

May 13, 1915.—The General Government has out a placard today about the *Lusitania*. Nothing could better set forth the addled state of the German mind than this placard with its special pleading, its illogic, its lack of the most rudimentary understanding of the laws of evidence or of its rules by which mankind fixes and places responsibility—the whole piece of childish special pleading ending with the statement that they have now proved that it was all England's fault.

The American papers that come in now have a good deal about von Bissing. There are interviews with him, pictures of him standing in the museum beside busts, attending church, listening to the preaching of some great pastor in the Belgian Senate, and so on and so on. In Germany, too, much is said about him and of the way he is "governing" Belgium, and there is considerable exploitation of him in this new rôle. To sit here, to live here under his government and to observe it as closely as I do, and then to read this sort of tommyrot and balderdash is enough to make one sick at heart.

Here is this old man over seventy who looks like an aged drill-sergeant, has the manners, the viewpoint and the intellect of a drill-sergeant. A man of five feet eight or ten, thin, stiff, with old hands and spatulate fingernails that have never known the manicurist's instruments in all their lives. A hard round head straight behind, brown skin stretched over the bones of it and shaved with a remorseless razor as to chin and upper cheeks but with a black moustache left all across the lips and then across the jaws, giving him a sinister look. Then a jaw that sets very firmly, and small cruel eyes, red and watery, and the hair plastered down as though by water or by grease on his cannon ball of a head. This, in a rough way, a physical picture of this old man. He speaks no English and very little French; has never traveled; has no ideas but Prussian ideas and believes that these can be imposed on all the

world and should be imposed on all the world, and that promptly by the use of the bayonet. No large intellectual outlook; his ideas all mediæval, no conception of the modern current of thought, no conception of democracy or liberty, no aspirations that the best men of the race have in all countries. Extremely vain; always wears a number of gaudy decorations; I do not know what they are. Villalobar, who is an expert in such things, says they are very ugly, as is his uniform. Can't even take a walk in the park without lugging his enormous sabre with him; he likes to hear it clanking against his thin old legs along the walks. His own men afraid of him; oftentimes I find that they hesitate to lay things before him. He is evidently not kept informed of what is going on, and when he went away to Berlin last week to consult his doctor, von der Lancken let the cat out of the bag and said it was a good thing he was gone, that now they could do a good many things in his absence and prepare them against his return. He is extremely brutal. Flies into terrible rages, as in that case the other day when he sent an angry letter to the Cardinal at Malines and von der Lancken nearly wild all the afternoon trying to get it back before it was delivered....

Von Bissing, too, extremely jealous of his authority; has never forgiven Hoover for going to Berlin. Would be a little kaiser here in what he considers his own domain and is extremely touchy, or as von der Lancken told me, *chatouilleux*. Such, then, is the type of man who is now to "govern Belgium"; such is the type of man who boasts about having brought about the resumption of life in Belgium! What is the life that he has caused to resume itself in Belgium? The people would have long ago been starved if we had not organized our American committee and got food over here to feed them. Von Bissing had nothing to do with that; has not helped it in the slightest degree, does not even understand it. While he is absent in Berlin now his staff officers are preparing a statement to lay before him so that he may know what the re-victualing consists of and what is being done. He thought for a long time that it was a charity distributing a little food in soup kitchens and a few old clothes to the poor, an organization by Heineman, and of course Heineman was perfectly willing he should think that.

He has printed placards saying he wants industries to be resumed. He has given out interviews stating that it has been resumed, and yet there is no industry left in the country. The first

thing he did was to have all the machinery taken out of the factories here and sent into Germany. He will allow no imports to be brought into Belgium and nothing to be exported, so that industry is literally impossible. Forty thousand men working in the gun factories at Liège have refused to work; the mines have been seized by the German authorities because they want the coal. There is in Belgium a general strike as a protest against German aggression, and this general strike is partly forced by conditions, partly brought about by the spirit of the Belgians, an attitude which von Bissing cannot possibly understand.

