

"OUTWITTING THE HUN"

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CHAPTER XIII.

Five Days in an Empty House.

The five days I spent in that house seemed to me like five years. During all that time I had very little to eat—less in fact than I had been getting in the fields. I did not feel it so bad, perhaps, because of the fact that I was no longer exposed to the other privations which before had combined to make my condition so wretched. I now had a good place to sleep, at any rate, and I did not wake every half hour or so as I had been accustomed to do in the fields and woods, and, of course, my hunger was not aggravated by the physical exertions which had been necessary before.

Nevertheless, perhaps because I had more time now to think of the hunger-pains which were gnawing at me all the time, I don't believe I was ever so miserable as I was at that period of my adventure. I felt so mean towards the world I would have committed murder, I think, with very little provocation.

German soldiers were passing the house at all hours of the day. I watched them hour after hour from the keyhole of the door—to have shown myself at the window was out of the question because the house in which I was concealed was supposed to be untenanted.

Because of the fact that I was unable to speak either Flemish or German I could not go out and buy food, although I still had the money with



I Rummaged the House Many Times.

which to do it. That was one of the things that galled me—the thought that I had the wherewithal in my jeans to buy all the food I needed and yet no way of getting it without endangering my liberty and life.

At night, however, after it was dark, I would steal quietly out of the house to see what I could pick up in the way of food. By that time, of course, the stores were closed, but I scoured the streets, the alleys and the byways for scraps of food and occasionally got up courage enough to appeal to Belgian peasants whom I met on the streets, and in that way I managed to keep body and soul together.

It was quite apparent to me, however, that I was worse off in the city than I had been in the fields, and I decided to get out of that house just as soon as I knew definitely that Huylyger had made up his mind to do nothing further for me.

When I was not at the keyhole of the door I spent most of my day on the top floor in a room which looked out on the street. By keeping well away from the window I could see much of what was going on without being seen myself. In my restlessness, I used to walk back and forth in that room and I kept it up so constantly that I believe I must have worn a path in the floor. It was nine steps from one wall to the other, and as I had little else to amuse me I figured out one day after I had been pacing up and down for several hours just how much distance I would have covered on my way to Holland if my footsteps had been taken in that direction instead of just up and down that old room. I was very much surprised to find that in three hours I crossed the room no fewer than 5,000 times and the distance covered was between nine and ten miles. It was not very gratifying to realize that after walking all that distance I wasn't a step nearer my goal than when I started, but I had to do something while waiting for Huylyger to help me, and pacing up and down was a natural outlet for my restlessness.

While looking out of the top floor window one day, I noticed a cat on a window ledge of the house across the street. I had a nice piece of a broken

mirror which I had picked up in the house and I used it to amuse myself for an hour at a time shining it in the cat's eyes across the street. At first the animal was annoyed by the reflection and would move away, only to come back a few moments later. By and by, however, it seemed to get used to the glare and wouldn't budge no matter how strong the sunlight was. Playing with the cat in this way got me into the habit of watching her comings and goings and was indirectly the means of my getting food a day or two later—at a time when I was so famished that I was ready to do almost anything to appease my hunger.

It was about 7 o'clock in the evening. I was expecting Huylyger at 8, but I hadn't the slightest hope that he would bring me food, as he had told me that he wouldn't take the risk of having food in his possession when calling on me. I was standing at the window in such a way that I could see what was going on in the street without being observed by those who passed by. When I noticed my friend, the cat, coming down the steps of the opposite house with something in his mouth. Without considering the risks I ran, I opened the front door, ran down the steps and across the street, and pounced on that cat before it could get away with its supper. For that, as I had imagined, was what I had seen in its mouth. It turned out to be a piece of stewed rabbit, which I confiscated eagerly and took back with me to the house.

