

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

### Chapter LXXIV. Escaping at the frontier.

IT was indeed difficult even for that hope which is an element of the phenomenon of spring, working mysteriously in man as a part of nature, to preserve itself animate in such an atmosphere. It was as though the atmosphere had been poisoned by those gas-bombs of which we were just beginning to hear. We heard of these first from the Germans themselves, who on April 10 posted an *affiche* stating that the French were employing a new kind of bomb containing an asphyxiating gas which rendered its victims insensible. The Germans were pained and surprised, even horrified ; they said that it was barbarous for the French to do such a thing. Then three weeks later, on April 28, we read in the newspapers that came in from the outside the accounts of the asphyxiating bombs used by the Germans at Hill 60 near Ypres — for the first time, I believe, in human history. Not only was there the constant outrage of that sense of justice which lives in most men who have known liberty, but there was every day some new and concrete instance of injustice, or, if not always that, of indelicacy, which, according to Talleyrand, is worse than crime.

Nothing was too small, too petty, for the official notice of the Government of Occupation. It had the notion, everywhere the mark of immature development, that every inexact statement, no matter how trivial, must be pursued and hunted down. It spent much time in denials and explanations ; long, elaborate, puerile discussions were posted on the walls and published in the censored Press. *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*. When the American newspapers published a story to the effect that a German officer in a Brussels restaurant had objected to my speaking English, and that I had risen and with a bow and a flourish handed him my card, precisely, of course, as it would be done in the cinema, the authorities asked me to issue a formal denial and were nonplussed when I declined to do so ; having read Treitschke more deeply than Emerson, they could not understand the attitude.

Some such adventure, indeed, had befallen the American Consul at Ghent, but I told them that Ministers were sometimes confused with Consuls, especially in my country, and that in any event the story was not worth denying ; that in four days it would be forgotten in the new interest that would be taken in a later inexactitude, and that a denial would serve only to introduce it to all those who had not seen the original story.

They found it difficult indeed to understand why the American Government could not control and regulate the American Press ; they frequently asked me if something could not be done, and seemed unable to comprehend when I explained that our Press had no censorship whatever.

"*Freedom !*" said Count H— one day, with a sneer at the word. "*It's not our way ; and as for democracy — we want none of it.*"

One of the members of the Rockefeller Commission, after returning to America, had reported in an interview that at Dinant the German had shot the director or cashier of the Banque Nationale de Belgique and his two sons because they refused to open the safe at the bank. The German authorities, much distressed, reproached me with the

inaccuracy of the statement and wished me to have it denied. I declined, and in their methodical way they proceeded to the denial themselves. A certain German official summoned a responsible official of the Banque Nationale before him and asked :

*"Is it true that the director of the Banque Nationale at Dinant and his two sons were shot by the German soldiers for having refused to open the safe ?"*

Now the fact was, as all Belgium knew, M. Wasseige and his two sons had been shot by German soldiers at Dinant for having refused to open the safe, not of a branch of the Banque Nationale, but of a branch of the Société Générale, of which M. Wasseige was cashier ; the Banque Nationale had no *succursale* at Dinant, and the official under interrogation began to explain this fact and to say that it was the director of the branch of the Société Générale who, with his two sons, had been shot, when the German official interrupted him, refused to accept this response, and told him that he was not to reply beside the question (*à côté de la question*), but was simply to answer, yes or no, the question whether the director of the Banque Nationale at Dinant and his sons had been killed. Limiting the question to that categorical form, the bank official could only reply, of course, that he would have to say no, and the German authorities thereupon sent out this statement to contradict the story that had been published as coming from the Rockefeller Commission.

The German censor seemed to read all the letters in the post. The Political Department complained to me of a letter which the Legation had posted ; it was the most innocent thing imaginable, a response to some inquiry concerning the health of an old lady. And one day an officer actually brought to me a letter written by a clerk in the Legation to a man in Liège, with the objection that there was a statement in the letter that the Germans could not approve ! It was done with apologies, to be sure, but — "*ce sont les militaires qui l'exigent*," the officer explained. The censor for the C.R.B.'s correspondence, Count von Somebody, delivering to Mr. Crosby, the director, a letter which Mr. Crosby's daughter had written to him from Rome, observed :

*"That is a very interesting letter of your daughter's ; I enjoyed reading it."*

Again, my friend Mr. Edward Riley went to the Pass-Zentrale to reclaim a pocket-book which he had inadvertently left there . the day before, and, in asking if it had been found, remarked :

*"There is a letter in it that I prize."*

*"Oh, yes, I know",* the officer said, most politely, *"I read it."*

These were trivialities, but there were other incidents with more formidable consequences. Thus a young girl, the Countess Hélène de Jonghe, who lived across the street from us, a girl of sixteen with her hair still down her back — a mere "*flapper*", as the English would say— walking with some of her young girl companions along the Boulevard du Régent — "*près des écuries de mon roi !*" as she said, with a proud and defiant toss of her head, before a court martial a few days later — saw two German officers.