And then there has been a good deal of talk about opening the museums and so forth; von Bissing's photograph standing by a bust of Hermes and this photograph sent broadcast over the earth. The museums are opened by German order, the Fine Arts Museum the last three days of the week, the Modern Museum the first three days. German sentinels are at the doors and the museums are closed by German time; that is, they are closed at five o'clock in the afternoon, which is four o'clock Belgian time, when there are three good hours of daylight left. They are closed, according to the German arrangement, the hours when the Belgians are free to go and take pleasure in them. But as a matter of fact the Belgians don't go and won't go so long as they have to pass German sentinels at the door and rub arms with brutal German soldiers within the museum, and German officers standing in grinning raptures before the nudes.

A band plays at noon before the National Palace and there are grey soldiers in boots and uniforms goosestepping, but I won't go to see that. I have never seen it because I won't go; I won't appear at any of their functions. And Belgians don't go to see it. I speak of that in connection with art, not that the goosestepping is artistic, but that they would claim that this is a sort of band concert given for the benefit of the people. They organized two concerts at the Monnaie and gathered all the German artists they could get; the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Weingartner conducting, popular prices, and so on, and not a Belgian went to one of their concerts and the old man who keeps the door had a pad to note down any one who did go. I said not one; there was one, a professor at the University of Brussels—a professor of Moral Philosophy! of all things in the world. He went because he loves music. And by unanimous vote and spontaneously the trustees of the University dismissed him.

And then in the other department, that of agriculture, of which von Bissing boasts so much. He has been of course immensely concerned that there should be a crop this year, because he wants to seize it for his soldiers and his Government next year. But as for helping Belgium and agriculture, that is impossible for the simple reason that Belgian agriculture is far in advance of that in Germany by the very nature of things, and there is nothing that von Bissing or any German could teach the Belgians in that department. The seeds that are being used were sent in by our American Commission. They are being planted by peasants on their own land in the old manner, and while spring is come and the sap is pulsing in the trees and seeds are bursting, nobody here, except possibly von Bissing himself, thinks that he is responsible for that. He is cutting down all the pine trees and denuding the forests because they want the trunks of these trees to make roads for their cannons and covers for their trenches. The boughs too of these trees make fine screens for their airships. They have taken all the animals in the country, taken away most of the fine horses and the fine breeds of dogs and sent them back to Germany to be placed there, and then they talk of helping in the resumption of life!

The Government here is a fitting exponent of the spirit of this cruel old man. There are five or six thousand spies running everywhere and denouncing everybody; in the mockeries that they call courts denunciation and suspicion suffice for proof. No householder is safe from the venom of these spies, from the rapacity of their judges, from the cruelty of the soldiers, and frequently when judgments are taken to von Bissing to be approved, as in the case of the de Mérodes and Mme. Lemonnier, he is not satisfied with the severity of the sentence that has been imposed and adds to it; no question is too small for him to concern himself with, and from the children in the streets even respect is "exacted at the point of the bayonet." He has given orders that when his car rolls through the streets every one must get out of the way and it need not slow down for anybody. He is greatly and secretly piqued and annoyed because no one will invite him out to dine.

The Government is a great bureaucracy which governs nothing; it is lost in the maze of its own intricacies. A day does not pass that we don't have to provide new copies of papers we have already filed for the German authorities, papers that have been so carefully put away that nobody can find them. And in an official letter that von Sandt wrote the Comité National about the Relief, they

complained of a letter written by the Agricultural Section, when it was under the German patronage and before it had been placed among the charities of the Comité National.

The courts, so-called, would have been considered a mockery during the days of the Terror of the French Revolution. If evidence is lacking, the judges openly say "we will presume that," and every day men and women are sent to Germany, placed in fortresses there and prisons there to be forgotten; placed in prison here or herded like wild beasts at the *Kommandantur*, when nothing is charged against them, without any means of defence, with no code of laws or of principles to which they could appeal. Nothing, nothing but the whim of an ignorant and brutal judge in uniform to depend upon and always von Bissing to make the sentence more severe. The officials are paid heavy salaries and all those fines and penalties that are daily levied for all sorts of trifles go into the chests. Only the other day a new horde of functionaries of the customs officials was imported, and for this the city of Brussels must pay ninety thousand francs per month.

And every day on the walls of the city the people are insulted in placards, and slowly their courage and spirit is sapped away. This is the sort of government the Germans have brought to Belgium; this is the way life is revived under the smiling beneficences of his Excellency von Bissing.

He is another Duke of Alva for this land, without either the courage or the intelligence of a Duke of Alva.