Perhaps I felt a little sorry for the cat, but I certainly had no qualms about eating the animal's dinner. I was much too hungry to dwell upon niceties, and a piece of stewed rabbit was certainly too good for a cat to eat when a man was starving. I ate and enjoyed it and the incident suggested to me a way in which I might possibly obtain food again when all other avenues failed.

From my place of concealment I frequently saw huge carts being pushed through the streets gathering potato peelings, refuse of cabbage and similar food remnants, which, in America, are considered garbage and destroyed. In Belgium they were using this "garbage" to make their bread out of, and while the idea may sound revolting to us, the fact is that the Germans have brought these things down to such a science that the bread they make this way is really very good to eat. I know it would have been like cake to me when I was in need of food; indeed I would have eaten the "garbage" direct, let alone the bread.

Although, as I have said, I suffered greatly from hunger while occupying this house, there were one or two things I observed through the keyhole or from the windows which made me laugh, and some of the incidents that occurred during my voluntary imprisonment were really funny.

From the keyhole I could see, for instance, a shop window on the other side of the street, several houses down the block. All day long German soldiers would be passing in front of the house and I noticed that practically every one of them would stop in front of this store window and look in. Occasionally a soldier on duty bent would hurry past, but I think nine out of ten of them were sufficiently interested to spend at least a minute, and some of them three or four minutes gazing at whatever was being exhibited in that window, although I noticed that it failed to attract the Belgians.

I have a considerable streak of curiosity in me, and I couldn't help wondering what it could be in that window which almost without exception seemed to interest German soldiers but failed to hold the Belgians, and after conjuring my brains for a while on the problem I came to the conclusion that the shop must have been a book-shop and the window contained German magazines, which, naturally enough, would be of the greatest interest to the Germans but of none to the Belgians.

At any rate I resolved that as soon as night came I would go out and investigate the window. When I got the answer I laughed so loud that I was afraid for the moment I must have attracted the attention of the neighbors, but I couldn't help it. The window was filled with huge quantities of sausage! The store was a butcher shop and one of the principal things they sold apparently was sausage. The display they made, although it consisted merely of sausages piled in the window, certainly had plenty of "pulling" power. It "pulled" nine Germans out of ten out of their course and indirectly "pulled" me right across the street! The idea of those Germans displaying as to stand in front of the window for two, three or four minutes at a time, however, certainly seemed funny to me, and when I got back to the house I sat at the keyhole again and found just as much interest as before in watching the Germans stop in their tracks when they reached the window, even though I was now aware what the attraction was.

One of my chief occupations during these days was catching flies. I would catch a fly, put him in a spider's web

(there were plenty of them in the old house), and sit down for the spider to come down and get him. But always I pictured myself in the same predicament and rescued the fly just as the spider was about to grab him. Several times when things were dull I was tempted to see the tragedy through, but perhaps the same Providence that guided me safely through all perils was guarding, too, the destiny of those flies, for I always weakened and the flies never did suffer from my lust for amusement.

The house was well supplied with books—in fact, one of the choicest libraries I think I ever saw—but they were all written either in Flemish or French. I could read no Flemish or very little French. I might have made a little headway with the latter, but the books all seemed too deep for me and I gave it up. There was one thing though that I did read and reread from beginning to end; that was a New York Herald which must have arrived just about the time war was declared. Several things in this interested me, and particularly the baseball scores, which I studied with as much care as a real fan possibly could an up-to-date score. I couldn't refrain from laughing when I came to an account of Zimmerman (of the Cubs) being benched for some spat with the umpire, and it afforded me just as much interest three years after it had happened—perhaps more—than some current item of world-wide interest had at that time.

I rummaged the house many times from cellar to garret in my search for something to eat, but the harvest of three years of war had made any success along that line impossible. I was like the man out in the ocean in a boat and thirsty with water everywhere but not a drop to drink.

I was tempted while in the city to go to church one Sunday, but my better judgment told me it would be a useless risk. Of course, someone would surely say something to me and I didn't know how many Germans would be there or what might happen, so I gave up that idea.

