

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION. (1917)

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 2

Brand WHITLOCK

Chapter XLI. Waiting.

The ravitaillement assured.

I spent the whole of the following day, Saturday, at the Legation, waiting for word from Washington. Sunday came, and we waited all day at the Orangerie, where it was still so peaceful, the great park steeped in the white solitude of the crisp snow. At tea-time Villalobar arrived, and even before he had spoken a word I could read in his face the news he brought. The President had broken off diplomatic relations ; he had it from Lancken, who had shown him the Reuter and Wolff despatches. The Marquis had hardly uttered the words before Ruddock arrived with Gregory, just back from Holland.

"Yes", said Gregory in his business-like way, "*the President had recalled Gerard and given Bernstorff his passports.*"

We sat there in what for the moment was futile discussion of the event, wondering what we should do with the ravitaillement.

The next morning I drove to the Legation through bleak, deserted streets ; few were abroad, save that at the King's stables on the boulevard in

the fog a knot of people was gathered to watch the seizure of horses ; a great round-up was in progress under the guard of Uhlans sitting their horses, with long lances and soiled guidons. At the Legation I heard that von der Lancken had gone to Berlin, but I went to see von Moltke. He was very grave ; Lancken would not be back until Thursday, but he had left word that he hoped to see me then. They were all depressed at the *Politische Abteilung* — evidently they had had no notion that the President would act so promptly and so decisively. They were under no illusions as to what a rupture in diplomatic relations must lead to ; von Moltke said it would soon be war. He could not imagine why America so misunderstood Germany, he said, as he translated the President's address for me from the German text into French ; we talked a while, but to no purpose, since neither of us knew anything as yet officially.

All morning long and all that afternoon the Legation was crowded with callers asking for news, Blancas, my Argentine colleague, and Burgomaster Lemonnier among them. Villalobar was in and out, and toward evening Mr. Gregory came with M. Francqui. M. Francqui wished the men of the C.R.B. to remain and to continue their work, and even as we talked a telegram came from London, asking that I announce to the Belgian people that the *ravitaillement* would go on. And for the first time that day we smiled and shook our

heads in the old hopelessness of ever making those "outside" understand the conditions under which we lived in Belgium, where there was no free public life such as the Occident knew, and where no one, except the German authorities, made public announcements.

We reestablished ourselves at the Legation, which, with the confusion of callers and cards, with trunks and packing-boxes everywhere, doors fanning icy blasts on one, all the bustle of preparation to leave, was not a cheerful place. There is sadness in all parting, and there was something peculiarly saddening in this ; men came to bid me good-by, tears in their eyes as they did so ; and that evening when we escaped for dinner to the Allards, our good de Sinçay, lifting his glass to propose my wife's health, made a touching little speech which he could not finish. Our situation had ever this unique quality, of which I fear I have not made enough in these pages ; we were among friends who had grown very dear in the sufferings we had shared. And now that we were going that very fact made it all the harder.

But though we said good-by, we did not go. We lingered on the scene perforce, with an embarrassing sense of anti-climax. Nor could we plan to go ; I was waiting for instructions from Washington and for Lancken's return from Berlin. From this anxiety and uncertainty, there was no relief in work, for the news had stricken all action

with a paralysis ; we could only sit about and wait, while Ruddock and I wondered what to do with the cipher codes when we went, whether to burn them or risk taking them with us.

My communication with my Government and with the outside world had been suspended ; my cablegrams were refused and while we were speculating as to when and how we should go I had a telephone message from Count Harrach, saying that there was a press dispatch from Washington which indicated that I might stay in Brussels if the Germans made no objections. Then on the heels of this unexpected news came a polite note from Count von Moltke, transmitting a package of telegrams in cipher. We seized them eagerly, and Ruddock and Herter set themselves to the task of deciphering them. We stood anxiously by, Mrs. Ruddock, my wife, Merritt, Swift, an *attaché* lately detailed to the Legation and just arrived from Washington, and I hanging eagerly on the cipher groups as slowly they disclosed their secrets — surely the instructions would be among them ! The first despatch was from Mr. Hoover, who was in Washington, ordering the men of the C.R.B. to remain at their posts ; there were other despatches relating to other details ; and then at last the one, the principal despatch. It was very still in that room, the atmosphere of which had palpitated with so many sensations during those long months and years since, in those hot nights of

