

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

**Brand WHITLOCK**

### Chapter XII. “*After the war !*”

The *letzte Schlag*, however, had failed, as Brussels knew when a fortnight had passed and Verdun had not fallen. And the people once more found courage, even though the newspapers printed in Brussels never permitted a cheerful bit of intelligence to appear. They had a daily article on the progress of military events, artfully written as though from an unbiased standpoint, but with a tendency to depress and discourage that was remorseless, implacable, almost diabolical. They gave the German *communiqués* and the French and British *communiqués*, especially when these latter acknowledged reverses and defeats. And the people learned to read those twisted and tortured tales as people learn to read between the lines of a censored Press, though there was not so much a censored press in Belgium as there was an inspired and subsidized Press, the basest prostitution to which human intelligence and the arts of writing and printing can be put. Perhaps, indeed, the Brussels folk exaggerated in an inverse ratio ; they always thought that their friends and allies outside had good news of which they knew nothing, and they had a confidence almost touching that on the other side of the line in those March days, with their *giboulées*,

their snows and rains and winds and bursts of sunshine, things were all going well . . .

The walls were covered with those *affiches* beginning *à la peine de mort* ; one day brought thirty-nine condemnations, eight of them victims shot at Mons for "counting trains" — another phrase that had been added to Belgium's coterie speech. One of the victims was a woman, and she was condemned, not because she had counted trains, but because she had not betrayed her husband, who had counted trains. The Germans were continuing to requisition indigenous food-stuffs, butter and pork, and now they began to seize the great patient draught-dogs that hauled the carts — those gentle, hard-working friends of the peasant ; they were taken for use in the German army, though the Belgians found cause for hope even in that, and insisted that the Germans intended to use them for food in Germany.

The Cardinal had returned from Rome, had issued another pastoral, and the printing establishment that had printed it for his Eminence had been raided and every one concerned — except the Cardinal — arrested. A week later the Cardinal's private secretary, the Abbé Louein (**Note** : chanoine A. Loncin), was arrested on the charge of having aided *Le Mot du Soldat*, an organisation formed to obtain personal news of soldiers in the Belgian army.

M. Davignon, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, had died at Nice ; Maître Theodor had been released from his German prison and was in Switzerland. Such were the bits of news that found their

way into the land that was being ground down under a heel heavier than that which had ground down Venice and Lombardy when they were under Austrian rule. People lived on some way, with one phrase constantly on their lips : "*Après la guerre !*"

After the war ! What vast schemes and projects, what gratified revenge, what dreams of joy, that phrase contained ! The people turned their thoughts and their hopes into that future where, after this horrid interruption, they could resume life again. They would breathe again, after that choking atmosphere ; they would go on journeys, make holidays, laugh, play, be happy — after the war. But the reality was always there — in those officers swanking along the boulevard, in those soldiers marching and singing, in those *Polizei* with their spiked, squat helmets, boots, belts, revolvers, long knives, heavy rifles with fixed bayonets, their air of brutality ; I used to fancy how they would look tramping down Broadway or on Pennsylvania Avenue or along the Lake Front. How would Americans feel ? Could they realize what the occupation of a city means ? No, no one could do that except, perhaps, some old Italian of Venice or Lombardy who could remember *Ravetsky*, whose rule was not so long as that Belgium knew. Yes, the reality was there, and if one fled the spectacle to go to *Ravenstein* or to the *Forêt (de Soignes)* or to *Groenendael*, or even down the road toward *Waterloo*, or out to pretty *Vlezenbeek*, and fell each time more captive to the charm of the red roofs of the Flemish landscape, even then one must hear the

distant thunder of the guns, saluting the ineradicable cruelty and hopeless stupidity of man along a front that stretched from the North Sea to the Vosges.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

### Footnotes.

French translation : « *Après la guerre* » in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre V (1916) in ***La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles*** ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 308-310.

It would be interesting compare with what the Argentine journalist **Roberto J. Payró**, told about the Brussels censored Press :

Original **Spanish** version:

« *Los alemanes en Bélgica. La prensa durante la Ocupación* », in ***La Nación*** ; 13/06/1919. Ver :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/PAYRO%20PRENSA%20DURANTE%20OCUPACION%2019190613.pdf>

**French** version :

« *Les Allemands en Belgique. La presse durant l'Occupation* » :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/PAYRO%20PRENSA%20DURANTE%20OCUPACION%20FR%2019190613.pdf>

It would be interesting compare with what the Argentine journalist **Roberto J. Payró**, told about the “*organization formed to obtain personal news of soldiers in the Belgian army*” :

Original **Spanish** version:

« *Monsieur Dagimont. Correo del soldadito belga (1-6)* », in ***La Nación*** ; 14-19/07/1915 :

<http://www.idesetautres.be/upload/191411-12%20PAYRO%20MONSIEUR%20DAGIMONT%20CORREO%20SOLDADITO%20BELGA.pdf>

**French** version :

<http://idesetautres.be/upload/191411-12%20PAYRO%20MONSIEUR%20DAGIMONT%20CORREO%20SOLDADITO%20BELGA%20FR.pdf>

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>

Le secrétaire particulier du cardinal Mercier est appelé « chanoine Loncin » dans Xavier BONIFACE ; *Histoire religieuse de la Grande Guerre* ; Paris ; Fayard ; 2014, 504 pages. Sa source est vraisemblablement *L'Echo belge* N°°526, page 1 du 1<sup>er</sup> avril 1916 (2<sup>ème</sup> année) :

<https://hetarchief.be/nl/media/lecho-belge-journal-quotidien-du-matin-paraissant-amsterdam/Yr4SfdENioNWOSMV8LsxSE7q>

« chanoine **A.** Loncin » :

<http://www.vaticana.be/regesten/4760.pdf>