

MANY BELGIAN PRIESTS SUFFER IN DUNGEONS; MERCIER DEMANDS THAT PERSECUTION CEASE

Cardinal Mercier Protests in Vain Against Imprisonments in Rigorous Seclusion in Malines and Louvain—Deprived of Saying Mass

Explanatory Comment

BEFORE the Germans came into Belgium, the French Revolutionary tribunals of the Terror held the record as courts of injustice. But Fouquier-Tinville, as public accuser, held office for only fifteen months, and moreover he and the Jacobins were actually confronted with numerous cases of treason to the republican cause. Extravagant and tyrannical as many of their judgments were, there was logic to support their contentions when Frenchmen were charged with betraying France. But how could a Belgian "betray" Germany? The essence of treason is activity directed against one's own country.

The Germans, however, had no patience with such distinctions. They established their merciless military code in the invaded nation and invented a new phrase, "war treason," to cover the acts of Belgians, which were opposed to the interests of the occupying power.

The priests, Quevit and Van Nylen, whose sufferings had moved the Cardinal to protest to Von Bissing, were victims of this iniquitous system, which authorized arrests often on the flimsiest suspicions. The trials were little more than farces. If the accused were permitted lawyers, they were not allowed to communicate with the prisoners before the trials, and hence had no opportunity to develop effectively the salient points in their cases. Under such conditions the presence of an attorney was but one more mockery of justice.

Hearsay conclusions against the prisoners were admitted as evidence. Every encouragement was given to informers, and sometimes personal spite was eagerly capitalized by the military courts.

Furthermore, the German Government was employed daily in swelling the lists of punishable offenses. "Verboten" became a terrible talisman. It was "forbidden" to approach a railway, telegraph or telephone line "in a suspicious manner," whatever that is. It was "forbidden" to ride a bicycle without an express permit, "forbidden" to sing the "Brabanconne," or to display the Belgian colors. This last ruling was somewhat difficult of enforcement when, on the national holiday, a Belgian mother went to church in a black gown. She was accompanied by her two little daughters, one of whom was attired in red and the other in orange. The Germans had neglected to specify what color dresses were correct and were at a loss how to punish this deliberate allusion to the flag of King Albert's people.

him; we have obtained for him thirty chairs, four benches, a chandelier and a big stove.

For the time being, the question of servers at mass is still in suspense. The priest wanted to have as a server a prisoner who is detained on suspicion after trying to pass the frontier. For easily understood reasons, this permission cannot be granted. A Catholic soldier has been appointed to fulfill this office.

(Signed) The Kreischef. JOCHMUS, Colonel.

Held in Filthy Dungeon

The report of the Kreischef is full of inaccuracies and errors. Father Van Nylen, he says, had a room all to himself; that is to say, he was lodged in a filthy military dungeon like all the others. At broad noon one could not see inside of it; the only light there was came in through crevices in the iron beams supporting the ceiling.

The prisoners' walks took place in a little backyard fifteen yards in length. They lasted at first half an hour, later on an hour. When the time for a walk came the father had to repair to the yard, no matter what the weather might be.

He never asked to say mass, affirms the report. That is false. At the German chaplain's first visit, Father Van Nylen put his painful case before him, insisting especially on his privation of holy mass. The chaplain went to the kommandant; but there he was told that they could not grant imprisoned priests facilities for saying mass. Only after three weeks, following a visit from the Governor General's chaplain, did Father Van Nylen receive the much-desired permission.

One day the Kreischef himself went to the prisoner's cell and asked if he had any complaints to make. The father told him that it was against all law to keep any one in prison on suspicion for three months in a dungeon where only young soldiers were confined and that for only a few days. The only answer he had was the Kreischef's assertion that it was Belgians who had built this dungeon and that there were no other places at his disposal.

The Kreischef excels in audacity when he asserts in his report that Father Van Nylen "has always declared that he desired nothing more than what he already had."

The Cardinal, in his letter of November 6th puts things in their true perspective and cleared himself of Von Bissing's allegation that he was misinformed regarding what took place in the prisons alluded to.

Archbishop's House, Malines, November 6th, 1915.

To His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General, Brussels.

Sir—On November 1st I received the letter P. 20001 with which your Excellency honored me dated October 30th. In it you express the opinion that the information contained in my letters of October 7th and 16th about the conditions under which Fathers Quevit and Van Nylen are imprisoned is without foundation.

I cannot do better than put the facts before your Excellency and give you the precise dates. Then you yourself will see that it is the unvarnished truth.

