

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1916)

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

Brand WHITLOCK

Chapter **XXIX**. *Belgium will learn what war is.*

There was endless and horrid fascination in the sound of the guns that never boomed so loudly as in that month of September ; people were discussing it all the time and bringing forth remarkable theories to explain why they were heard so much more clearly on some days than on others, so much more loudly in some places than in others. There were scientific explanations by the wise, in which they talked of curves of reverberation, and such things. All I knew was that sometimes at night at the *Orangerie* they sounded as though they were at the very gates of Brussels, and yet, alas ! they were never any nearer. The aspect of the city underwent another striking change in the middle of that month. I must have spoken somewhere in these pages of the sudden revival of the old fashion of bicycle-riding in Brussels. The Germans had taken all the horses except those used for drawing the wagons of the breweries and finally they took those too, and that autumn the heavy *camions* were trundled through the streets by yokes of oxen. There were no motors except those of the Germans, of the C.N., the C.R.B. and the diplomats. People had taken to

riding bicycles as a means of transport, and the boulevards and the Avenue Louise swarmed with them, two long streams coming and going. They wobbled about, so that it was an agony to ride in a motor ; indeed it was almost always something like that in Belgium, where there have never been any traffic rules, and where the communal spirit of independence is so strong, and the love of personal liberty so intense, that every self-respecting Belgian makes it a point of honour not to get out of the way if he happens to be standing in the middle of the road ; he would almost prefer to be run down rather than to feel that he had been weak enough to yield.

There were few bicycles in Brussels at the beginning of the war, and German agents did a large business immediately thereafter in selling them, and then, as the Belgians insisted, simply because the Germans had sold all their bicycles, there was a new *affiche* revoking the permission to ride them, and commanding the people to turn in their rubber tyres. Then, another opportunity for *les zwanzeurs* — long lines of bicycles rolling recklessly on the naked fellies of their wheels, the riders, with their rubber tyres *en bandoulière* across their shoulders, on their way to give them up. And the next day the streets were all deserted from kerb to kerb.

Another change that had something of the sadness there is in all change befell that month in

Brussels, though it was due only indirectly to the Germans. There were all over Brussels many *pâtisseries*. Brussels is equally famous with Paris for those dainty confections of the pastry cook's art — the *Madeleines*, the *petits fours*, *babas au rhum*, *tartelettes aux fruits*, *cornets a la crème* — what delights ! And then those delicate and delicious buns, or muffins, or scones, *la brioche* ! We were taught in school that Marie Antoinette, when told that the people had no bread, said : "*Well, let them eat cake*", and the remark, as quoted, has done her memory much evil. As a matter of fact, however, she said no such thing ; what she said was :

"*Qu'ils mangent de la brioche !*" It makes all the difference in the world ...

But it all took flour, though pastry as light as that they made in Brussels could have taken very little flour, and the officials of the C.R.B. doomed the institution to extinction. It was a little tragedy in its way, only understood by those who knew what a part the *pâtisseries* played in Brussels life ; they were hallowed by custom, they had almost the dignity of a constitutional institution. To doom their abolition was as though some one should decree the sudden suppression of baked beans in Boston, or of beaten biscuits in Virginia, or of tea and toasted muffins in England. The *pâtisserie* occupied in the affections of Brussels a place like that which the soda-water fountain holds in those

of our own people. They were crowded every afternoon. Whole families repaired to them at tea-time to taste the delicious cakes, though instead of tea most of them drank coffee or chocolate. There the people would sit around the little tables, as at some genial social centre ; it was a common meeting place for reunion, gossip and the day's gazette. The date of their last baking was a notable one, September 27, 1916. The patrons were as sad as the proprietors, but the *pâtisseries* had to go because flour was too precious, and the proprietors of the *pâtisseries*, instead of giving up, began making a sort of flour out of almonds and out of rice, and inventing new kinds of cakes.

There came to me one morning, when Baron von der Lancken sent me a formal note, an echo of an old tragedy in this world. He wrote to ask me to consent to the exemption from the latest restrictions of the *ravitaillement* of the household of Charlotte, former Empress of Mexico, who lived on and on under the lengthening shadow of one of the imperial adventures of the third Napoleon. The Empress could not eat the grey bread, could she have white ? I had already been appealed to in the matter of the provisioning of the estate, and I consented, of course, and we arranged the matter so that she might retain for the use of herself and her household the native produce of her restricted domain about the gloomy château at Meise.

It was the one problem of the *ravitaillement* easily settled, and the problems seemed to be increasing each day. It was always the same — the impossibility to secure a reasonable compliance with the guarantees concerning native produce. The exceptions that we had admitted were being used by the *militaires* to justify every kind of infraction ; cattle were being lifted and driven off across the border ; butter was being seized — even from the farm of M. Solvay, the President of the *Comité National*. It was growing more and more difficult to exercise control ; if the C.R.B. delegates reported that the soldiers were taking food, the *militaires* darkly hinted at spying ; it was not permitted to make observations as to the conduct of soldiers. The Germans, too, and apparently with deliberation, tried to exasperate the C.N., to induce its members to do something of which complaint could be made ; poor Kellogg was wellnigh worn out. His secluded existence in the academic grove had not developed for him that protective coloration which long years of dealing with human nature in the ugly form it so often assumes in politics, provide — sometimes ...