One of them, the Count Metternich, scion of an old family, had often been in Brussels before the war, and had been a guest in the home of the girl. Seeing him she said to her companions :

*"Voilà encore un sale Prussien !"*

The officer heard the remark, as doubtless it was intended he should, turned, seized the girl by the arm and took her to the Kommandantur, where she was interrogated and released. The next day she was again summoned to the Kommandantur ; a great affair was made of it, and when she went home from the Kommandantur and related her adventure, the old Countess, her grandmother, flamed up and wrote a letter, in no gentle terms, to the German authorities. Then she too was ordered to appear, and, with her little granddaughter, haled before a court martial composed of I know not how many officers, all in uniform and decorations, and there tried.

"*Stand up*" they ordered the grandmother. She refused . . . When asked her name she replied :

*"Je demande de savoir le vôtre"*, and then said to them :

*"Envoyez-moi votre Bissing !"*

There was no lawyer to defend them. The young officer was there as an accuser. He stood behind them, as was the custom for accusing witnesses before the courts martial, and the grandmother reproached him for not facing them. He testified that the girl had called him "*un cochon allemand*."

*"Vous mentez !"* cried the spirited girl.

The dowager was intractable at the trial. When the German officers rose, solemnly held up their right hands to take the oath, she laughed in harsh derision.

*"Ha ha ! ... Le serment allemand !"* she said.

The Germans were of course furious, and she continued to taunt them thus throughout the trial.

One can imagine the scene . . . A bench of German officers in uniforms and decorations, and the elderly Countess, whose husband had been Minister at Vienna in his time, sitting there taunting them, and the little girl, the cause of it all, troubled but courageous, and the young nobleman of the ancient name, much embarrassed by his situation . . .

Hermancito, who always had all the gossip, had heard that the nobleman had not meant to carry the thing so far ; that he had regretted the incident, and indeed tried to have the Countess and the little girl released, but that Von Bissing was determined ; the German uniform had been insulted, it was necessary to make an example, and if the nobleman did not prosecute the business to a conclusion he would be expelled from the officers' club. It was the fetish of militarism ; "*the uniform had been insulted*" ; it was as though an altar had been violated.

And so when the trial was over the girl was condemned to three months' imprisonment in Germany, and her grandmother, the old Countess, to four months.\*

*"C'est monstrueux ! C'est unimaginable !"* exclaimed an old Belgian nobleman who had once been a friend of the German nobleman. His eyes flashed with indignation. The *affaire* was the talk of all Brussels, and was in the newspapers outside. It threatened, indeed, to take on even more formidable

proportions, for the Belgian nobleman wrote a letter to the Count Metternich, forbidding him ever to salute him again in the street, and declaring that any Belgian who even after the war should shake his hand would be guilty of *lèse patriotisme* . . . And furthermore, if he himself was too old to fight for his country as his sons were doing, he was not too old to say to Count Metternich that if he were too cowardly to go down on the firing-line and fight, he might do better than to play the spy on little girls and old ladies in Brussels.

The defiant letter was sent by a messenger. The two Countesses, the old and the young, were taken off to Germany, and it was supposed that the affair was at an end, but no, nothing was ever at an end. A German officer came to notify the Belgian nobleman that he had committed a very grave offence in writing as he had to the Count Metternich ; the *État-Major*, he said, had tried the Count to determine whether he had conducted himself as an officer should, and had decided that he had ; therefore, in criticizing him the Belgian nobleman had reflected on the infallibility, sacredness, or I know not what divine attribute, of the General Staff — and therefore must go to Germany as a prisoner. In the end he did not go, because, I think, though I do not know — such things are profound and complex in their mystery — because when it came to the test the Germans, tremendous snobs in such things, were too much impressed by the exalted rank of the Belgian nobleman to proceed against him.

