer medeburgers. Wij rekenen op de medewerking van allen om het behouden der openbare rust te verzekeren.</p> <p>Brussel, den 27^e September 1914.</p> <p>Het Schepencollege.</p> <p><small>Brussel. — Boek- en steendrukkerij E. GUYOT, Pachecostraat, 12.</small></p>
---	--