It was indeed an impossibility that we had undertaken to carry out, a miracle we had impiously tried to perform. We could control the imported food because it remained in the hands of the Belgian or American organizations ; but the native food the soldiers would take that where they

found it, and when they went home to Germany they filled their valises with it. And the *Zentralen* — there was no human way of circumventing them, and in despair we decided to ask for representation on those vicious contrivances for evil.

What made it all the more difficult was that the Germans were in bad temper as the result of the battle on the Somme and the advance of the British troops, whose distant unceasing drum-fire we could always hear. The Germans, indeed, were discouraged with the situation of their armies ; never before, in fact, had they considered themselves so nearly beaten, probably never before were they so nearly beaten. Von Hindenburg, it was said, had been in Belgium and had criticized von Bissing, characterizing his reign as too lenient, urging new rigours — the city should be closed at six o'clock in the evening, all citizens of countries at war with Germany should be placed in detention camps, and, worst of all, there was the first suggestion of that monstrous cruelty, the deportation as slaves of Belgian workmen. There was a quarrel between the two, and von Bissing had hurried off to Berlin to protest against Hindenburg's interference. It was at the moment when the military party in Germany was getting the upper hand ; von Tirpitz was clamouring, the reopening of the submarine war was being urged ; von Bethmann was tottering to his fall ; his speech in the Reichstag, warlike as it was, did not satisfy

the mad warriors into whose hands Germany was more and more confiding her destinies.

"*Now Belgium will learn what war is*", said one of the officers at headquarters, with what seemed almost like a personal satisfaction in the prospect.

We felt the reaction of all this ugly feeling in the meetings at which its effects were discussed, whether in the American Legation or in the Spanish Legation, where Villalobar received us with such ceremony there in the upper *salon* hung with the paintings of Goya, each of us with a little table to write on, at five o'clock his men serving tea and chocolate, and passing around cigarettes. The feeling gave a somewhat more sombre atmosphere to the reunions of the *Comité National*, and was adumbrated more and more in the serious faces of the members. But most of all it was apparent in the meetings we had with the Germans.

Discussion with the Germans was apt to be difficult because of the wide difference between our fundamental point of view ; it seems to be almost constitutionally impossible for them to realize that there can be any other point of view than their own, and the methods they use in war they use sometimes in diplomacy. I can not say that it was a definite and studied policy to attempt to frighten the opposite party, and thus make him more amenable, reduce him to a frame of mind in which he would be more easily affected and

impressed, but they generally opened all discussions by attempts to create terror and alarm, predicting all sorts of dreadful things, horrors and catastrophes, a kind of preliminary shelling of the trenches. At each new meeting we were met by statements to the effect that the *Comité National* would have to be abolished, that the *ravitaillement* would have to end, that the men in the C.R.B. would have to be replaced by others, that perhaps all the diplomatic privileges would be suspended, etc. There were painful scenes, black looks, shouting, gesticulating, threats to pull down the whole work of the *ravitaillement*, and let the Belgians starve. And all to be gone through with every time before the discussion could be undertaken.

When October came the Germans turned back their clocks an hour to announce that summer time had been changed to the old time, and thus set their clocks with the Belgian clocks ; but the Belgians turned their clocks back an hour — they would not have *l'heure boche*.

The resistance was firm, even if the spirits of Brussels were low. The hopes of a retreat had gone the way of so many other hopes ; the winter was coming on, and there was in the very atmosphere of those rainy days of early autumn, not only the looming prospect of another dark and desperate winter, but some sinister, unnamed

dread, summed up for me one day when M. Francqui said to me : "*Les choses se gâtent.*"