Whatever one might have thought of the incident, or of the code that makes mountains out of such molehills, there were others of a somewhat similar nature happening all the time. For instance, Madame Lemonnier, the wife of the Burgomaster, walking in the Bois one Sunday afternoon went into the *laiterie* with a number of friends. They took a small table and had ordered their tea, when a young man and a young woman sitting not far away became excited, and the young woman seemed to urge her companion to some action, so that at last he got up and went to the *restaurateur* and complained that Madame Lemonnier was mocking his companion and calling the Germans "*Boches*". The *restaurateur* did nothing, but when Madame Lemonnier went to her home in the Avenue Louise that evening she saw the same young man on the sidewalk before her residence. The next day she was summoned to the Kommandantur and haled before one of the German judges, and ultimately fined fifty francs. And not only this, the condemnation of "the wife of the Burgomaster" was published on all the walls of Brussels by means of a large *affiche*. Of course Madame Lemonnier had said no such thing as the *agent provocateur* attributed to her, but with the system of espionage, denunciations, and the general reign of terror it was what any one who went into a public place was exposed to.

The tram, too, was a place of danger ; the wise kept very still there, were careful not even to jostle a German. A German colonel entered a tram one day, and immediately all the Belgians rose, some going into the second-class compartment, others to the platform, while others got off ; the German who told the story said that the Oberst was very much hurt and surprised. A gentleman mounting a tram encountered a German officer in the doorway ; the officer bowed, gave the Belgian the *pas*, and said :

"Après vous, monsieur."

But the Belgian bowed low, and said :

"Mais non, après vous, monsieur ; je suis chez moi."

The little daughter of a man I knew, a child of ten, walking on the boulevard with her governess, used the word *Boche*, and instantly a man

beside her, a German spy in civil garb, sprang forward and then and there boxed her ears.

And I knew a tradesman in a small way who was standing one afternoon near the Colonne du Congrès gazing idly up at the western sky, where the captive balloon always soared over Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, miles away. One of the swarm of German spies saw him looking at the German balloon and arrested. He was kept a day and a night at the Kommandantur, and his house raided.

Perquisitions were as common as denunciations ; no one's home was safe ; at any moment a squad of soldiers might enter and ransack the house, turn out an the drawers, rummage in all the closets, peer and pry and peep everywhere. Nothing was safe or sacred ; a man's house is not his castle under German rule. We had a neighbour who was denounced for having, or for being suspected of having, letters of a compromising nature. The only thing she had was some topical verses about the German Kaiser, and these were in the *salon*. While the secret agents were hunting through the house her husband came to the door outside, and they went down to arrest him. The lady took advantage of this respite to enter the *salon*, get her doggerel and put it in a room that already had been searched — and so escaped.

A common trick was to appear at the door and ask for means to join the Belgian army ; they came to the Legation often with this ruse. I knew a woman who one morning had a can from a man in miserable clothes ; he asked charity and for means to get away and join the army. She refused him assistance and he went away. But he came back the next day and said :

*" Pour l'amour de Dieu, donnez-moi assez pour aller à Anvers. "*

Touched by pity, she gave him two francs. The next day he returned in a German uniform and arrested her for assisting soldiers to escape, and the poor woman could only say to him :

*" Monsieur, c'est un joli métier le vôtre ! "*

Madame Carton de Wiart, the wife of the Belgian Minister of Justice, had not gone to Antwerp with her husband and the other members of the Government, but had remained behind with her six children and the servants, living on in the ministerial residence when all the other Ministries were occupied by Germans.

This charming woman, with the white hair and the blue eyes and the gracious smile, was to give an example of the fine courage of which women are capable. She used to come occasionally to see us ; she had visited America ; she was fond of it, and had much of its spirit ; she found, to use a phrase of Ibsen's, that "*there a freer air blows over the people*", and she had been so impressed with our system of juvenile courts that, with the infinite toil and patience required to inculcate any new idea anywhere, she had induced their adoption in Belgium. Of indomitable energy, and of strong human sympathies, with deep interest in social amelioration of all sorts, Madame Carton de Wiart had worked incessantly among the poor, and especially among the children of the poor, and after the German occupation she found not only a human but a patriotic solace in these good deeds. She had little time then for social visits, and formal calls were no longer in fashion in Brussels, but she came now and then to the Legation,

generally in the evening after her day's work was done. She used to wear a long black cape, which enveloped her like the cloak of a conspirator. We used, indeed, to rally her about it, and assure her that a garment so mysterious and conspiratorial in appearance would surely bring her trouble.

In the first days of the war, before the German occupation, and at some risk of unpopularity, she had organized a charity for the women and children of the Germans in Brussels. She had gone to distribute food and warm drinks to the refugees there in the *Cirque* those nights when we were shipping off the German refugees to Holland. She had organized soup-kitchens for the poor, *l'Œuvre des Soupes populaires*. Under the occupation she continued to go about in her charitable work, travelling, sometimes on foot, all over Belgium, visiting the poor in the stricken districts, bearing clothing and comforts to them, and what no doubt was more, out of her inexhaustible sympathy, heartening them and keeping up their spirit of passive resistance, a resistance no less to despair than to the invaders and despoilers of the land. She set them an example by her courageous and cheerful attitude.