August, 1914, the despatches deciphered there had come to have an interest almost historic ; the words came out slowly, one after another. Ruddock swiftly turning the leaves of the code, Herter writing down the translation. Yes, it was the despatch for which we had been watching and waiting ; only it seemed strangely brief. There was some difficulty with the ciphers, but finally they decoded a sentence to the effect that the Legation and the archives and the protection of American interests were to be transferred to — and Herter suddenly tossed his pencil to the desk, Ruddock slammed the code book shut with a dull report, and they sat back in their chairs and laughed. The despatch ended there. We knew no more than we knew before. It was, as it proved after the work of rectification and verification had been accomplished, a correction of some previous despatch, one that had not reached us. So there was nothing to do but to wait.

Count Harrach called that afternoon on behalf of the Governor-General, who had just returned from Wiesbaden, and, still ill, had taken to his bed at the château de Trois-Fontaines. Count Harrach presented the Governor-General's compliments and expressed his hope that I arrange to stay in Belgium.

"His Excellency says it would be a calamity if the ravitaillement were to come to an end", said the Count. "He wishes very greatly that you stay to

insure its continuance. In Germany" — he paused, looked at me a moment, and went on — "*in Germany we have hardly enough to eat ourselves ; we have none to give the Belgians.*"

Through my mind there flashed the recollection of the logical arguments of all those theorists who had spoken with such owlish wisdom of The Hague Conventions and the duty of the occupant to nourish the population.

"*On est très serré*" the Count was saying, and he gave a little laugh as if to cover whatever embarrassment there was in the situation.

I asked the Count to make my compliments and to give my thanks to the Governor-General and to say that I should do all in my power to aid in sustaining the work of the *ravitaillement*, but that I could say nothing definitely until I had received instructions. It was a curious sensation, finding myself at last in a position I had long anticipated and prepared for ; I had thought it out in the watches of the night, and decided that in that emergency we should replace the American delegates by Dutch and Spanish delegates, and Hoover had been of that mind ; thus the *ravitaillement* might go on. But now that the long-anticipated emergency had arisen my solution was not so simple. That is the way with emergencies ; try how we will to prepare for them, the imagination can not envisage all the possibilities ; the expected never happens ; the one thing certain of any

situation is that it will never be what one thought it would be. I had never had any illusions as to that euphemism "*rupture of diplomatic relations*" ; it meant war, soon or late, and I had felt from the beginning that it would be impossible for the Americans long to remain in Belgium ; they could not safely continue their work in an enemy country. Diplomatically my position was simple enough ; I had only to leave Belgium and proceed to Havre, the seat of the Belgian Government. But there was another complication ; I could not go and leave the men of the C.R.B. behind. I had thought of that, too, in the watches of the night. Thus, even while Harrach sat there, and after he had gone, I was turning the old problem over in my mind ; the feeding of the Belgians must go on, the brave little nation must be kept alive — and the men of the C.R.B. must be got out of Belgium.

The weather seemed to grow colder with each day, a veritable *froid de loup*, as the French say. The corridors of the Legation resounded with the sound of hammer and of saw, as Gustave packed up the archives, and there were callers in such throngs as we had not known since those August days of 1914, men asking for news, men to bid us farewell, members of the C.R.B. come to have their passports put in order. Among the callers one morning was M. Louis Franck, the eloquent deputy and acting Burgomaster of Antwerp, the leader of the Flemish movement in

Belgium ; a striking man in appearance, Franck, with his full reddish beard ; he could be eloquent and convincing in four languages. He came on behalf of the provincial committee of Antwerp to ask me to remain.

"Your presence will be a comfort to the people", he generously said. "They will be less hungry with you here than with you away. In remote villages in Flanders humble folk are praying to-night that you remain."

His musical voice, like some deep-toned instrument of many melodious strings, the rich, rolling accent in which he spoke French, made his plea very moving.