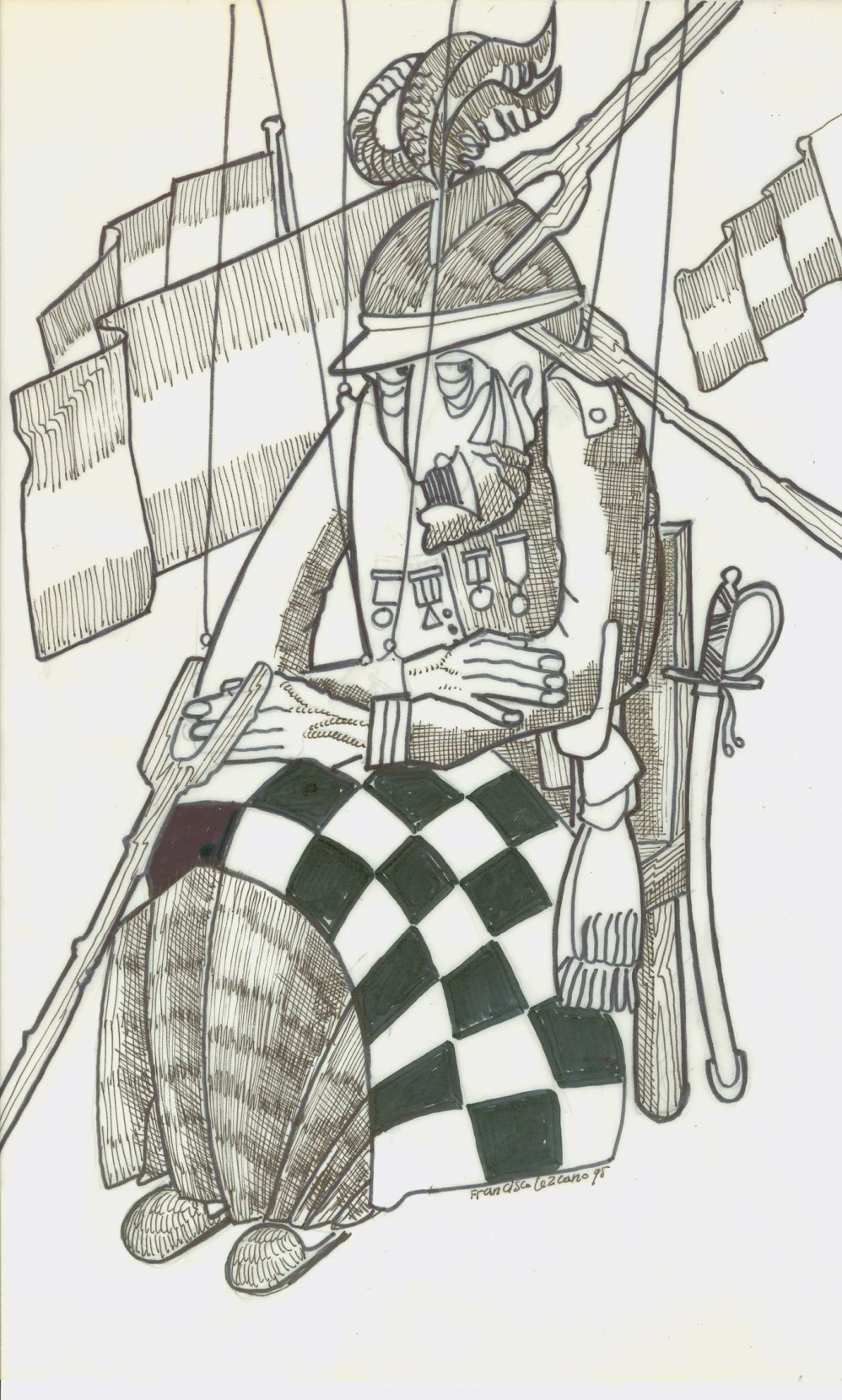
"*Les choses se gâtent !*" I can see the dark face, full of sorrow, full of pain ; the world was looking dark those early October days. The low grey skies, like those of the old Dutch masters, the leaves falling in damp masses, the cold wind blowing in from the sea, gave a melancholy tone to nature that accorded well with the sadness in the heart of men. The conditions of life were more and more difficult ; prices of necessities had increased to extravagant proportions. But more than all else there was some presentiment in the air, the portent of some vague, unknown and monstrous catastrophe. German submarines had appeared in American waters ; the controversy begun by the blowing up of the *Lusitania* would not down. The younger officers at the *Politische Abteilung* mentioning the U-53, could not restrain the enthusiasm that they invariably displayed in any new form of frightfulness. *

What was more serious, the delegates of the C.R.B. were reporting wholesale purchases, requisition and exportation of native products. Our agreement of April was being violated more and more. We had sufficient evidence on which to base the statement that there was a systematic attempt to help supply the needs of the military authorities in the occupied territory and the needs of the civil population in Germany. German troops in the

commune of Nechin had ordered the Burgomaster to furnish before evening of a certain day 50.000 kilos of potatoes, and to load them on to the railway wagons, and it required the labours of the whole population to comply with the order. In the provinces of Brabant and Liège goats and sheep were being purchased for exportation to Germany or to the front. There was a lively market of speculators in food at Welkenraedt, on the German border. It seemed as though the whole work was about to break down under the difficulties that accumulated. We had made new and vigorous protests, asking for a more rigorous control and for representation on the *Zentralen*, and in order to give additional force to those representations we had asked an interview with the Governor-General.

When he received us in the Ministry of Arts and Sciences that we might present our protest to him in person, Villalobar, Van Vollenhoven and I, von Bissing was looking depressed and ill ; he seemed older, and showed the haggard marks of care ; I wondered if the quarrel with Hindenburg had had anything to do with this unaccustomed air, less vigorous than we were used to in him. Prussian soldier though he was, he was not always for Prussian methods ; he had some conception of milder means, and he had occasionally resisted the military element. But Hindenburg had risen to the position almost of dictator ; the military were in the saddle and were riding roughshod over all

civilian scruples — and Bissing's power was waning.



When I asked if he were in good health he put his wrinkled hand wearily to his head, and said :

"Non, le climat d'ici ne me convient pas (No, the climate here does not agree with me)."