The Germans naturally did not relish her presence in the only one of the imposing block of Ministries there in the Rue de la Loi that they had not taken over. Every one who entered or left the Ministry was harassed by having to show a *Passierschein* ; spies followed her wherever she went ; three of her children were arrested and taken to the Kommandantur because they wore little medals bearing the portraits of the King and Queen. The Germans tried in every way to induce her to quit the Ministry, but she was oblivious to suggestions, invitations, and even to more pointed observations, and continued to come and go as though there were no Germans in the world — though there were always a guard of them, thirty or more, at her door, and now and then companies of them quartered in her home, sleeping even on the floor of the dining-room. They sent old Grabowsky, *conseiller aulique* of the German Legation, to see her, but Madame Carton de Wiart, who knew the protocol, would not receive him, and told them to send some one of her own rank if they wished to communicate with her. Then they sent the Count d'Ortenburg, of the Governor-General's staff, who was exceedingly polite, but she told him that she would leave her home only as the result of the employment of force.

It was no surprise, then, to Brussels, when one morning early in May it heard that the Ministry of Justice was surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, and that Madame Carton de Wiart was detained at the Kommandantur. On May 4 a perquisition was made at the Ministry of Justice, all her papers seized and translated and studied. The same day she was subjected in the Senate chamber to an interrogation lasting four hours ; the next day she was subjected to another interrogation lasting four hours. She was allowed to return then to her home, but forbidden to leave Brussels, and when she went for a promenade in the Bois she was followed by the police. A few days later she was again interrogated, this time in her own *salon*, and on May 18 she was formally arrested and confined in the Kommandantur, and during vine mortal hours again subjected to an interrogation. The next day there was another interrogation in the Senate chamber lasting five hours. The day following she was taken to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to hear the reading of the formal charges ; the next day there was another interrogatory ordeal lasting three hours, and at six o'clock in the evening of the 18th she was condemned to deportation. The day following she was taken to Berlin and confined in a common prison for female criminals.

We saw Madame Carton de Wiart only once after the proceedings began, and that was one afternoon at the Palais de Glace, in the Rue du Marché-aux-Herbes-Potagères, where there was an exposition, and the Burgomaster of Brussels presented to Villalobar, to Van Vollenhoven, and to me medals of St. Michael, the patron saint of the city. A little girl recited a poem written by Georges Garnir for the occasion, in presenting to my wife, on the part of the school-children of Brussels, a souvenir that recalled the Christmas gifts sent by the American school-children to the Belgians. Madame Carton de Wiart was very calm and smiling, but her eyes showed the excitement of her dangerous adventure, and she did not converse long with any one, fearing, in her knowledge of the presence of spies, that she might compromise her friends.

We did not, indeed, know of her departure until a few days after she had been deported, and I did not know the details or the reason of it until long afterward. She had never, to us, referred in any way to her patriotic activities. It was a bit of the charming humour characteristic of Madame Carton de Wiart that she had somehow arranged to have "p.p.c." cards left on us at the Legation.

Among the published *arrêtés* of the German authorities the day following was one announcing the condemnation and deportation ; it took pains to refer to Madame Carton de Wiart as the wife of the *former* Belgian Minister of Justice. She was condemned to three months and two weeks' imprisonment. The Pope himself made a personal request of the German Emperor to liberate Madame Carton de Wiart, and it was intimated to her that she might be set free if she would ask for pardon.

"Ask pardon for what ?" she demanded. She would not, and she remained in a common prison at Berlin until the expiration of her sentence. She was allowed to take little with her, though she did have a small box containing a bit of the soil of Belgium. At the end of the time she was released and sent to the neutral soil of Switzerland, whence she rejoined her husband at Havre, where he was still Belgian Minister of Justice.

During the interrogation and badgering to which she was constantly subjected, Madame Carton de Wiart acknowledged that she had been in correspondence with her husband at Havre, that she had transmitted news of the state of health of soldiers in the Belgian army to their families in Belgium, and that she had caused to be circulated the famous pastoral of Cardinal Mercier, "*Patriotisme et Endurance*". She acknowledged, too, that she had found a letter in her post-box addressed to the Kommandantur, and that she had destroyed it. But all the letters that she had transmitted, she declared, were of a personal nature, intended to alleviate the anxiety of those who had no news of their sons and brothers at the front, and they contained nothing of a military nature.