"Même si le ravitaillement continue, restez parmi nous, car le réconfort moral que vous nous donnerez nous fera du bien".

Count von Moltke continued to send me my cablegrams and finally the important one arrived instructing me to turn American interests over to Villalobar, to leave Belgium at once, and to proceed to Havre to take up my residence near the Belgian Government ; there were many details as to closing the four consulates in Belgium. Mr. Diederich, Consul-General at Antwerp, Mr. Johnson, Consul at Ghent, Mr. Heingartner, Consul at Liège, were to accompany me. Mr. Watts, Consul-General at Brussels, had gone to America in January and was already happily out of

it all ; Nasmith, Vice-Consul, was to go to Amsterdam.

But this despatch was altered by another, a correction of the correction we had received a few days before, and thus amended, it authorized me to remain in Brussels if my presence would insure the continuance of the *ravitaillement*, and it could be satisfactorily arranged.

When Lancken returned from Berlin I went at once to see him, there in his little warm upper room overlooking the frozen snowy park, where the poor sea-gulls were volplaning on their strong white wings over the spot where the people threw crumbs through the iron fence to them. He received me cordially, and seating himself at his littered desk, said that the rupture in diplomatic relations had greatly surprised him, and as he felt again the shock of that surprise he sank back in his chair and flung up his hands, and exclaimed :

"Et mon Dieu ! à quoi bon ? à quoi bon ?"

His blue eyes fixed me with their question, and he went on :

"Je m'attendais à une protestation très forte, mais oui ! Mais pas à ceci !"

I thought that there were yet other surprises in store for those minds at Berlin that had so persistently misunderstood America and America's character, and that of her patient President, but the time was past for any explanation of mine to avail.

"What of the ravitaillement ?" I asked.

The Baron wished me to remain, and he said that the Governor-General would be grateful if I were to remain.

"*But in what capacity ?*"

Oh, evidently not as Minister ; he made that clear, but as, shall we say, Honorary Chairman of the C.R.B. ? They would consent to half a dozen members of the Commission remaining to supervise the work, for instance, Gregory and Gray, perhaps Ruddock and Consul-General Diederich. He would feel in my presence an assurance and would personally assume the responsibility for my treatment. However, the freedom of the men in the C.R.B. would meanwhile be restricted ; they could no longer have the use of their motor-cars. And besides, he would permit himself merely to mention the fact that since my nation had broken off diplomatic relations with Germany I was guilty of a diplomatic incorrection in keeping my flag flying on the Legation.

I suspected that in this last observation he had etiquette and usage on his side, but as I listened to all the rest I grew sick at heart, for under the conditions he proposed we could not with dignity remain, and I knew the processes of German official thought so well that I had little hope, after that, of our reaching an agreement that would insure the continuance of the *ravitaillement*. The conversation, so far as any practical ends

were concerned, had been futile. I asked the Baron to put his proposal in writing, and came away.

I sent for Gregory and told him of the official attitude toward the C.R.B., and he decided to apprise Hoover of the fact by cable at once ; Gray was going out to Rotterdam that afternoon, and he could send the despatch from there. The threat to curtail the liberties of the C.R.B. was unexpected, however little there was in the rest to surprise us, for at the *Vermittlungsstelle* Gregory had been told that all the members of the C.R.B. could remain with their privileges unimpaired, and on the strength of this assurance Gregory had already sent the seven men for the north of France back to their posts.

It was not a comfortable position in which to be placed, and we were very much undecided as to what we should do, and I recall that Ruddock, as though in search of some ultimate criterion, took down and dusted an old volume and read the Treaty of 1797 between America and Prussia, with no more satisfaction, alas ! than that of the academic and perhaps patriotic pleasure we could take in the English in which Benjamin Franklin had written it.

But even the wisdom of Poor Richard was unavailing in those days ; we must seek some solution for a situation which even his sagacity could not foresee.

