

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

Chapter V. The reaction.

Why was Miss Cavell singled out among the others as the one to be shot at dawn on the morning after condemnation ? Why, if justice, even rude military justice, were being done, were not all shot who had been condemned to death? Why this signal distinction, this marked and tragic discrimination ? Because Edith Cavell was English ; that was her offense. And so they slew her, those generals with stars on their breasts and iron crosses, bestowed for bravery and gallantry — slew the nurse who had cared for their own wounded soldiers. They could not even await the unfolding of their own legal processes ; they could not wait even the few days they had allotted to the Countess de Belleville, to Madame Thuliez, or to Severin, the Belgian, although the Countess and Madame Thuliez, if all that is now known of the complot and the trial is true, were as deeply involved as Miss Cavell. They had been associated in a conspiracy, if the word may be employed, to aid British soldiers to escape ; the only fact that saved the Princess de Croy was her declaration that after the men reached Brussels she did not know what became of them. But *Messieurs les militaires* must hide their intentions, perhaps even from their own colleagues in the Government of occupation, and shuffle their frail victim out by stealth in the night, like midnight garroters and gunmen, because she was English. The armies of Great Britain were just then making an offensive, and it was partly in petty spite for this, partly an expression of the violent hatred the Germans bore everything English, the savage feeling that had been fostered and kept alive and fanned into a furious flame by historians and Herr Professors and Herr Doktors and Herr Pastors, and editors with their editorials and harangues and hymns of hate, that they did what they did. It was in that spirit that they pronounced their judgment secretly in her prison cell and hurried her out and slew her before dawn and another day should come in which the voice of pity and of humanity could get itself heard. They could not wait for that, and they would not disturb von Bissing there at his game of bridge in the château at Trois Fontaines.

We were told that, according to the German law, whatever that may mean, it was only the Military Governor in the jurisdiction in which the so-called crime had been committed who had the power to receive or to grant a plea for mercy. I do not know as to that ; German military law seems to be whatever *Messieurs les militaires* are moved at the moment to call it. Von Sauberzweig said that he alone had the power to receive our plea for mercy, or even to grant a few hours' delay ; he accepted the responsibility.

Baucq, the Brussels architect, was shot that morning because it would have been too bald, too patent, even from the Prussian viewpoint, to hurry out a woman all alone and kill her. And so it was Baucq's sinister luck to be chosen for a fate that might have been no worse than that of Severin, or the others whose lives were saved. Poor Baucq has not been often mentioned in connection with this tragedy. He was no less illegally condemned, no less foully done to death, but his fate was swallowed up in the greater horror of the assassination of his companion of that tragic dawn at Etterbeek. He left a wife and two children. One of them was a little girl of twelve who, several days after, went to a neighbor's and asked if she might come in and be alone for a while.

"*I wish to weep for my father*", she said, "*but I do not like to do it before Mamma ; I must be brave for her.*"

There were heroisms even among the Belgian children.

Miss Cavell, as I have said, did not deny having aided British soldiers and Belgian lads by giving them food and clothing and lodging and money. The thirty-four who were tried were said to be concerned in a combination of wide extent — more than seventy persons were said to be included in it — to help men over the frontier into Holland. More than seven thousand young men, it was said, had gone out during the months of June, July and August.

Miss Cavell was ideally situated to aid such patriotic work. Her nursing home offered an exceptional *pied-à-terre*. The Germans had apparently convinced themselves, at least, that among the seventy whom they had arrested they had the ringleaders of a formidable organisation and that they had undone the knot of the conspiracy that had been carrying on so extensively the work of recruiting for the Allied armies. They determined to break it up, and they employed their favorite weapon — *Fürchterlichkeit*. What would make a deeper impression on the mind, or instill greater fear in the hearts of the people, than to take a woman out and shoot her — this calm, courageous little woman with the stern lips and the keen grey eyes that were not afraid ? And then she was English — the unpardonable offence.