Among her papers seized at the Ministry there was found a journal, which was subjected to a most thorough examination. Madame Carton de Wiart was closely questioned as to its contents. On a certain date the following note was found :

*Passé une soirée très intéressante chez B.W. Le Ministre a raconté une belle histoire dans laquelle il a fait allusion au mot du Ministre Talleyrand, "On peut militariser un civil, mais on ne peut pas civiliser un militaire."*

The reference was to an evening at the American Legation when I had told I know not what story in which the saying of the witty Frenchman was introduced. During the investigation the official, a large German in uniform and wearing glasses, holding in his hands Madame Carton de Wiart's journal, said in an impressive manner :

*"Madame, I see here that you allude to a remark made by a certain Minister, a Monsieur Talleyrand. You apply this saying to the Germans, do you not, madame ?"*

"Not at all", answered. Madame Carton de Wiart, *"it is not I who said it, it was Monsieur Talleyrand."*

*"But you say here, madame, that 'one can militarize a civilian'. Now then, the Belgians fired on the Germans when they entered Belgium. It can therefore be said that one can militarize civilians, can it not ?"*

Madame Carton de Wiart could with difficulty keep from smiling. She replied, however :

*"Not at all ; that has nothing to do with the Belgians ; I have told you that it was the Minister Talleyrand who said that."*

*"But who is this Minister Talleyrand ?"*

*"He was a Minister of France."*

*"What portfolio does he hold ?"*

*"He was Minister for Foreign Affairs."*

*"But, madame", said the German, "every one knows that it is Monsieur Delcassé who is French Minister for Foreign Affairs."*

*"I did not say", said Madame Carton de Wiart, "that Monsieur Talleyrand is the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the present time. It was some time ago that he occupied that post."*

*"And when was he Minister for Foreign Affairs ? "*

*"Oh ! It was about a hundred years ago, monsieur ; under the Directory, the Consulate, the Empire, and the Restoration." \*\**

The women of Belgium, indeed, were quite as patriotic as the men. The young Countess d'Ursel, a charming and beautiful girl, was arrested, tried, and condemned, *on suspicion of attempting to aid* young men to cross the frontier — such, precisely, was the charge. She was tried before a court martial and, as she was permitted no counsel, she displayed in her own defence a clear and clever mind. She protested that it was unjust to convict her on a charge of suspicion, especially of a fact that had not yet been established — namely, the fact of the escape of the young men at the frontier. Once she began to speak English, and was told :

*"C'est une langue défendue."*

*"Mais", said she, "si l'on est Américain !"*

She was condemned to one month in prison in Germany, or to pay a fine of one thousand francs. She wished to go to prison, in Belgium preferably, because *"autrement les pauvres gens considéreraient que je suis libre parce que j'ai de l'argent."*



But her father paid the fine. For the family of one thus accused the whole experience was an agony of suspense and vague fears. And then such an affair was never ended. Not long afterward the brother-in-law of the young Countess was visited in his château, which was searched, and his concierge and his guard arrested. The pretext was that there were arms in the château. Then the house of an aunt was perquisitioned : some one had denounced her for having made signals to aeroplanes. The assertion, of course, was ridiculous, but denunciations were frequent and inseparable from the system. The Kommandantur believed everything it heard, and the amounts of money thus collected in "fines" were enormous.

There were, of course, vast numbers of Belgians who were secretly concerned in the work of aiding young men to cross the frontier. For a long time after the occupation began it was not difficult to escape over the border into Holland ; a few francs to a sentinel — and his back was turned. Afterward the methods were systematized ; there were known centres and agents who arranged such escapes.

Belgians knowing well this part of the country, collected in groups the young men desiring to escape, conducted them by night across the country to the sentinel in league with the guide.

The expense of crossing the frontier, like all other expenses, indeed, increased as the war continued. I was told that a group of eight young men who crossed together, paid each one a thousand marks to the sentinel. And the sentinel asked the guide to bring as many young men as he could that same week because the week following he was going to the front.

For a while it was not a very deep secret that a certain German officer at Antwerp would arrange these escapes, but the price of his services, growing more and more extortionate, became finally too great to be available. The higher authorities would ultimately discover and break up these combinations, and the vigilance at the Dutch frontier would be redoubled. All along the border through the dreary Campine country, with its woods of low scrub-oak and its waste moors of purple heather, there were elaborate contrivances of barbed wire, and a high fence of gleaming wire charged with electricity that instantly killed any one who touched it. Men used to escape through these wires, however, by thrusting between them a barrel from which the heads had been removed, and then crawling through it. Sometimes the wires were insulated by wrapping rubber blankets about them ; sometimes they were cut. But the wires were strengthened and there were double rows of them ; the barrier was made higher and higher. Along the River Scheldt there were all sorts of expedients contrived by means of boats.. Besides, many plunged in and swam the stream — and many were shot by sentinels as they were in the water.