During all the time I was concealed in this house I saw but one automobile and that was a German staff officer's. That same afternoon I had one of the frights of my young life.

I had been gazing out of the keyhole as usual when I heard coming down the street the measured tread of German soldiers. It didn't sound like very many, but there was no doubt in my mind that German soldiers were marching down the street. I went upstairs and peeked through the window and sure enough a squad of German infantry was coming down the street accompanied by a military motor truck. I hadn't the slightest idea that they were coming after me, but still the possibilities of the situation gave me more or less alarm, and I considered how I could make my escape if by chance I was the man they were after. The idea of hiding in the wine cellar appealed to me as the most practical; there must have been plenty of places among the wine kegs and cases where a man could conceal himself, but, as a matter of fact, I did not believe that any such contingency would arise.

The marching soldiers came nearer, I could hear them at the next house. In a moment I would see them pass the keyhole through which I was looking.

"Halt!" At the word of command shouted by a junior officer the squad came to attention right in front of the house! I waited no longer. Running down the stairs I flew into the wine cellar and although it was almost pitch dark—the only light coming from a grating which led to the backyard—I soon found a satisfactory hiding place in the extreme rear of the cellar. I had had the presence of mind to leave the door of the wine cellar ajar, figuring that if the soldiers found a closed door they would be more apt to search for a fugitive behind it than if the door were open.

My decision to get away from that front door had been made and carried out none too soon, for I had only just located myself behind two big wine cases when I heard the tramp of soldiers' feet marching up the front stoop, a crash at the front door, a few hasty words of command which I did not understand, and then the noise of scurrying feet from room to room and such a banging and hammering and smashing and crashing that I could not make out what was going on.

If Huylyger had revealed my hiding place to the Huns, as I was now confident he had, I felt that there was little prospect of their overlooking me. They would search the house from top to bottom and, if necessary, raze it to the ground before they would give up the search. To escape from the house through the backyard through the iron grating, which I had no doubt I could force, seemed to be the logical thing to do, but the chances were that the Huns had thrown a cordon around the entire block before the squad was sent to the house. The Germans do these things in an efficient manner always. They take nothing for granted.

My one chance seemed to be to stand pat in the hope that the officer in charge might possibly come to the conclusion that he had arrived at the house too late—that the bird had flown.

My position in that wine cellar was anything but a comfortable one. Rats and mice were scurrying across the floor and the smashing and crashing going on overhead was anything but promising. Evidently those soldiers imagined that I ought to be hiding in the walls, for it sounded as though they were tearing off the wainscoting, the picture molding and, in fact, everything that they could tear or pull apart.

Before very long they would finish their search upstairs and would come down to the basement. What they would do when they discovered the wine I had no idea. Perhaps they would let themselves loose on it and give me my chance. With a bottle of wine in each hand I figured I could put up a good fight in the dark, especially as I was becoming more and more accustomed to it and could begin to distinguish things here and there, whereas when they entered the pitchy darkness of the cellar, they would be as blind as bats in the sun.

Perhaps it was twenty minutes before I heard what sounded like my death-knell to me; the soldiers were coming down the cellar steps! I clutched a wine bottle in each hand and waited with bated breath.

"Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" In a moment they would be in the cellar proper. I could almost hear my heart beating. The mice scurried across the floor by the scores, frightened no doubt by the vibration and noise made by the descending soldiers. Some of the creatures ran across me where I stood between two wine cases, but I was too much interested in bigger game to pay any attention to mice.

"Tramp! Tramp! Halt!" Again an order was given in German, and although I did not understand it I am willing to bless every word of it, because it resulted in the soldiers turning right about face, marching up the stairs again, through the hall and out of the front door and away!

I could hardly believe my ears. It seemed almost too good to be true that they could have given up the search just as they were about to come upon their quarry, but unless my ears deceived me that was what they had done.