Young Herter's problem was settled, at any rate, for that evening the Germans sent him passports to leave via Switzerland. Mr. Gerard was leaving Berlin that evening, and as Herter was attached to the Berlin Embassy he must go with his chief, and the word that accompanied the passports told Herter to go as soon as possible. He did not stand upon the order of his going but was off by an early morning train, and though he was arrested *en route* and confined for hours in some sort of German prison or *Kommandantur*, he did finally, after two or three days, reach Switzerland in safety.

The written statement of Baron von der Lancken's proposal took the form of a letter addressed by him to the Marquis de Villalobar, who transmitted it to me. It was a letter in which the desire was expressed that the work of *ravitaillement* continue, that the members of the C.R.B., or some of them, remain in Belgium, and that I remain as well, though there was a sedulous avoidance of any reference to my official capacity and a marked omission of all the official forms of respect usual in diplomacy, forms to which the Germans themselves always attached the greatest importance, and the disregard of which in their own case they would instantly have resented. There was no reason why they should continue to have diplomatic intercourse with me after my Government had expressed its unwillingness to

have any further diplomatic relations with Germany. Had my position alone been involved it would all have been very simple ; I should have had only to ask for my passports and go. But nothing was ever simple in Belgium ; each situation there was complex, involved, complicated, novel and without precedent. The work of *ravitaillement* which America had undertaken remained, and the need of it remained more urgent than ever, and there were three score Americans engaged in that work still in Belgium, for whose safety I was responsible. It was evident from Baron von der Lancken's letter to the Marquis of Villalobar that the first concern of the German authorities was that if the *ravitaillement* ceased and the Belgians were left to starve, the onus should not rest on the Germans, and I was equally anxious that it should not rest on the Americans, so I replied in a letter to the Marquis in which I set forth the American position as I conceived and interpreted it.*

Then, suddenly, we were all asked to meet at the *Politische Abteilung* to discuss the situation. The Baron von der Lancken, Dr. Reith and Dr. Brohn were there, and the Marquis of Villalobar, M. van Vollenhoven and I. There was a new and vital complication ; the question of the route to be taken by the ships of the C.R.B. had been raised. The Germans had insisted that the ships follow the narrow passage-way which they had marked out around the northern part of the British Isles to

Rotterdam, and the British Government had insisted that the ships continue to touch at a British port to be overhauled for contraband. The British Government was willing to forego this search if the ships were given safe conduct through the danger zone. And this the Germans refused.

"We are not going to have the English putting the C.R.B. flag on their ships", said von der Lancken, *"and thus passing through the danger zone"*.

It was a point that could be settled only at Berlin, and we decided to invoke the services of the Spanish Ambassador at that capital.

The Baron von der Lancken disclosed a plan whereby his Government proposed to replace the American delegates by delegates of other nationality.

"The Swiss Government had offered Swiss delegates, and the German Government had accepted", he said.

But Villalobar promptly resented this as an interference.

"The German Government has nothing to do with the delegates", he said. *"That is for the Protecting Ministers to decide."*

There was a lively discussion between the Marquis and the Baron which I could enjoy, my new position after all not lacking its compensations. I cared little whether the new delegates were Spanish or Dutch or Swiss, if only

they would come quickly and let my Americans go. The question was not settled and when the meeting dissolved Lancken asked me to step aside with him, and we went into the little dining-room and sat down at the long table of the officers' mess, where the cloth was always spread.

"*Et maintenant*", he said, "*votre position ?*"

He must know at once, must telegraph Berlin immediately — that was the impatient German way; he must have a decision on the spot, the which I told him he could not have ; I would see him on the morrow.

I called on Baron von der Lancken at half past four o'clock that next afternoon and told him that in case of war I should go at once, taking with me the members of the C.R.B., but that otherwise I was willing to remain until the American delegates could be replaced by those of some other nationality, or until the *ravitaillement* was in some other way assured, but that I reserved the right to depart on any day, with my staff, household and servants, with all the honours and considerations due my rank, and to this he agreed.

"*Je vous le dis maintenant officiellement, comme je l'ai dit à Villalobar hier ou l'autre jour*", he said.