My first letter is dated October 7th. In it I told your Excellency that Fathers Quevit and Van Nylen, though merely under suspicion, were being kept in a dungeon. I asked for a mitigation of their lot and facilities for saying mass.

Very kindly on October 13th your Excellency wrote to me that as the result of orders given immediately by you, the priests' accommodation would without delay be altered to suit their dignity and that steps would be taken to enable them to say mass so long as the judicial investigation of their case lasted.

I had all the more reason to hope that the two religious would not have to wait long before enjoying the improvement asked for, because, on the occasion of a visit he paid me on October 8th, the Baron von der Lancken seemed disposed to second my request to your Excellency.

This is what actually took place: On Saturday, October 9th, in any case, so I am assured, certainly before October 13th, Father Quevit was taken out of his dungeon to be tried, was found guilty and immediately deported to Germany. Therefore, neither did he know anything about a mitigation of his sentence nor had he the satisfaction of saying mass.

Obeys Von Bissing

As regards Father Van Nylen, after having been shut up on July 31st in a dungeon at the barracks in Louvain and then transferred to the jail of the same town, he was imprisoned in a dungeon at the Lancers' barracks in Malines on October 2d. On October 25th he was still there and had not as yet obtained leave to say mass.

It was only on Monday the 25th that the provincial military chaplain, Father Gierlich, came to me with the news that leave was going to be given to Father Van Nylen to say mass, but that the requisites for this purpose did not exist at the barracks. Immediately a secretary from the Archbishop's House, Canon Van Olmen, was commissioned to procure all the necessary requisites; a building was prepared on the 26th and on the 27th the father had the consolation of saying his first mass in prison. Since the 27th your Excellency's orders concerning the celebration of mass have been carried out.

Replying on a report dated October 27th of the Kreischef M. Jochmus, your Excellency reproaches me with having complained without reason of the treatment meted out to religious detained in prison. Your Excellency expresses yourself as follows: "Your Eminence must therefore have been quite misinformed when you think it right to reproach me with the way in which the clergy is being treated."

Nevertheless, truth compels me to uphold the correctness of my communications.

Little Light in Cell

I have questioned several witnesses whose good faith is beyond all cavil, who have themselves gone through life in the dungeon here or have been allowed to enter one on the occasion of a visit to the prisoners.

This is substantially what they declare: The room which the prisoners are shut up in is very narrow and badly ventilated; there is neither table nor chair to be found in it; in general, there is not the cleanliness there should be; there is hardly any light; a witness who occupied the cell in the middle of summer asserts that then he could hardly read between 10 a. m. and 2 p. m.; Father Van Nylen has, during the few weeks of his detention, used as a makeshift at least two dozen candles. Under these circumstances the prisoners find themselves condemned to a sort of stagnation, to enforced idleness and to an oppressive boredom; and from 3 or 4 p. m. till the next morning they remain perforce reclining on a mattress, if a friend has been good enough to supply them with one, otherwise on a bed of straw. Every one must admit that such a regime is demoralizing.

And when one considers that several of those who are enduring for weeks or even for months at a

time these mental tortures and these privations, have not been tried and have not been declared guilty, but are merely awaiting trial; when one knows that the accusations brought against them relate to acts which the government no doubt has a strict right to prevent, but which are none the less required by a patriotism which calls for respect, one cannot help thinking that your Excellency must be ignorant of the abuses which are committed under cover of your authority; and one cannot give up hoping that, when better informed, you will no longer tolerate such things.

It is possible that Father Van Nylen's fate will soon be decided. But, if I have intervened in the case of two religious who had a special claim to my protection, nevertheless I should like your Excellency to extend your benevolence to all prisoners not yet found guilty.

Please accept, sir, the assurance of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

Hardly had the preceding letter been dispatched when the Cardinal learned of the arrest of Fathers Devroye and Mertens, S. J. He immediately intervened on their behalf to obtain favorable conditions for their imprisonment:

Archbishop's House, Malines, November 7th, 1915.

To His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General, Brussels.

Sir—At the risk of importuning your Excellency, I find myself obliged to supplement my letter of yesterday. I have just had news of the condemnation of the Rev. Father Van Nylen and also of the imprisonment of Father Devroye in a dungeon at Malines barracks. This excellent man, Father Devroye, is a friend and cousin of mine. It is painful for me to think that he had to pass Saturday night last on straw in an unhealthy cell such as I described to your Excellency yesterday.

I learn on good authority that Father Mertens, of Brussels, has been put into a cell at Louvain under the same conditions.