The possibility that the whole thing might be a German ruse did not escape me, and I remained in the cellar for nearly an hour after they had apparently departed before I ventured to move, listening intently in the meanwhile for the slightest sound which would reveal the presence of a sentry upstairs.

Not hearing a sound I began to feel that they had indeed given up the hunt, for I did not believe that a German



"I Figured I Could Put Up a Good Fight."

officer would be so considerate of his men as to try to trap me rather than carry the cellar by force if they had the slightest idea that I was there.

I took off my shoes and crept softly and slowly to the cellar steps and then step by step, placing my weight down gradually so as to prevent the steps from creaking, I climbed to the top. The sight that met my eyes as I glanced into the kitchen told me the whole story. The water faucets had been ripped from the sinks, the water pipes having been torn off, and gas fixtures, cooking utensils and everything else which contained even the smallest proportion of the metals

the Germans so badly needed had been taken from the kitchen. I walked upstairs now with more confidence, feeling tolerably assured that the soldiers hadn't been after me at all, but had been merely collecting metal and other materials which they expected an elaborate dwelling house like the one in which I was concealed to yield.

Later I heard that the Germans have taken practically every ounce of brass, copper and wood they could lay their hands on in Belgium. Even the brass out of pianos has been ruthlessly removed, the serious damage done to valuable property by the removal of only an insignificant proportion of metal never being taken into consideration. I learned, too, that all dogs over fourteen inches high had been seized by the Germans. This furnished lots of speculation among the Belgians as to what use the Germans were putting the animals to, the general impression apparently being that they were being used for food!

This, however, seemed much less likely to me than that they were being employed as dispatch dogs in the trenches, the same as we use them on our side of the line. They might possibly kill the dogs and use their skins for leather and their carcasses for tallow, but I feel quite sure that the Huns are by no means so short of food that they have to eat dogs yet awhile.

Indeed, I want to repeat here what I have mentioned before; if anyone has the idea that this war can be won by starving the Huns, he hasn't the slightest idea how well provided the Germans are in that respect. They have considered their food needs in connection with their resources for several years to come and they have gone at it in such a methodical, systematic way, taking into consideration every possible contingency, that provided there is not an absolute crop failure, there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind that they can last for years, and the worst of it is they are very cocksure about it themselves.

It is true that the German soldiers want peace. As I watched them through the keyhole in the door I thought how unfavorably they compared with our men. They marched along the street without laughter, without joking, without singing. It was quite apparent that the war is telling on them. I don't believe I saw a single German soldier who didn't look as if he had lost his best friend—and he probably had.

At the same time there is a big difference—certainly a difference of several years—between wishing the war was over and giving up, and I don't believe the German rank and file any more than their leaders have the slightest idea at this time of giving up at all.

But to return to my experience while concealed in the house. After the visit of the soldiers, which left the house in a wretched condition, I decided that I would continue my journey towards the frontier, particularly as I had gotten all I could out of Huylyger, or rather he had gotten all he was going to get out of me.

During my concealment in the house I had made various sorties into the city at night, and I was beginning to feel more comfortable even when German soldiers were about. Through the keyhole I had studied very closely the gait of the Belgians, the slovenly droop that characterized most of them, and their general appearance, and I felt that in my own dirty and unshaven condition I must have looked as much like the average poor Belgian as a man could. The only thing that was against me was my height. I was several inches taller than even the tallest Belgians. I had often thought that red hair would have gone good with my name, but now, of course, I was mighty glad that I was not so endowed, for red-haired Belgians are about as rare as German charity.

There are many, no doubt, who will wonder why I did not get more help than I did at this time. It is easily answered. When a man is in hourly fear of his life and the country is full of spies, as Belgium certainly was, he is not going to help just anyone that comes along seeking aid. One of the German's most successful ways of trapping the Belgians has been to pose as an English or French prisoner who has escaped, appeal to them for aid, implicate as many as possible, and then turn the whole German police force loose on them. As I look back on those days I think it remarkable that I received as much help as I did, but when people are starving upon those conditions now forced upon those unfortunate people, it is a great temptation to surrender these escaped prisoners to German authorities and receive the handsome rewards offered for them—or for alien spies, as I was classed at that time.