It is possible that the men at the *Politische Abteilung* did not know, that Monday afternoon, that the judgment had been pronounced. *Messieurs les militaires* had an affair in hand, and they had set their hearts on carrying it out ; and they may not have told them at the *Politische Abteilung*, may have kept the truth from their colleagues, or, with that contempt they always had for the civil department of government, may have warned them to keep their hands off. It may be that the Political Department did not care, or did not dare, to interfere. If the military party had deceived or ignored them, they, of course, in the solidarity and discipline that binds all Germans, would not have given that fact as an excuse. The excuse they did give was that Maître de Leval had led the American Legation into error, and that, anyway, even if Conrad had told Maître de Leval

what he did tell him, neither Conrad nor Maître de Leval had any diplomatic quality, and that therefore the German authorities had not deceived the American Legation. The first excuse is not founded on fact, the second rests upon a distinction too trivial to give it any moral or legal value. Maître de Leval did not lead us into error ; Conrad did tell him and did tell Topping, either honestly believing what he said or having been instructed to say — it must be one or the other — that no judgment had been rendered, when, as a matter of fact, that judgment had been rendered hours before.

There is a curious variance between the statements of the Germans that I have never been able to explain. The affiche of the German Government which announced the death of Miss Cavell begins : "*Par jugement du 9 octobre*" ("By judgment of the 9th October"). This statement as to the time of the rendition of the judgment is opposed to all the declarations made by the Germans to representatives of the Legation. Miss Cavell's trial took place on October 7, 8 and 9, and on the 11th de Leval, Gibson and Topping, who made inquiries, were informed that the judgment had not yet been pronounced and would not be pronounced for several days. The judgment or the final and formal judgment, was not pronounced until the 11th, at 4:30 in the afternoon in the prison of St.-Gilles, and hours afterward Conrad again said that it had not been pronounced and would not be pronounced for a day or two. Either the affiche is mistaken or the officials at the *Politische Abteilung* were mistaken, or the phrase "*Par jugement du 9 octobre*" means something else in the German mind than it does in our minds. If the judgment was rendered on October 9, then the action of the Germans is even more odious than ever, and could be explained on no hypothesis consistent with honourable conduct, for if the judgment were rendered on October 9, as the official announcement of the German Government states, then their verbal communications to the Legation of the 11th were unspeakable in their cynical disregard of facts. I am of the opinion that the judgment was rendered on October 11 and that the statement in the affiche is inexact, or else the action of the 9th was in the nature of a verdict and that of the 11th in the nature of a death sentence.

There were many stories of how the Princess and the Countess and Miss Cavell and the others were betrayed : there was the tale of the post-card sent to Miss Cavell by the boy whose indiscreet gratitude betrayed his benefactor ; there was another that would have it that there was a lad, a messenger somewhere down in the Borinage, who, angry because his pay was not at once forthcoming, betrayed his employers. And only lately I heard a fantastic tale to the effect that one of the accused was a somnambulist who talked in his sleep, and that the Germans, as always, strong on science and modern methods, hypnotized him and so obtained the facts. The story is hardly sufficient for our Anglo-Saxon notions of evidence, and others claimed that the explanation was somewhere to be found in another dark tragedy which some months later shocked that Brussels so accustomed to tragedy.

In the letter that Miss Cavell wrote to her nurses there is a reference to the evil of gossip that is of immense significance ; not only were happiness and reputations destroyed by idleness, she says, but life itself sacrificed. It is not for me, or any one, to penetrate the sacred precincts of the brave soul of Edith Cavell in that solemn hour, but the references may have been, in part at least, due to the fact that she found herself condemned to death because of some unrestrained and indiscreet tongues that had betrayed her.

"*It is no small prudence to keep silence in an evil time*", she wrote in her copy of the *Imitation* — the most pathetic, perhaps, of all the lines she wrote, and the nearest expression of anything like reproach that she ever made.

I shall refer to that other tragedy in its place, but for us at the American Legation there was a sequel a week later. I had had Gibson's and de Leval's reports sent over to the American Embassy at London, and there they were turned over by our Ambassador to the Foreign Office and given out to the press for publication. They were published far and wide — and in consequence the *Rotterdamsche Courant* and the other Dutch newspapers were not allowed on sale in Brussels that next day. The closing of the frontier to newspapers was an invariable sign, well known in Brussels, that the Germans were not satisfied with the state of things, and we soon heard that the authorities were very angry and had even intimated that the Governor-General "*might have to send all the diplomats away in consequence*". It was, of course, the policy of terrorization transferred to the diplomatic field, but it was a menace that held few terrors for us. Our situation was not enviable.