Villalobar gave me the glance the remark must infallibly provoke. The old soldier had been shooting in the Ardennes, and bagged three deer and some wild boar ; game was plentiful just then in those old forests where the animals had taken refuge from the dangers of those fields where men were hunting each other in the north of France. He wore no decorations as he stood there that day in the *salon*, in an almost shabby uniform, before a portrait of King Albert.

There was at times something very human about the old man. Catch him in the right mood, and one could obtain anything, if it was in the nature of a personal favour, from him. I had been greatly worried over some young American scapegraces who, dining, and perhaps indulging too liberally in a restaurant one evening, had mocked some German officers by caricaturing their manner of bowing, saluting, eating and drinking. The officers had had the young men arrested, and they were in a much more serious predicament than they realized. I had made numerous *démarches* in their favour, but had been unable to secure the dismissal of the charges against them ; the military faction was for pursuing them. I had used all the arguments I could think of, but to no

avail. I had even got Villalobar to speak a word in their favour, and he had written me a note in which he had said, in the tolerance he had for all human weakness, "*It was only youth*", and he had added a pensive and envious, "*Alas !*" That day, then, when we had presented and discussed our protest, I lingered and asked the Governor-General to let off my American boys, and to give them passes to Holland. He had heard of the incident, and was not at first disposed to be lenient ; the sacred uniform was involved. I argued with him, and finally, by a lucky stroke of psychology, I said bluntly :

"But they were drunk."

"*Oh !*" he cried, as if a sudden flood of light had been shed on the dark complication, "*they were drunk, were they ? Then I'll let them go. Don't worry any more about them.*"

He gave orders there and then to Lancken, and the boys were released immediately, and I adjured them never to minimize the reports of their state on that evening of their dinner until they were safe across the Holland border.

The second trial of Dr. Bull was coming on ; we had just learned that he was accused of complicity in the complot which had cost Miss Cavell her life, charged with having given her a thousand francs to aid British soldiers. I obtained permission for Mr. Ruddock to attend the trial, and for two days he sat in the Senate chamber and looked on while a court martial decided the fate of

sixteen persons accused of having conspired with Miss Cavell to aid young men in crossing the frontier. They had been betrayed by a letter written by one of the group. Dr. Bull did not make in this trial the favourable impression that he had made in the other ; he enraged his judges by saying that he had given money to Englishmen because, as he said, since the Germans shot their English prisoners he could thereby save the lives of his countrymen. To our intense relief, however, the prosecutor asked, not for the death penalty, as we had feared he would, but for six years' imprisonment. This penalty was imposed then, and we were once more relieved ; and then a few days later we heard that Dr. Bull was implicated in another matter. Mr. Ruddock went to Saint-Gilles Prison and saw the doctor, and while the presence of German sentinels discouraged conversation the old gentleman found a way of giving a gruesome suggestion of the plight in which he found himself by raising his hand to the position assumed by one who aims a gun ; he dropped his head over the imagined stock, shut his left eye and gave a too realistic "*Tschk !*" with his tongue as he pulled the imagined trigger. Having thus dramatized the fate he anticipated, he was taken away the next morning to Hasselt, the very sound of which connoted tragedy ...

And Vernon Kellogg was going away. I have been rich in friendships in my life and have been

shown a great deal of kindness by those who generously, in my case, have taken the will for the deed and the promise for the performance. I had formed many friendships in Brussels. I could feel as though surrounded with affection and regard, and

*I count myself in nothing else so happy
As in a soul remembering my good friends.*

But there was something in Vernon Kellogg, which I shall not limit by any attempt at definition, that made me like him, so that I was peculiarly sad at his going. The University of Stanford, an unwritten book, or something was calling him. It had been such a comfort to have him there ; he got on well with every body, with the Belgians, with the Germans, with all the others, this slender man with the smiling, humourous countenance, this gentleman and scholar.

Already I was lonesome in his going. October 17 was a day of a dull sky that grew very dark as the afternoon wore on. The laggard guns sounded louder than ever, as if to show that while they could not advance, they could make more noise, reiterate their one and only argument in a deeper, heavier voice. Kellogg and I were playing truant ; we had agreed to meet at Ravenstein to lunch alone and talk about the things of a world that once had been, of a world we sometimes feared could never be again. He came driving up to the terrace, and the smile he usually wore was gone from his

pleasant countenance ; in its place was the adumbration of evil tidings. And then he told me :

In Flanders the Germans had forcibly seized between twelve and fourteen hundred working men and carried them off to Germany to toil in the mines.

I remembered then the speech of Hellfrisch in the Reichstag a few days before, in which he had declared that the time had come when the Empire must force the men in the occupied territories to work. And I recalled the repeated conferences with reference to the *chômeurs*, that incessant preoccupation of the Germans, a subject to which they had returned again and again with the nagging persistence that characterized them ; once they had an idea in their head there was no way of dislodging it.

I was hardly surprised ; not that I expected precisely this, but the Germans had tried every other means they could think of to compel the *chômeurs* to work, and as they put all their trust in force they were not patient in argument or discussion — a waste of time, they felt, if one has the power to take what one wants.