Then we discussed special trains — I had told him that when I went I should go via Switzerland — and the difficulties of providing them because of the military requirements, and finally Lancken,

repeating and reiterating it all, as it were officially, tapping his pencil on the table as he emphasized each point :

"Vous partirez quand vous voulez, soit demain, la semaine prochaine, ou d'ici six mois, comme si vous étiez parti le même jour que Monsieur Gerard a quitté Berlin ...".

"Et maintenant", he said, taking up a long sheet of official note-paper, *"qu'allons-nous dire aux journaux ?"*.

I had forgotten that there were such things as *journaux* in the world — and I dictated this simple statement, which he wrote out :

"Le Ministre d'Amérique restera provisoirement à Bruxelles pour rendre service pendant qu'on effectuera les changements dans le personnel de la C.R.B."

I went away thinking of Mr. Gerard, out of it all and in Switzerland.

The next day was Valentine's Day and Hoover did not forget the Germans. Gregory was at the Legation early in the morning with a copy of a long telegram brought in by the courier from Rotterdam, saying that in view of Lancken's statement that the privileges of the C.R.B. would be abridged the Americans would be withdrawn at once from Belgium, and there were business-like details about closing the books. We smiled in the pleasure the despatch gave us ; it did not lack positiveness, at least !

When we assembled again in the Louis XVI *salon*, Lancken, Villalobar, Brohn, Reith, Gregory and I, it was to learn that the Germans already had the telegram themselves ; it had come *en clair* through the *Vermittlungsstellen*, having been duplicated thus, and intentionally, by Mr. Hoover. Lancken innocently said that he did not understand it, he did not like its reference to him, did not, it was plain, wish to be held responsible for the retirement of the Americans. I can see him now ; he had the reputation of being one of the cleverest diplomats in the German service, and deserved his reputation, but as he turned toward Gregory he was blushing ; he said, with evident embarrassment, that it was a very delicate matter to talk about but that when he had spoken to me he had been under the impression that war was inevitable. He thought it, however, less likely at that moment, and with this there was a complete change of position. The delegates could do as they had done before, precisely and in all respects, and under these circumstances Mr. Gregory said that he would recommend to Mr, Hoover that they remain. M, Francqui had been invited to the meeting, but the problem was so quickly solved that when he arrived the *dénouement* had been reached. We went outside — Villalobar, Francqui, Gregory and I — and, on the sidewalk, M. Francqui leaned against the wall and laughed, and Villalobar said :

"Hoover is the best diplomat of us all."

The days wore on, with their constant frictions, the difficulties, embarrassments, humiliations and dangers of a position rendered impossible by the ineluctable demands of the diplomatic situation on the one hand and the needs of the *ravitaillement* on the other. Mr. Hoover was three thousand miles away, with communications slow and difficult, out of touch and lacking knowledge of that most important element of every situation — its atmosphere. Telegrams, often in apparent conflict, orders which when they arrived were no longer applicable, came daily to perplex Mr. Gregory, and while I have never been able to bring up the long arrears of my ignorance of what was transpiring in the world outside during those trying days, I had a feeling that the most sensational stories were in circulation. The rumour got abroad that I had been ordered by the Germans to haul down my flag, and after the manner of rumours, improved itself until it depicted the Germans as tearing down my flag. A despatch came then, instructing me that inasmuch as my privileges had been denied I was to leave, unless they and the privileges of the C.R.B. were at once restored. I went over to the *Politische Abteilung* to discuss the matter with Lancken. I spent two hours with the Baron in that hot little room upstairs. He was at his best that morning, courteous, smiling, pleasant.

"Nous parlerons, d'abord", he said, "en amis, et puis officiellement."

To begin with, he wished to correct certain misapprehensions. First, the privileges of the Americans in the C.R.B. had never been curtailed, he said, hence it was superfluous to discuss their restoration. In the second place, the English, he declared, were trying to inflame American sentiment by reports of mistreatment of the C.R.B. and of me, and to illustrate the point he made a little mock speech in imitation of some imagined British statesman excoriating the Germans as barbarians, though the imitation lacked verisimilitude for one thing, because it was made in French. Lancken said then that they greatly desired the *ravitaillement* to continue and the Americans to remain ; that it was purely an American work, and that they, the Germans, had little faith in the ability of others to carry it on. If it should be necessary in case of war — a word he did not like to utter — and he was happy to say that he thought war just then less likely than it had been — he hoped that the organization of the C.R.B. at New York, London and Rotterdam would continue to function as it had functioned, and that if others had to come in as delegates they could replace the Americans gradually.