The Germans had a copy of the *London Times* over at the *Politische Abteilung*, with our reports spread out in full through all its broad columns, and were greatly agitated. Even little Conrad, much moved, had exclaimed to Villalobar :

"*Ils m'ont mis dedans !*"

"*Très bien*", said the Marquis, "*vous êtes devenu fameux, un des gros bonnets de l'Europe*".

Then we heard that the German rage was especially directed against de Leval for having made a report at all, and that they threatened to send him to a concentration camp in Germany. That was on Saturday, the 23rd. I was convalescing ; my physician had told me that I might go to work again, and I had made an appointment to see the Baron von der Lancken on the following Monday to discuss *la reprise du travail* — an appointment that had been postponed several times already by my illness. It was raining heavily when Monday came, and Dr. Derscheid came to give me a *piqûre* and to tell me not to go out ; but I went.

The Baron von der Lancken, just from his morning ride, booted, with his Iron Cross and other ribbons, the white cross of St. John on his side, and a large dossier under his arm, received me with a dark, glowering face, asked me

upstairs to his little workroom where a fire was burning, and when seated he began solemnly :

"Je suis très peiné d'être obligé de vous faire la communication que ..."

And then he went on to say that the diplomats had remained in Brussels by courtesy of the Germans, that the publication of my report in the Cavell case was a real injustice to Germany and a breach of diplomatic etiquette, that our Legation was furnishing an arm to England, Germany's enemy, that it was an unneutral act, etc. All these observations and others like them were conveyed in phrases that were diplomatically correct, but in the manner of conveying them there was an evident feeling and I know not what of irritation and resentment that revealed or reflected the temper of *Messieurs les militaires*, smarting, no doubt, under the sting of that universal opprobrium which had surprised them with its lash, and of course trying in their rage to shift the blame for a deed the consequences of which they had apparently been unable to foresee. It was, as I have already reported, a habit, I might almost say a policy of theirs, to open discussions that involved their manners and morals in a way that was intended to put their opponent or their interlocutors at once in the wrong, and I interrupted the Baron, then, and he adopted a less emphatic tone.

"Let us talk the matter over unofficially and in a friendly way, and try to reach some conclusion", he said.

This was better, and we discussed the case in all its bearings. He had copies of the *Times* and of the *Morning Post* before him, marked with red and blue pencils. His objections, it soon developed, were not to the report so much as to the fact that the report had been published, though by reason of what he alleged as misstatements in de Leval's report he himself had been accused of having broken his promise. He said that I officially, as American Minister, had not made frequent inquiries, that it was de Leval who had spoken to Conrad, and that neither de Leval nor Conrad had any diplomatic quality. What he wished then, at the end, was that I express regret at the publication and that de Leval instantly be dismissed from the Legation ; otherwise he could not be responsible for what would happen to him. Already the military had threatened to arrest and report him.

To this I replied that I was responsible for de Leval and for his actions, and that I would not dismiss him, and that my Legation would be his asylum if any effort were made to molest him.

"You don't think me capable of throwing him to the wolves and letting this Sauberzweig eat him alive !" I exclaimed.

And as for regrets, I said that I would not express any, nor make any statement unless instructed by my Government so to do. We talked calmly and frankly perhaps as never before, both recognizing in our conversation the fact that the relations between our Governments were still strained over the *Lusitania* case.

We spoke of the *ravitaillement*, and the danger involved

to it in any disagreement; but even so, I said, rather than seem to shirk any responsibility or to abandon de Leval, I should prefer to withdraw from Belgium. At this he protested, begged me not to mention such a thing, suggested that Villalobar join the discussion — to which I consented of course, with pleasure — and we parted, to meet again that afternoon. And in the end he shook hands twice and inquired solicitously about my health.

At three o'clock that afternoon, in the yellow *salon* downstairs, the Baron and the Marquis and I met, and Baron von der Lancken outlined the whole subject again; on the table before him were copies of the London newspapers, with the *Graphic*, or some illustrated journal, containing my portrait and one of Villalobar — the Marquis in a yachting-cap, at Cowes — thirty years before, he said with a sigh.