And I recalled Hindenburg's quarrel with Bissing ; the new policy was coincidental with the coming of Hindenburg to the Western Front ; it was the work of *Messieurs les militaires* and they gloried in it openly, the first-fruits of the policy which was to teach Belgium, "*what war is*", as the

threat had been at the time of Hindenburg's visit. The policy had not as yet been applied to the *Occupationsgebiet* ; von Bissing was said to be opposed to it, and von der Lancken had gone to Berlin to induce the Government, if possible, not to apply such measures to their jurisdiction.

At our bi-weekly meeting the next afternoon we talked of little else than the *deportations*, to employ the euphemism by which the slave-drive became known. Dr. Kellogg by that time had details, based on the reports of the delegates of the C.R.B., who had just come into Brussels for their weekly meeting. Demands to work for the German army were being made on unemployed, and even on employed men, not only in the Belgian *Etappen* but in the territory of the General Government itself, as in Luxembourg and in the Hainaut. In Luxembourg the Germans had issued orders that certain public works undertaken by the Belgian Provincial and Communal authorities, in order to provide work for the unemployed, be discontinued, and further orders were given to the effect that the men thus thrown out of work were not to be employed by private persons. The men had then been invited by the German military authorities to work for them, and when they refused they had been seized by force. Men had been taken thus at Liège, Dinant and Verviers. Thus, despite the Governor- General and before

Lancken could get to Berlin, the policy was already in vogue in the *Occupationsgebiet*.

In Tournai demands to work for the military authorities had been made on large numbers of men, who, when they refused, had been interned in prison camps and put on bread and water. The relief organization had been ordered to issue bread to them, but bread only ; it was not allowed to provide any other part of the regular ration, such as bacon, lard, rice, peas and beans. Besides, numerous demands were made by the military authorities on the local committees of the relief organization for lists of *chômeurs*, the expressed intention being to use these lists as a means of determining what men should be impressed for labour in the service of the German army ; and local civil authorities who had refused to give these lists had already been arrested and deported to Germany. These acts constituted an infraction of the undertaking with regard to the forcing of labour, not only the undertaking in The Hague conventions — no one ever thought of citing them any more — but of the undertaking in regard to the *ravitaillement*. If the *Comité National* and the Commission for Relief in Belgium should accept this situation without protest they would be acquiescing in an indirect infraction of the agreement between the Governor-General and the Protecting Ministers, and, by the limitation of the

food ration, would even be a party to the punishment of these Belgian men.

This then was the *dénouement*, the end of all those efforts put forth by the Germans and so often frustrated, to inquire into the charity distributed by the Comité National, and to obtain the lists of those to whom it was given — the *chômeurs*.

It was not difficult to imagine the effect of such proceedings on the *ravitaillement* ; the next courier from England would bring a demand that either the deportations or the *ravitaillement* cease. And then ? It was a sober and discouraged group that met that afternoon, but we could do no more just then than to await von der Lancken's return from Berlin in the hope, not very strong, that he would bring some sort of good news, and in the more likely event that the news was bad, to prepare to protest.

The press-gang was not a new institution in the zone of operations. It had been at work, in principle, as early as June 1915, in Lille, in Roubaix and in Tourcoing, where the civilians had been forced to make sacks for use in the trenches. The correspondence between the Mayor of Lille and the German commander had been given to me, and nothing could place in opposition more strikingly the two mentalities involved in conflict. **

More than a hundred men, mayors and leading manufacturers of that industrial centre of the north of France had been arrested and sent to

Germany for having refused to aid the Germans in their press ; I knew of a retired manufacturer, who had had a factory at Roubaix, who was locked up in a bathroom for twelve days — he was ill at the time — simply because he refused to use his "*moral influence*" to compel his former employees to work.

Thus, first in the *Operationsgebiet*, then spreading to the *Etappengebiet* and now in the *Occupationsgebiet* it began — this kidnapping, this shanghaiing, this crimping, this slaving, in those remote and obscure hamlets which knew so many more horrors than the cities because there the *feldwebels* and under-officers were supreme, under no supervising eye, and since in the German system there are no equals, but only superiors and inferiors, so that every man is cowering before the man above him and bullying the man below, they could work their brutal and irresponsible will as they chose. Prowling thus in far and hidden corners of the land they pounced upon their helpless prey, rounding slowly, stealthily in on the larger cities, reserving Brussels and Antwerp to the last.

The stories of the seizures, with details of a cruelty and brutality the like of which one could recall only vaguely out of the memory of tales, long since read, of slave-drivers in the African jungle, came up to Brussels from the provinces, and after the first dazed incomprehension, the early

scepticism, there was a rage and indignation far beyond that produced by the earlier atrocities. These, as I have said, had seemed to be accepted by the people in a kind of dumb fatalism, as they might have accepted some terrible cataclysm in nature. But this deed, with its monstrous and cynical cruelty, perpetrated upon a cultivated people, in the year of Our Lord 1916, at a moment in the history of the world when, despite all its disillusion, it believed human slavery no longer possible on any of its continents, created a rage that was black, implacable, remorseless, a hatred that found its savage intensity deep down in the primeval instincts of the race. I had never imagined, much less seen, any human emotion comparable to it ; I hope never to have to look upon the like again. It transformed the faces of men I knew ; they grew hard, dark, stony, until a livid hue of passion informed them, and then their eyes blazed, their jaws were set, and they could find no words to express their loathing of this foulest deed committed by man, or that hatred of the men who committed it.