"But above all", he said, "we wish you to stay."

Coming at last then, as I supposed, to the point, he said :

"While we shall show you every courtesy and allow you every privilege of a diplomat we can not officially recognize your diplomatic status because America had broken off diplomatic relations — which we were willing to continue. As to the flag, we should prefer that it be removed because we are on the eve of a great battle, the city is full of troops, we do not know what some irresponsible soldier may do, and a regrettable incident might very easily be created."

As for the courier, *Messieurs les militaires* would not consent to my having the regular courier, but I might send my courier by Villalobar's.

"*Merci*", I said, "*pour une prérogative dont je jouis déjà.*"

At this he coloured and laughed, and then said that he was going to write me a personal letter.

"*Je dois m'adresser à vous comme Monsieur Brand Whitlock, n'est-ce pas ?*" and he significantly emphasized the word "*Monsieur*".

"*Comme vous voulez*", I replied.

The letter he was going to write, he said, was to be published later in order to protect himself from any possible accusation that he had not done his best to keep the *ravitaillement* going, and I told him then that I should wait before replying to his proposals until I had his letter. And I came away

after two hours' conversation which had altered very little the delicacy or embarrassment of my position.

Baron von der Lancken's letter came to me two days later, and contained nothing that had not already been expressed in the letter he had written to Villalobar.**

*** (Translation :)**

To His Excellency the Marquis of Villalobar,
Minister of Spain,
Brussels.

POLITISCHE ABTEILUNG

bei dem

Generalgouverneur in Belgien

V. 2676

Brussels, 10 February, 1917

Mr. Minister :

The rupture of diplomatic relations between the Imperial Government and the Government of the United States of America might create the impression that the work of provisioning the civil population of the occupied territories of Belgium and the north of France is facing a new situation.

In order to prevent misunderstanding from arising on this occasion, I hasten to inform Your Excellency that such an opinion appears to me to be erroneous, since this work operates under the high patronage of the Government which Your

Excellency represents and that of the Netherlands, together with and on the same basis as the Government of the United States. If, then. His Majesty the King of Spain feels inclined to continue to accord his protection to the work of the *ravitaillement*, I have the honour to inform Your Excellency that the Imperial Government and the Governor General in Belgium will grant in the future, as they have done up to the present time, and in conformity with the engagements entered into, their aid and their protection to this work, so beneficial to the suffering populations of the occupied territories of Belgium and the north of France.

Having to envisage the possibility that certain American members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium will feel that they must return to their country, I feel that Your Excellency will believe it worth while to replace these members by other persons who appear to Your Excellency to be suitable for this mission, the Commission having been since its creation composed of neutral members of various nationalities.

The Governor-General, however, desires to submit to the approbation of Your Excellency the question as to whether he considers it desirable that certain American members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium continue to exercise their functions in the direction of the Commission in Brussels. If Your Excellency were of that opinion,

the Governor-General would be happy to see Mr. Brand Whitlock devote to the work of the Commission for Relief an activity of which I am certain this institution would see itself deprived only with regret ; in this event I should beg Your Excellency to be good enough to agree with Mr. Brand Whitlock on the form in which his assistance could remain assured to the said Commission.

I beg Your Excellency to have the goodness to inform me as to the measures you plan to take for the purpose of assuring, as in the past, the proper functioning of the work of which you have been good enough to accept the patronage, and which has pursued with such success for almost two and a half years the humanitarian and high end of lightening for the populations of the occupied territories the burden of the war.

I profit by this occasion to renew to Your Excellency the assurance of my high consideration.

Lancken.

Legation of the United States of America
To His Excellency the Marquis of Villalobar,
etc., etc.
Brussels.