Baron von der Lancken's tone made it clear that they were especially bitter against de Leval. He said that de Leval was *persona non grata* and that his presence compromised our neutrality. I told him that of course if de Leval was *persona non grata* he could be eliminated, though not as a punishment, and only after communication with Washington.

We talked all afternoon — a terrible afternoon. I was weary and depressed — weary of the long strain, weary of negotiations in French of all accents, and I was still seedy and under the horror of that awful night. The cold rain was falling in the park .. The Baron was anxious and even insistent that I make a statement in writing, that would absolve the German authorities by admitting inaccuracies in the report made by de Leval and express regret at its publication ; he had a sheet of paper and pencil ready to write it all down. But I declined to make such a statement or any statement or to authorize any expression in the nature of an excuse, a disavowal or a regret.

So it was left. Van Vollenhoven was waiting to join us in the discussion of the *reprise du travail*. He came in and I hurried the business through ; every one, indeed, was tired except van Vollenhoven, and possibly Villalobar, who seemed never to get tired.

The next day Baron von der Lancken went to Munich. The Governor-General had gone to Berlin. The President and the King of Spain had made appeals to the Government at Berlin on behalf of the Countess of Belleville and Mademoiselle Thuliez, and Villalobar and I felt that their lives were saved, at any rate. And Severin, who was a freemason, had friends who were working in his behalf. Some one brought to the Legation and committed to my care Miss Cavell's Prayer Book, with its touching entries *, written in her own hand, firmly, that last night, with the verses of *Scripture* that had given her comfort, and then, last entry of all— written while she was yet alive and life still pulsing within her, when, in a world otherwise ordered, long years of devoted service might have been hers — the legend, the epitaph that need not yet have been :

"Died at 7 a.m. on Oct. 12th, 1915."

There were a few francs and a few precious trinkets, all her poor little belongings. And yet — how vast, how noble, how rich an estate !

The modest English nurse whose strange fate it was to be so suddenly summoned from the dim wards of sickness and of pain to a place among the world's heroes and martyrs will have, in happier, freer times, her monument in Brussels ; some street or public place will bear her name, the school she founded will be called after her, and continue her mission of healing in the earth. And when the horror of her cruel and unjust fate shall have faded somewhat in the light of its emergent sacrifice, the few lines she wrote and the simple words she spoke as she was about to die will remain to reveal the heights that human nature may attain, and to sanctify a memory that will be revered as long as faith and honour are known to men.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

* Notes in Miss Cavell's "Imitation of Christ" :

p. 124. *It is no small prudence to keep silence in an evil time.*
Chapter XXIX, p. 125, and Chapter XXX, p. 126 (Psalm XXX). *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, thou God of truth.*

p. 502. *'T was the last watch of night.*
Except what brings the morning quite
When the armed angel, conscience-clear.
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards
Till God relieves him at his post.

p. 170. *So shalt thou keep one and the same countenance*
always with thanksgiving, both in prosperity and in adversity,
weighing all things with an equal balance.

p. 58. *Man considereth the deeds but God weigheth the*
intentions.

p. 36. *Thou must pass thro' fire and water before thou come to*
the place of refreshing.

p. 22. *Occasions of adversity best discover how great virtue or*
strength each one hath.

p. 108. *Without a combat thou canst not attain unto the crown of patience.*

p. 102. *Grant me above all things that can be desired to rest in Thee and in Thee to leave my heart at peace.*

Thou art the true peace of the heart ; thou its only rest ; out of Thee all things are hard and restless. In this very peace that is in Thee, the one Chiefest Eternal good, I will sleep and rest. Amen.

p. 62. Be pure and free within and entangle not thy heart with any creature.

p. 54. It were more than just that thou shouldest accuse thyself and excuse thy brother.

Notations in Miss Cavell's Prayer Book :

Arrested 5 Aug., 1915

Prison de St. Gilles 7th Aug. 1915

Brussels

Court martialed, 7th Oct. 1915

(Court martialed), 8th Oct. 1915

Condemned to death, 8th Oct.

In the Salle des Députés at 10.30 a.m. (h.a.)

with 7 others. (The accused numbered in all 70 of whom 34 were present on these 2 dates.)

Died at 7 a.m. on Oct. 12th, 1915

E. Cavell

With love to

E. D. Cavell

Footnotes.

French translation : « *La réaction* » in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre XXVII (1915) in *La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles* ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 281-286.

