

August 8, 1914.—This morning a telegram came from the Department saying that Diederich, Consul-General at Antwerp, had reported that his life was in danger because he had undertaken the representation of German interests, and instructing me to secure adequate protection for him. I had had such complaints before from Diederich, the poor old man has really been frightened out of his wits. He is indeed unpopular in Antwerp, because he is so pro-German; speaks German in his family circle. I went to the Foreign Office, showed Davignon the complaint, and he laughed, for he understood the situation; indeed had already heard of it. He promised to see that additional guards were provided for the Consul-General.

On my way back to the Legation, stopped in at the British Legation to see Sir Francis. He told me of the announcement of Germany's request for an armistice of twenty-four hours at Liège, to bury their dead—piled up, Sir Francis said, in windrows on the *glacis* of the forts. The armistice has been refused.

Sir Francis, of course, was delighted.

Indeed, the heroic resistance of the little Belgian army in the forts along the Meuse—the forts that Leman, who now commands them, helped to construct—has produced an extraordinary enthusiasm that vibrates nervously in the sparkling sunlight; a kind of contagious exhilaration, intoxication, when men meet each other in the streets and say:

“The forts still hold out!”

When I came back to the Legation, I was met at the door by the big officer of the civil guard, who greeted me in his deep bass voice, and said:

“Your Excellency, have you any news?”

I told him of the heroism of his comrade in arms, of the request for an armistice, and so on, and his face lighted up.

“It is glorious! It is a day that will go down in history.”

And he went to tell his men.

The newspapers naturally are full of the valor of the Belgians, though they have not much news. De Broqueville has issued a proclamation declaring martial law, and a strict censorship has

been established; a state of siege has been declared in the Provinces of Limbourg, of Liège, of Luxembourg, of Namur, and within the fortified position of Antwerp. Two spies have been shot at the Porte de Bruxelles at Louvain. The French Republic has conferred the decoration of the Legion of Honor on the City of Liège and the French colors have been put on the statue of Liège at the Cinquantenaire; there has been an exchange of letters between Poincaré and King Albert; all Belgium is proud; there is a new spirit of solidarity; the old feeling between Flemish and Walloons is forgotten—in these fierce fires a nation is being born.

In the midst of all the news of war, we had the news of the death of Mrs. Wilson, and I sent the President a telegram of sympathy and several colleagues have called or left cards of sympathy.

In the early evening a message from van Dyke, a most remarkable message! He said he had been asked by his German colleague at The Hague to ask me to present a message on behalf of the Imperial German Government to the Belgian Government. The message of the I. G. G. in German—de Leval translated it while we waited impatiently—was this:

The fortress of Liège has been taken by assault after a brave defence. The German Government most deeply regret that bloody encounters should have resulted from the attitude of the Belgian Government. It is only through the force of circumstances that she had, owing to the military measures of France, to take the grave decision of entering Belgium and occupying Liège as a base for further military operations. Now that the Belgian army has upheld the honour of its arms by its heroic resistance to a very superior force, the German Government beg the King of the Belgians and the Belgian Government to spare Belgium the further horrors of war. The German Government are ready for any compact with Belgium which can be reconciled with their arrangement with France. Germany once more gives her solemn assurance that it is not her intention to appropriate Belgian territory to herself and that such an intention is far from her thoughts. Germany is still ready to evacuate Belgium as soon as the state of war will allow her to do so.

I stood there by the desk in Gibson's room and read it over and over; looked at Gibson, looked at de Leval, looked at Miss Larner, amazed beyond any words at its cold, cynical, brutal effrontery.

I stood there with the telegram in my hand, looked at those ugly German words. What cruel hand had written them? What dark and evil mind had conceived them? Had that clumsy intelligence in Berlin no conception of the fact that there are, after all, in this world such words as honor and faith? Only a week ago a promise more solemn than this had been broken; why regard this as more reliable than that other?

I laid it down on the table, one thing at least decided,—that I would communicate no such dirty bribe to the Belgian Government.

I knew perfectly well that the King would scorn any such suggestion—he is too pure, too noble for that.

But how to manage it? I began to think about a despatch to Washington; I thought at first that I would point out what the President and Bryan, of course, must already realize, that this war is but the old struggle in the world between democracy and autocracy, and that little Belgium is just now holding this Thermopylean pass for democracy. I was writing at Miss Lerner's desk a despatch in those terms; trying to make the view accord with our neutrality, a rather difficult task.

Gibson was studying the original telegram. After a while, he said:

“There are no cipher groups here.”

“Ah yes! perhaps it is not authentic!”

I thought it over a long while. Perhaps Gibson was right. I did not, nor did he (the despatch was too essentially German for doubt) think he was, but perhaps he was. And so I wrote a telegram to Washington, pointing out that the remarkable message bore no cipher groups or other evidence of authenticity and asking for instructions. Also wired van Dyke asking him if it was authentic. We were all night putting the message into cipher.

Meanwhile the Belgians were holding on at Liège—the statement in the German note that the Germans had taken Liège is not true—and perhaps the Allies are getting up. I told Gibson he might tell Leo d’Ursel, if he wanted, and he did. D’Ursel much impressed, and ran to see Davignon and de Broqueville.

We were all night at the job.

The beautiful dawn was breaking as I went to bed.