It was a long and dangerous journey to the frontier ; oftentimes it occupied days, with long waits and pauses in certain houses, barns, and *estaminets*, what our grandfathers in America in the days before the Civil War used to call an underground railway. There were those who knew the passwords, and in the woods there were poachers who acted as guides. The routes, the passwords, the stations, and all the mysterious paraphernalia were changed frequently, for the German spies were always discovering the means.

It is said, however, that in that first winter more than 34.000 young men found their way out of Belgium and into Holland, and eventually

joined the army on the Yser ; 34.000 adventures, full of what excitement and danger !

Mothers in Belgium trembled to see their boys grow up, for that meant not only the danger of war that was common to all, but the far greater danger of crossing the frontier. There is not in history any story more heroic than that of those lads, some of them only seventeen, who braved the many dangers that lay between their comfortable homes and the taut, shining spread of electrified wires at the Dutch frontier. Thousands of boys were shot down with liberty in sight, there among the bracken and the heather of that drear land of the Campine. Among those who thus escaped were British soldiers who had been cut off from the main body of their troops after the Battle of Mons, and had hidden in woods and fields and farms for months until they found their Belgian friends. There were French soldiers in this plight as well, and even Belgians. There was a captain of artillery, a Belgian, who had been wounded and taken prisoner at Liège ; he escaped from the hospital, got to Brussels, hid for months in an attic, and then, after wonderful adventures in Oriental Flanders, was guided by a poacher at night across the frontier.

The adventurous voyage of the tug *Atlas V*, as it was told to me — after I had come out of Belgium — by one who participated in it, shows the spirit of the young men and the dangers they braved to get away. He was at Liège then, and to-day is in the Belgian army.

*"They came to tell me", he said, "at my home one evening about eleven o'clock, that the moment had come to go. I wrapped pieces of felt about my boots so as to make no noise in the streets, for we were forbidden by the Germans to be out after half-past ten. The chief of my group gave me a playing-card with a special sign, and said to me, 'Crawl on your hands and knees past the two German posts which guard the foundry along the guard-rail of the Meuse, cross the bridge at the communal rifle-range, and you will see some trees on the left. Then a man will come out toward you ; say to him "Charleroi"'. However, when I came to the trees it was not one man, but fifty that I found. I thought that I had been betrayed ; nevertheless I spoke to one of them and he replied 'Charleroi', and told me that the man in question was not there. I had been told that the tug was called **Atlas V**, and that it had a four-leaf claver on the funnel. I went toward the Meuse and found the tug, and those who were to be my companions — Belgians, anxious to get away. The tug, in order not to attract attention, had the prow turned in the direction opposite to that in which we were to go. About midnight it started and turned about, which was very dangerous, because three hundred meters away there was a German sentry. As soon as the tug had turned they shut off the steam and we were caught in a violent current, the Meuse having risen three meters. We passed without any trouble under the bridge of Wandre, but at Argenteau we noticed a mil guarded by the Germans, and they must have seen us, for as soon as we came in sight of the bridge of Visé we were caught in a sharp fusillade. At the same time two searchlights were turned on us, and guns and mitrailleuses started up in a lively fashion. Three gunshots even were fired at us, but they did not hit. It was a nasty moment (un sale moment), because the balls were striking the hull as high as our ears. A German boat, furnished with two mitrailleuses, and with a crew of six Boches, advanced toward us to shoot point-blank, but our pilot did not lose his head, and with a turn of the wheel sank the barque with its crew. I saw it all very plainly, because I was looking through a forward port-hole. The Germans had built a bridge about thirty meters over the Meuse in order to*

give passage to a four-track railroad joining Antwerp and Aix-la-Chapelle, and beside this viaduct there was a low footbridge of wood, with a double track. We were going at full speed and hit this footbridge. The tug bounded back and again butted the bridge, which went under. The funnel of our tug looked like an accordion. Six Germans guarding the bridge were drowned." This detail was afterwards confirmed by the German Consul at Maestricht. "But our troubles were not over. After that we had to cut through seven chains strung across the Meuse, and all that under a hot fire. When the seven chains were cut there still remained the electric cable, the most terrible obstacle, but the last. The cable resisted, and the tug was lifted up at the prow and slid over toward the river-bank. We thought we were lost, when one of the cable posts on the river-bank broke, and the tug dove forward and I had a douche of water from the port-hole above. The tug struck the river bottom and we thought we were gone ; we were running toward the companion-way when the captain shouted '**Full speed ahead**', and we understood then that it was all right. Two minutes later the firing had ceased and we were free. What joy ! We sang the national hymns with all our hearts. It was half-past one o'clock. There were one hundred and three Belgians aboard, among them two women and two children. And think of my astonishment when I discovered that the crew of the boat consisted of the captain, who was a forage merchant, and a pilot who knew how to steer, but who knew the Meuse only between Dinant and Namur ; the engineer was an engineer by trade, and the one who indicated the turnings, the islands, and the depths of the water was an old man who had fished all his life along the Meuse."