"*L'Esclavage !*" they would say, with a harsh, rasping voice.

"*L'Esclavage !*" And they would repeat :

"*L'Esclavage !*"

And sometimes tears would start to their eyes, tears at their own impotence in the passionate and terrible longing for revenge.

Brand WITHLOCK

Footnotes.

* Comparative table of prices of staple food articles in Brussels (Autumn 1916)

* COMPARATIVE TABLE OF PRICES OF STAPLE FOOD ARTICLES IN BRUSSELS (Autumn 1916)

	Price before the War	Price, Autumn 1916	Increase Percentage
Flour	kilo Frs. 0.20	Frs. 2.25	1025
Sugar	" " 0.60	" 4.00	566
Coffee	" " 3.00	" 11.00	266
Chicory	" " 0.50	" 2.50	400
Bread	" " 0.28	" 0.60	114
Beef, veal, mutton	" " 2.60	" 7.00	169
Fresh pork	" " 2.60	" 9.00	246
Salted pork	" " 2.30	" 10.00	334
Cooked ham	" " 3.50	" 15.00	328
Suet, etc.	" " 2.00	" 8.00	300
Lard	" " 2.50	" 11.00	340
Butter	" " 3.75	" 12.50	233
Cheese	" " 1.30	" 6.50	400
Milk	litre " 0.22	" 0.50	127
Cream	" " 2.00	" 7.00	250
Rice	kilo " 1.20	" 4.00	233
Macaroni, noodles	" " 0.95	" 4.00	421
Dried vegetables	" " 0.95	" 4.00	421
Chocolate, cocoa	" " 3.50	" 12.00	242
Olive oil	litre " 3.00	" 25.00	733
Black soap	kilo " 0.40	" 12.50	3025
" Sunlight " soap, 4 pieces	" " 0.40	" 6.50	1525
Sal soda	" " 0.06	" 0.55	1200
Seed oil	litre " 1.50	" 17.50	1066

The price of cauliflowers, carrots, and turnips had increased 300 per cent.
The price of ordinary fruits had increased 300 per cent.

** Lille, le 18 juin 1915.

EXTRAIT DU RAPPORT DE LA SECTION DE TRANSPORT DU 16 AVRIL 1915 N° 1142 AU GOUVERNEMENT.

Jusqu'à présent la fabrication de sacs à sable se faisait sans empêchement depuis des mois ; il y a environ 4 semaines que pour la première fois se montraient dans la population des efforts de retenir

les ouvriers et ouvrières qui sont employés dans la maison Couzineau par des menaces. Elles n'eurent tout d'abord aucun résultat, même quelques autres fabriques s'étaient déterminées à travailler, de sorte que ces derniers temps, environ 230.000 sacs avaient été confectionnés journellement.

L'agitation paraît cependant avoir continué et a amené 5 fabriques sur 7 qui se trouvaient en activité à arrêter le travail faute de main-d'oeuvre.

Comme on paie pour la fabrication d'un sac 7 centimes de salaire, la dépense pour les 3 millions 800.000 sacs encore à livrer se monterait à 266.000 frs qui devraient être payés par la Ville de Lille, si elle ne réussissait pas à déterminer les ouvriers à reprendre le travail.

Stalm
Pour copie conforme,
SODING, Capitaine.

(Translation :)

Lille, June 18, 1915.

**Extract of the Report of the Transportation
Section of April 16, 1915.**

N° 1142 To the Government.

Up to the present time the manufacture of sandbags has been carried out without difficulty for several months ; but about four weeks ago, for the

first time, efforts were observed in the population to restrain the working men and working women who are employed in the Couzineau factory by menaces. These efforts at first had no result ; even several other factories decided to work, so that lately nearly 230.000 sacks have been made daily. However stop work because of the lack of working men.

As seven centimes are paid for the fabrication of each sack, the expenditure for the 3.800.000 sacks still to be delivered would amount to 266.000 francs, which must be paid by the city of Lille if it does not succeed in inducing the workers to resume their labour.

Stalm
A certified copy,
SODING, Captain

Gouvernement de Lille
J. N° 14790

Lille, le 18 juin 1915.

(Copie à retourner)
Au Maire de Lille.

Il est déclaré au Maire ce qui suit :
(a) Le Maire doit user de toute son influence pour déterminer les gens à reprendre le travail.

Pour garantir les ouvriers contre les désagréments après conclusion de la paix, le gouvernement est prêt à leur délivrer un certificat constatant qu'ils ont été forcés au travail.

(b) Pour le cas où le 22 juin, le travail n'était pas repris, la confection des sacs à sable sera donnée à la ville.

(c) Si même ceci n'atteignait pas le but, les toiles réquisitionnées seront envoyées en Allemagne y seront travaillées et réexpédiées ici aux frais de la ville.

Je me réserve en outre d'imposer à la ville une contribution en amende.