N°602

Brussels, 12 February, 1917

My dear Colleague and Friend :

I received with pleasure your kind communication of the 11th instant, by which you send me a letter, dated the February 10, from H. E. the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz. In this letter H. E. the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz says that "*the rupture of diplomatic relations between the Imperial Government and the Government of the United States of America might create the impression that the work of provisioning the civil population of the occupied territories of Belgium and the north of France is facing a new situation*" — and — "*in order to prevent misunderstandings from arising on this occasion*", he hastens to inform Your Excellency that "*if His Majesty the King of Spain feels inclined to continue to accord his high protection to the work of the ravitaillement, the Imperial Government and H. E. the Governor-General in Belgium will grant in the future, as they have done up to the present time, and in conformity with the engagements entered into, their aid and their protection*".

H. E. the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz is kind enough to say also that H. E. the Governor-General desires to submit to the approbation of Your Excellency "*the question as to whether he considers it desirable that certain American members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium continue to exercise their functions in the direction of this Commission at Brussels*".

Precisely at the moment when the news of the rupture of diplomatic relations between the Government of the United States of America and the Imperial Government was announced, Mr. Hoover, the Director of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, made it known that the Commission would continue to function and to assure the *ravitaillement* of the civil population of Belgium and of the occupied portion of the north of France, if means could be found to reconcile the differences existing between the groups of belligerents concerning the route which the ships of the Commission for Relief in Belgium must follow to carry their cargoes to Rotterdam. As Your Excellency knows, at the same time that Mr. Hoover sent this news to us by telegram he notified all the members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium of his desire to have them remain at their posts until a way out of this new situation was discovered.

So far, then, as the members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium are concerned,

since, on the one hand, more than 140 Americans have come into Belgium since the beginning of the war to work for the Commission for Relief in Belgium, with no remuneration and with no recompense whatever, save the satisfaction of having done their duty in a purely humanitarian work, and since, on the other hand, their Director has ordered those of them, about 40 in number who are actually in Belgium, to remain at their posts, I am happy to say that the Americans are prepared to continue to give all their aid and all their assistance in this work ; and if, in the engagements which we all hope to see entered into between the interested parties, it seems desirable that the Americans remain in control of this Commission, they will do so with the devotion which they have thus far shown.

Obviously there are other questions than those which are envisaged in the letter of H. E. the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz — that is to say, those which concern the operation of the Commission outside of the country whose population benefits from the activity of the charity. As you know, the Commission for Relief in Belgium, through its offices in New York, in London, and in Rotterdam, and with the assistance of numerous sub-organizations assures the accomplishment of its task of conducting the ships across the seas to the port of Rotterdam. Recent events have increased in the largest degree the

difficulties, already so great, of this task : the difficulty of obtaining ships and seamen, the increased rate of insurance, the difficulty of tracing a route among the different mine fields, the different danger zones, and the different reservations made on the sea by the different belligerents, as well as the demands, often in opposition, of the different Governments. The problem to-day has become one of enormous gravity.

However, as you know, Mr. Hoover, who is in New York, and other persons interested in the work, are now seeking the means of overcoming these difficulties. Your Excellency has even had the kindness to assure Mr. Hoover of his generous desire to lend him all aid and assistance possible, and I am sure that if every one puts in all the good will that Your Excellency has shown in this work since the beginning, we shall find the means of overcoming the present difficulties and of assuring during the time that this war must yet inflict its evils and its horrors on the earth, the continuation of this work in which you and I have laboured since the beginning.

It seems to me, then, that if — as I believe and hope with all my heart — a solution of the problems which present themselves on the outside is reached, since the Commission for Relief is altogether disposed to continue its work, we shall find the means of settling the questions that

concern us directly, here in the country, and which are perhaps less difficult to solve than the others, as we have so often, since the beginning of the organization, found the means of resolving the great difficulties that were inseparable from it.

In his letter H. E. the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz is kind enough to say that if certain members of the Commission for Relief in Belgium continue to exercise their functions in the direction of this Commission, H. E. the Governor-General "*would be happy to see Mr. Brand Whitlock devote to the work of the Commission for Relief an activity of which I am certain this institution would see itself deprived only with regret*", and he begs Your Excellency "*to be good enough to agree with Mr. Brand Whitlock on the form in which his assistance could remain assured to the said Commission*".