The passport which I had described me as a Spanish sailor, but I was very dubious about its value. If I could have spoken Spanish fluently it might have been worth something to me, but the few words I knew of the language would not have carried me very far if I had been confronted with a Spanish interpreter. I decided to use the passport only as a last resort, preferring to act the part of a deaf

and dumb Belgian peasant as far as it would carry me. Before I finally left the house I had a remarkable experience which I shall remember as long as I live.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Night of Dissipation.

During the first two days I spent with Huylyger after I had first arrived in the big city, he had told me, among other things, of a moving picture show in town which he said I might have a chance to see while there.

"It is free every night in the week except Saturdays and Sundays," he said, "and once you are inside you would not be apt to be bothered by anyone except when they come to take your order for something to drink. While there is no admission, patrons are expected to eat or drink while enjoying the pictures."

A day or two later, while walking the streets at night in search for food, I had passed this place and was very much tempted to go in and spend a few hours, particularly as it would perhaps give me an opportunity to buy something to eat, although I was at a loss to know how I was going to ask for what I wanted.

While trying to make up my mind whether it was safe for me to go in I walked half a block past the place, and when I turned back again and reached the entrance with my mind made up that I would take the chance I ran full tilt into a German officer who was just coming out.

That settled all my hankers for moving pictures that night. "Where you came from, my friend," I figured, "there must be more like you! I guess it is a good night for walking."

The next day, however, in recalling the incident of the evening before, it seemed to me that I had been rather foolish. What I needed more than anything else at that time was confidence. Before I could get to the frontier I would have to confront German soldiers many times, because there were more of them between this city and Holland than in any section of the country through which I had so far traveled. Safety in these contingencies would depend largely upon the calmness I displayed. It wouldn't do to get all excited at the mere sight of a spiked helmet. The Belgians, I had noticed, while careful to obey the orders of the Huns, showed no particular fear of them, and it seemed to me the sooner I cultivated the same feeling of indifference the better I would be able to carry off the part I was playing.

For this reason I made up my mind then and there that, officers or no officers, I would go to that show that night and sit it through no matter what happened. While people may think that I had decided unwise because of the unnecessary risk involved in the adventure, it occurred to me that perhaps after all that theater was about one of the safest places I could attend because that was about the last place Germans would expect to find a fugitive English officer in even if they were searching for me.

As soon as evening came, therefore, I started out for the theatre. I fixed myself up as well as possible. I had on a fairly decent pair of pants which Huylyger had given me and I used a clean handkerchief as a collar.

With my hair brushed up and my beard trimmed as neatly as possible with a pair of rusty scissors which I had found in the house, while my appearance was not exactly that of a Beau Brummel, I don't think I looked much worse than the average Belgian. In these days the average Belgian is very poorly dressed at best.

I can't say I had no misgivings as I made my way to the theatre; certainly I was going there more for discipline than pleasure, but I had made up my mind that I was going there to see it through.

The entrance to the theatre or beer garden, for it was as much one as the other, was on the side of the building and was reached by way of an alley which ran alongside. Near the door was a ticket-seller's booth, but as this was one of the free nights there was no one in the booth.

I marched slowly down the alley imitating as best I could the indifferent gait of the Belgians, and when I entered the theatre endeavored to act as though I had been there many times before. A hasty survey of the layout of the place was sufficient to enable me to select my seat. It was early and there were not more than half a dozen people in the place at that time, so that I had my choice.

There was a raised platform, perhaps two feet high, all around the walls of the place except at the end where the stage was located. On this platform tables were arranged and there were tables on the floor proper as well.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Showing It.

"That De Jones must be a wonderfully brave man."
"What makes you think so?"
"Because in the course of a single day he defied the cook, flattered the waiter and bullied the tea man."