(d) Il sera procédé sévèrement contre les instigateurs.

Von Heinrich
Pour copie conforme,
SODING, Capitaine

(Translation :)

Government of Lille,
J. N° 14790

Lille, June 18, 1915.

(Copy to be returned)
To the Mayor of Lille

The Mayor will take notice of that which follows :

(a) The Mayor will use his influence to induce people to resume work.

In order to guarantee the workers against difficulties after the conclusion of peace, the Government is willing to deliver to them a certificate stating that they have been forced to work.

(b) In case that work is not resumed by June 22, the work of making the sacks will be given to the city.

(c) If this does not attain its end, the canvas requisitioned will be sent to Germany to be made there and returned here at the expense of the city.

I may also find it necessary to impose a fine on the city.

(d) The instigators will be dealt with severity.

Von Heinrich
A certified copy,
SODING, Captain

Lille, le 19 juin 1915.

Le Maire de Lille

à Monsieur le Gouverneur de Lille

Monsieur le Gouverneur,

M. le Général de Graevenitz m'a transmis hier soir la copie de votre lettre relative aux ouvriers qui confectionnent les sacs à sable pour les tranchées.

Vous me dites qu'une certaine agitation dont l'écho n'est même pas venu jusqu'à moi, règne à ce sujet dans la population ouvrière, et tend à paralyser le travail.

Vous me demandez en conséquence "d'user de toute mon influence pour déterminer les gens à reprendre le travail."

Je regrette devoir vous faire respectueusement remarquer qu'il m'est impossible d'entrer dans vos désirs.

Obliger un ouvrier ou un patron à travailler est absolument contraire à mon droit ; lui conseiller de travailler, absolument contraire à mon devoir, que me dicte impérieusement l'art. 52 de la Convention de la Haye.

Vous avez reconnu vous-même la justesse de mes observations lorsqu'il s'est agi, au début de l'occupation, de trouver des ouvriers pour les tranchées et vous n'avez pas insisté pour que je m'y entremette. Ce sont les mêmes raisons que j'invoque aujourd'hui.

Quant à la solution que vous proposez de donner à la ville elle-même le soin de confectionner les sacs, elle ne peut même pas être envisagée, car mon devoir de Maire français me l'interdit plus formellement encore.

Quelque risque personnel que je puisse encourir, je regrette donc ne pouvoir vous donner satisfaction.

Vous êtes soldat, Excellence, vous placez trop haut le sentiment du devoir pour vouloir exiger que je trahisse le mien. Si j'agissais autrement, vous n'auriez pour moi au fond de vous-même que du mépris.

Veillez agréer. Excellence, mes civilités.

Le Maire de Lille,
Ch. Delesalle.

(Translation :)

Lille, June 19, 1915.

The Mayor of Lille to the Governor of Lille

Mr. Governor,

General de Graevenitz has transmitted me yesterday evening the copy of your letter relating to the workers who are making sandbags for the trenches.

You say to me that a certain agitation of which the echo even has not reached me, exists among the population and has a tendency to paralyze work.

You ask me in consequence to use all my influence in order to induce the people to resume work.

I regret to be compelled to respectfully ask you to note that it is impossible for me to meet your desire.

To oblige a workman or an employer to work is absolutely contrary to my right ; to counsel him to work is absolutely contrary to my duty, which is imperiously dictated to me by article 52 of the Hague Convention.

You have recognized yourself the justness of my observation when, at the beginning of the occupation, it was a question of finding workmen for the trenches, and you did not insist that I interfere in that. I invoke the same reasons to-day.

As to the solution which you propose, that is to impose on the city itself the task of making the

sacks, that cannot even be considered because my duty as a French mayor forbids me still more formally to do it.

Whatever personal risk I may run, I regret, then, not to be able to give you satisfaction.

You are a soldier, Excellency ; you place too high the sentiment of duty, to wish to compel me to betray my own. If I did otherwise, you will have only contempt for me in your heart.

I pray you to accept, Excellency, my compliments.

The Mayor of Lille,
Ch. Delesalle

Kommandantur Lille
8843

Lille le 20 juin 1915
3 h. 30 (allemande).

A Monsieur le Maire de Lille :

Son Excellence Monsieur le Gouverneur a retiré aux otages de la Ville de Lille, leur faveur, jusqu'à nouvel avis. Le nécessaire doit donc être fait pour que 5 otages se trouvent tous les jours, à 7 h du soir, à la Citadelle, pour y rester jusqu'à 7 h du matin.

L'appel doit se faire aujourd'hui le 20, VI, 1915, à la Citadelle à 9 heures.

Son Excellence le Gouverneur répondra à part à la lettre du Maire.

von Graevenitz

(Translation :)

Kommandantur, Lille
8843

Lille, June 20, 1915
3.30 (German time)

To the Mayor of Lille

His Excellency the Governor has withdrawn from the hostages of the city of Lille the favours accorded to them, until further orders. The necessary steps must be taken then for five hostages to report every day at 7 o'clock in the evening at the Citadel, and to remain there until 7 o'clock in the morning.

The roll will be called to-day, June 20, at the Citadel at 9 o'clock.