I know a priest who escaped across the frontier with the aid of a poacher, returned to the land, and escaped again ; he hid in the covert while the Uhlans were beating it in every direction in their effort to find him ; at night they brought motor-cars with electric searchlights, and he lay there in the broom and heather while the long rays swept the ground about him.

Again, I was told of a group of lads from Brussels ; they went to Louvain ; there, in the railway-station, was a man who carried a handkerchief in his left hand, with which he wiped his brow ; this was the signal. They followed this man, who entered a train, finally got off far up in Flanders, thence led his young men to a little inn, where they stayed overnight, and then, in carts with pigs, crossed the frontier, bribing the sentries — at that time not a difficult thing to do.

And the priest at the prison of Saint-Gilles, condemned for two years for aiding them to escape — he had got forty out of the country — said :

*"My loss of liberty helps others to be free, and my country to be free."*

To aid these young men was held by the Germans to be treason, on what strange, exaggerated notion of law it would be difficult to imagine, but treason it was — "*military treason*", they called it, *trahison de guerre*. It was not always punished by death, but it was so punished sometimes, and more and more as time went on, until the yard at Saint-Gilles prison was full of graves, and at the Tir National there was another cemetery that has now more than two score graves. Strange dramatic destiny of the National Rifle Range of Belgium, that it should become the scene of so many heroic martyrdoms — those scores of patriots blindfolded and stood before the grey firing-squad in the dawn !

I think now of the shudder that went through Brussels when poor Lenoir was shot ; so many knew him ; the fact somehow made it more real and more terrible. Lenoir was a division chief of the Government railway, who had

been talking more than was good for him in the *estaminets* in Brussels, telling of his services, and how he had sent information to the Government at Havre. One morning he was arrested and taken to Ghent and tried that same day. At eleven o'clock he was condemned, and at five o'clock in the afternoon, without having been allowed to see his wife or a priest, he was led out before his coffin, a squad of soldiers before and behind, stood up against the wall, and shot. And then his wife was sent to Germany. The story sickened one as it was told. The poor chap was only one of hundreds, of thousands, of Belgians, men and women, killed thus.

There were, of course, many spies of the Allies in the country, who, under the hard rules of war, expected no mercy if they were caught, and there were others who played an even more difficult and involved role in practising what is called *contre-espionnage* ; they were Belgians who pretended to sell themselves to the Germans and to obtain information for them, when, in fact, they were doing this in order to obtain for the Allies information from the Germans. They not only ran all the ordinary risks of the spies, but lost as well the confidence and respect of their own fellows and countrymen.

It would be impossible to relate all the dramatic stories that were told more and more as time went on and the terror grew. An American, whose release from the Kommandantur I had just secured, told me of a French girl, with dark flashing eyes, who was to be shot in the morning ; she sang "*La Marseillaise*" all night.

No wonder the Belgians hate the Germans with a hatred that will not die for centuries. No wonder that Le Jeune could say :

*"They are brutes, you know !*

*"I hate them as nobody ever hated another, you know !*

*"If I could I'd kill six millions of them every day.*

*"When I shave them my hand itches to cut their throats."*

**Brand WITHLOCK**

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

\* The official German account of the incident was as follows :

#### CONDAMNATION

Le 25 mai 1915, à l'avenue du Régent, à Bruxelles, un officier allemand entendit des cris de "*sale Prussien*" partir d'un groupe de dames. Après que ces dames eurent proféré d'autres injures de même genre, l'une d'elles, Mademoiselle la Comtesse Hélène de Jonghe d'Ardoye, âgée de 16 ans, passa tout près de l'officier en criant de nouveau "*sale Prussien!*" L'officier fit conduire la comtesse devant l'officier judiciaire de la Kommandantur impériale. Madame la Comtesse Valentine de Jonghe, grand'mère de Mademoiselle Hélène de Jonghe, exigea alors impérieusement de cet officier qu'il la laissât assister à l'interrogatoire de sa petite-fille. L'officier judiciaire lui fit remarquer poliment, mais énergiquement, que lui seul avait à décider qui pouvait assister à l'interrogatoire d'une accusée ; il envoya ensuite Madame la Comtesse dans l'antichambre et interrogea Mademoiselle Hélène de Jonghe en présence de sa demoiselle de compagnie. Dans l'antichambre, Madame Valentine de Jonghe se mit à crier qu'elle voulait qu'on allât chercher le gouverneur général et le gouverneur. Elle injuria l'officier de justice et l'appela "*paysan !*"