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)

The Argentine journalist **Roberto J. Payró**, having been arrested on September 22, 1915 :

« *Roberto J. Payró : son arrestation à Bruxelles* » a été, à l'origine, publié dans *La Nación* du 15/12/1915 :

French version :

[http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTATION%20PAYRO%20A%20BRUXELLES%20LA%20NACION %2019151215.pdf](http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTATION%20PAYRO%20A%20BRUXELLES%20LA%20NACION%2019151215.pdf)

Original **Spanish** version:

[http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTO%20PAYRO%20EN%20BRUSELAS%20LA%20NACION%2019151215.p df](http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTO%20PAYRO%20EN%20BRUSELAS%20LA%20NACION%2019151215.pdf)

Fac-simile :

[http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTO%20PAYRO%20EN%20BRUSELAS%20LA%20NACION %2019151215.JPG](http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTO%20PAYRO%20EN%20BRUSELAS%20LA%20NACION%2019151215.JPG)

« *Une primeur pour nos lecteurs. Sous l'Occupation : M. Roberto J. Payró* », est paru dans *Le Cri de Belgique* (*organe hebdomadaire des intérêts belges dans l'Amérique du sud*) ; Buenos Aires ; 17 janvier 1920, numéro 223 :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTATION%20PAYRO%20CRI%20DE%20BELGIQUE%2019200117.pdf>

Fac-simile :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/19150922%20ARRESTATION%20PAYRO%20CRI%20DE%20BELGIQUE%2019200117.JPG>



Roberto J. Payró could not react about Edith Cavell's arrestation, as he used to do in his *Diario de un testigo* (*La guerra vista desde Bruselas*) :

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

Original **Spanish** version: www.idesetautres.be

About **BAUCQ, Philippe François Victor**

(1880 - 12 octobre 1915)

 [Rendre hommage à cette personne - Een hulde brengen aan deze persoon](#) 

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[memorial.org/names_on_memorials/display_names_on_mon.php?MON_ID=1387](http://www.bel-memorial.org/names_on_memorials/display_names_on_mon.php?MON_ID=1387)

in « *Monuments et autres éléments de patrimoine à la mémoire des Belges décédés lors de conflits armés* »

Statut/Statuut: Résistant fusillé - Gefusilleerde weerstandslid

Conflit / **Conflict:** 1914-1918 ;

Naissance/Geboorte : Bruxelles - Brussel, BR, BE

1880-03-13; **Décès/Overlijden** : Schaerbeek -

Schaerbeek, BR, BE 1915-10-12

Plus d'infos/Meer info: Conjoint: Marie MOÏMONT. Philippe-François-Victor Baucq, héros de la Première Guerre mondiale, était un **architecte belge** et a eu un rôle important dans un réseau d'évasion au côté d'Edith Cavell pendant cette guerre. Ce réseau d'évasion fut initié par des Belges de la région de Mons et aidait les soldats alliés blessés et cachés à s'évader de la Belgique occupée. Ensuite, ce réseau fusionna avec un autre, créé par plusieurs femmes (la comtesse de Belleville, la princesse de Croy, Louise Thuliez et Louise de Bettignies) dans le nord de la France. Il fut arrêté cinq jours avant Edith Cavell, le 31 juillet 1915. Il est incarcéré à la prison de Saint-Gilles et jugé les 7 et 8 octobre 1915. Six des accusés sont condamnés à mort le 11 octobre 1915 à 17h. Pour faire cesser les protestations internationales, les juges font exécuter Philippe BAUCQ et Edith CAVELL le lendemain à 2h au Tir National, un site militaire (aujourd'hui un mémorial) (...). Il y a une rue Philippe BAUCQ - Philippe Baucqstraat à Etterbeek (anciennement rue Cranz)

Photos et autres documents / Foto's en andere documenten: http://www.bel-memorial.org/photos/BAUCQ_Philippe_23794.htm

BEL-MEMORIAL

BAUCQ, Philippe François Victor



In chapter 3 (« An *ex-post-facto* edict ») of *Belgium under the German Occupation : A Personal Narrative* (1919) :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/BRAND%20WHITLOCK%20BELGIUM%20UNDER%20GERMAN%20OCCUPATION%202%20CHAPTER%2003.pdf>