I am truly very sensible to this mark of regard and I should be happy to continue to contribute to the work the interest and the care that I have devoted to it since its creation, in any way compatible with the position that I have the honour to occupy under the Government of the United States of America.

I beg you to accept, my dear Colleague and friend, the assurance of my high consideration and of my most sincere devotion.

Brand Whitlock.

Legación de España en Bélgica
To His Excellency
The Honorable Brand Whitlock,
Minister Plenipotentiary of the
United States of America.

Brussels, February 26, 1917.

My Dear Colleague and Friend :

I have just received your letter of the 12th instant referring to my communication of the 11th instant transmitting to you that of the 10th from His Excellency the Baron von der Lancken-Wakenitz.

In thanking Your Excellency for his kind and friendly words I need to renew to him neither my attachment nor the devotion I have for his person and for the noble cause which has united in the annals of this horrible war our names and those of our countries in one single humanitarian idea, which has been that of saving from famine seven million inhabitants of the country to which we are honoured by being accredited, and that of aiding this poor Belgium in the horrors of war. During three years, my dear Colleague, we have worked hand-in-hand and with high hearts, and the happy results obtained have merited honours and blessings for our countries and for our flags. The New World, of which Your Excellency represents one of the greatest and most glorious powers, in close union with the Old Nation of Europe which

discovered it, of which I am honoured to be, however unworthy, the representative, have been able, by our fraternal understanding, to accomplish a work which remains in the midst of the ruin that surrounds us the one international, the one neutral, and one of the most glorious of this epopée.

It would have been able to accomplish also a close friendship between our two souls and our two spirits if the goodness of Your Excellency had not of itself sufficed to bring that about, irrespective of every other thought and consideration.

This being well established, I have no further need to add the interest with which I read Your Excellency's letter. I refrain from all comment, for once again our two souls understand each other and have no need for written words.

Nevertheless I shall transmit all of its contents to the Government of the King, my August Master, while as always I remain entirely devoted to Your Excellency.

Le Marquis de Villalobar.

** To Mr. Brand Whitlock
Brussels

POLITISCHE ABTEILUNG
bei dem
Gouverneur general in Belgien

Brussels, February 25, 1917

My Dear Mr. Brand Whitlock :

After the rupture of diplomatic relations between the Imperial Government and the Government of the United States of America, I addressed, after having placed myself in accord with the Spanish Minister, Protector of the Work of the *ravitaillement*, a letter to him on the February 10, of which he has told me he sent you a copy. In this letter I suggested to the Marquis of Villalobar that in the interest of the work of the *ravitaillement* the continuation of your presence in Brussels would be desirable, and I assured him that in this event the Governor-General would be happy to see you devote to the work of the Commission for Relief your activity, for a long time so useful to that institution.

In the interview which I then had the pleasure of having with you, you informed me that you proposed to prolong your stay in Brussels in order to see to the continuance of the proper functioning of the C.R.B. On my part, I had assured you that

you could always, at your convenience, leave Belgium under the same conditions as if you had gone a fortnight ago.

Under these circumstances I believe that I may hope, in the interest of the work of the *ravitaillement* of Belgium, that you will continue your association with that humanitarian work which, thanks to the efforts of neutral and belligerent nations, has exercised since the beginning of the war its beneficial effects to the profit of the suffering populations of Belgium and of the north of France.

I beg you to believe, my dear Mr. Whitlock, in the expression of my most devoted and sincere sentiments.

Lancken

Footnotes.

French translation : « *L'attente* » in WHITLOCK, Brand ; chapitre III (1917) in ***La Belgique sous l'occupation allemande : mémoires du ministre d'Amérique à Bruxelles*** ; (Paris ; Berger-Levrault ; 1922) pages 417-427.

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

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&smode=ieaFictions&part=belgique100>

It would also be interesting compare with what Charles TYTGAT told about the same days in ***Journal d'un journaliste. Bruxelles sous la botte allemande*** :

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

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