Les deux comtesses passèrent pour injures, devant un tribunal de guerre. Mademoiselle Hélène de Jonghe déclara qu'elle avait voulu injurier un officier allemand quelconque par haine des Allemands et qu'il était regrettable que d'autres femmes belges n'agissent pas de même. Madame la Comtesse Valentine de Jonghe se comporta aussi très arrogamment devant le tribunal et pendant la prestation de serment des juges et des témoins, elle se mit à rire pour montrer qu'il lui semblait incroyable qu'une dame de son rang soit citée en justice et y soit rendue responsable de ses injures.

Mademoiselle Hélène de Jonghe a été condamnée à trois mois, sa grand'mère à quatre mois de prison pour injures. Toutes deux ont été internées dans la prison d'Aix-la-Chapelle.

*Translation*

CONDEMNATION

On May 25, on the Avenue du Régent, in Brussels, a German officer heard cries of "*dirty Prussian*" coming from a group of girls. After these girls had offered other insults of the same kind, one of them, the Countess Hélène de Jonghe d'Ardoye, sixteen years of age, passed very close to the officer and cried again "*dirty Prussian !*". The officer had the Countess taken before the judicial officer at the Imperial Kommandantur. The Countess Valentine de Jonghe, grandmother of Hélène de Jonghe, then imperiously demanded of this officer that he allows her to be present at the interrogatory of her granddaughter. The judicial officer politely but energetically told her that it was for him to decide who could be present at the interrogatory of an accused ; he thereupon sent Madame the Countess into the antechamber, and questioned the young Countess in the presence of her governess. In the antechamber Madame Valentine de Jonghe began to cry that she wished them to go and bring in the Governor-General and the Governor. She insulted the officer of justice and called him a "*peasant !*"

The two Countesses were arraigned for their insults before a military court, Hélène de Jonghe declared that she had wished to insult some German officer on account of her hatred of the Germans, and that it was to be regretted that other Belgian women did not do the same thing. The Countess Valentine de Jonghe also conducted herself very arrogantly before the court, and during the swearing in of the judges and the witnesses she began to laugh., to show that it was unbelievable to her that a lady of her rank should be haled into court and made responsible for her insults.

Hélène de Jonghe was condemned to three months and her grandmother to four months in prison for the insults. Both have been interned in the prison of Aix-la-Chapelle.

\*\* In the *arrêtés* published by the Germans in **La Belgique** on May 27 is the following :

CONDAMNATION

Madame Carton de Wiart, femme de l'ancien Ministre de la justice, a été condamnée le 21 mai 1915, par le tribunal militaire du gouvernement, à trois mois et deux semaines de prison. Madame Carton de Wiart a, elle-même, avoué avoir continuellement, dans un grand nombre de cas, et en évitant la poste allemande, fait transmettre des lettres à elle et à d'autrui en Belgique, et au delà de la frontière hollandaise. Elle a, ainsi, soustrait ces lettres au contrôle et rendu possible leur utilisation pour l'espionnage et la transmission de nouvelles défendues. Elle a, en outre, d'après son propre aveu, distribué des écrits défendus tout en connaissant très bien leur caractère offensant. Elle a, enfin, toujours après son propre aveu, soustrait et détruit une lettre adressée à la Kommandantur et mise par erreur dans sa boîte à lettres. Par de tels procédés, il est possible de mettre en danger la sécurité des troupes allemandes. Par conséquence, Madame Carton de Wiart a dû être condamnée et transportée en Allemagne.

*Translation*

CONDEMNATION

Madame Carton de Wiart, wife of the former Minister of Justice, was condemned on May 21, 1915, by the military tribunal of the Government to three months and two weeks imprisonment. Madame Carton de Wiart has, herself, in many cases, and thereby avoiding the German post, admitted having continually caused letters to be transmitted, both her own and those of others, in Belgium and across the Holland frontier. She has thus withdrawn these letters from control and rendered possible their utilization for espionage and for the transmission of forbidden news. She has, furthermore, according to her own admission, distributed forbidden pamphlets, knowing very well their offensive character. She has, finally, again according to her own admission, taken out and destroyed a letter addressed to the Kommandantur and by mistake put into her letter-box. By such proceedings it is possible to endanger the security of the German troops. Consequently, Madame Carton de Wiart had to be condemned and transported to Germany.