His Excellency the Governor will reply separately to the Mayor's letter.

von Graevenitz

Gouvernement de Lille

Lille, le 20 juin 1915

A Monsieur le Maire de Lille :

J'ai reçu votre lettre du 19 juin, dans laquelle vous me dites que vous n'aviez point le droit de forcer un ouvrier au travail, et qu'il était contraire à votre devoir de lui conseiller d'exécuter les travaux désirés par le Gouvernement, comme étant en contradiction avec la convention de la Haye.

Je n'ai nullement voulu que vous usiez de contrainte envers les ouvriers ; j'ai plutôt espéré que vous ouvririez une voie de conciliation pour protéger la ville et les ouvriers contre des désagréments.

Je ne saurais nullement partager votre opinion que la confection des sacs soit contradictoire au paragraphe 52 de l'accord du 18 octobre 1907. Je vous invite de nouveau à insister auprès des patrons et des ouvriers ; je suis convaincu que la plupart des ouvriers ne demandent pas mieux que de pouvoir gagner leur vie.

Au cas où le 22 juin à 10 heures du matin, le travail ne sera pas repris, je me verrai obligé de prendre des mesures plus rigoureuses.

La faveur que j'ai accordée aux otages de la ville, je l'ai fait cesser à partir d'aujourd'hui. Cinq otages devront passer la nuit à la Citadelle depuis 7 heures du soir à 7 heures du matin, jusqu'à la reprise de la confection des sacs.

von Heinrich

(Translation :)

Government of Lille

Lille, June 20, 1915

To the Mayor of Lille

I have received your letter of the June 19, in which you tell me that you have not the right to force a workman to work, and that it is against your duty to counsel him to execute the work desired by the Government, as being in contradiction with the Hague Convention.

I have never wished that you should use any coercion on the workmen. I rather hoped that you

would obtain a way of conciliation to protect the city and the workmen against trouble.

I can in nowise share your opinion that the manufacture of sandbags is contrary to paragraph 52 of the accord of October 18, 1907. I ask you again to insist to the employers and to the employees. I am convinced that the greater part of the workmen will ask nothing better than to be able to earn their livelihood.

In case that by June 22 at 10 o'clock in the morning work is not resumed, I shall be obliged to take the most rigorous measures.

The favour that I have accorded to the hostages of the city I put an end to from to-day. Five hostages will have to pass the night in the Citadel, from 7 o'clock in the evening to 7 o'clock in the morning, until the manufacture of the sandbags is resumed.

von Heinrich

Le 21 juin 1915

Le Maire de Lille à

Monsieur le Gouverneur von Heinrich, Lille.

Monsieur le Gouverneur,

Je reçois votre lettre de ce jour, et m'empresse d'y répondre, je ne puis que vous confirmer ma lettre du 19.

Depuis plus de huit mois je crois avoir fait preuve du plus grand esprit de conciliation, et vous n'hésitez pas, je l'espère, à reconnaître la

loyauté parfaite que j'ai apportée dans mes rapports avec l'autorité occupante.

Les ouvriers qui travaillent dans les tranchées "*prennent part aux opérations de la guerre contre leur Patrie.*" Je n'ai pourtant jamais cherché à les en empêcher, estimant que chacun de mes concitoyens ne relève que de sa propre conscience.

Mais quand il s'agit de mon devoir personnel, il n'y a pas de conciliation ni de transaction possible. Mon devoir dans la circonstance est tellement net que je ne pourrais m'y soustraire sans forfaire à l'Honneur.

Vous me dites que si le travail n'est pas repris demain, des punitions rigoureuses seront infligées à la ville.

Pourquoi voulez-vous rendre responsable une immense population innocente, et ne pas exercer vos rigueurs contre celui-là seul qui assume et accepte les responsabilités de ses actes ?

Veillez agréer, Excellence, mes civilités.

Le Maire de Lille

(Translation :)

June 21, 1915.

The Mayor of Lille to the Governor von Heinrich,
Lille

Mr. Governor, — I receive your letter of this day, and I hasten to reply to it. I can only confirm my letter of the 19th.

For more than eight months I have tried to give proof of the largest spirit of conciliation, and you will not hesitate, I hope, to recognize the perfect fairness that I have shown in my dealings with the occupying authority.

The working men who work in the trenches are "taking part in the operations of war against their country". I have never, however, tried to prevent them from so doing, feeling that each one of my fellow-citizens has to obey only to his own conscience.

But where there is a question of my personal duty there is no conciliation and no discussion possible. My duty in the circumstances is so clear that I cannot escape without forfeiting my honour.

You tell me that if the work is not resumed tomorrow rigorous punishment will be inflicted on the city. Why do you wish to render responsible a whole innocent population and not exercise your rigours against him who alone assumes and accepts responsibility for his acts ?

I beg you to accept, Excellency, my compliments.

The Mayor of Lille

Illustration of Francisco LEZCANO : « *Vieja gloria militar* ». © 1995-2016

French translation : « *La Belgique saura ce qu'est la guerre* » in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre XXII (1916) in ***La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles*** ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 369-372.

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

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>