Again I appeal to your Excellency's humane and just feelings. Father Devroye enjoys very poor health; I beg of your Excellency to send a doctor to him as soon as possible to examine him. He could not bear up long under the treatment he is undergoing.

Accept, your Excellency, the expression of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

Two days after, Von Bissing sent the Cardinal from his residence at Trois Fontaines the following telegram: Trois Fontaines, November 8th, 1915. Cardinal Mercier, Malines.

In accordance with your Eminence's wish, I have given orders by telephone for an improvement to be carried out in the treatment of the imprisoned priests referred to in your letter. The Governor General.

(Signed) BARON VON BISSING, Major General.

The Cardinal hastened to thank Von Bissing for the kindness shown by him to the religious in prison awaiting trial:

Archbishop's House, Malines, November 10th, 1915.

To His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General, Brussels.

Sir—Your Excellency has been kind enough to assure me by wire last night that religious imprisoned under suspicion would for the future have better accommodations. I am very grateful to you for this assurance, and I take the liberty to insist that all suspected prisoners should be treated with the same fairness.

This very evening the news has reached me that a civilian prisoner in poor health, M. Wasnair, whom I had the honor to recommend to your Excellency, has been restored to his family.

For this I am grateful to your Excellency, and beg you to accept the expression of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

The Governor General forwarded to his Eminence a copy of the Kreischef of Malines' report on the conditions of Father Devroye's internment.

Governor General of Belgium, Brussels, November 10th, 1915.

To His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines.

As a sequel to my wire of yesterday, I have the honor to inclose herewith the copy of a report from the Kreischef of Malines and a bulletin of the army medical service about Father Devroye, who is detained under suspicion in the prison of this town. From these documents it is clear that the priest interested has no ground of complaint against the treatment to which he is subjected, that he is well and quite capable of undergoing the prison regime.

About Father Mertens, imprisoned at Louvain, notice has been given me through the telephone that he was in the same condition as Father Devroye. I have not yet received the written report. I intend to pass it on to you immediately when I receive it.

I present to your Eminence the expression of my sincere esteem and have the honor to be your very devoted servant. (Signed) BARON VON BISSING, Major General.

Some "Comforts" in Jail

Copy of the Kreischef's report inclosed with the preceding letter.

Kreischef's Office, Malines, No. 7049 II. November 10th, 1915.

To the General Government of Belgium, Brussels.

In execution of the order communicated to me by telephone on November 8th, 1915, I forward herewith a medical report on the state of health of Father Devroye, interned in the military prison at Malines.

At the time the doctor was drawing up his report, an officer of the "Kreiskant" visited the cell in which Father Devroye was lodged.

The cell is 3.20 meters long, 1.95 meters broad and 4 meters high. The walls are whitewashed with lime. Father Devroye is not obliged to sleep, as has been said, on straw placed immediately on the floor, but he has at his disposal a camp bedstead furnished with a straw mattress. He has only slept one night on this mattress. The day following his arrival at the prison, the 7th instant, he received a hair mattress which he uses still. A sufficient number of clean woolen blankets have been given him, as is proved by the fact that he has sent one back.

The warming of the cell is secured by a stove placed in the corridor of the prison. At the time of the visit to the prisoner the temperature there was sufficient. A warmer cell nearer to the stove was offered to Father Devroye. He refused it, saying that his was sufficiently heated. The lighting at night comes from a lamp attached to the wall.

The inquiry has proved that Father Devroye is treated with the deference due to his rank. The head of the local military police asked him whether there was anything he wanted done. The father answered that he was content, had no complaints to make about the food and was satisfied with his state of health. That his health is excellent is proved by the fact that during his interview with the Cardinal he remained standing for three-quarters of an hour before an open window, and on a remark being made about this, he said he was well and had no need for a scarf.

I would also remark that the prison where those detained on suspicion are confined formerly served as a jail for Belgian soldiers. The fitting up of the cells dates only a few years back. It answers to all hygienic requirements. (Signed) JOCHMUS, Colonel and Kreischef.

(CONTINUED MONDAY)

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Cardinal Mercier's Story

Including his correspondence with the German authorities in Belgium during the war, 1914 to 1918, edited by Professor Fernand Mayence of Louvain University and translated by the Benedictine Monks of St. Augustine's, Ramsgate, England.

CHAPTER XVIII

Treatment of Religious Awaiting Trial in the Military Prisons at Malines and at Louvain

SEVERAL religious prosecuted for having abetted recruiting for the Belgian army in occupied territory had been, in consequence of the prisons being full, thrown into military cells at Malines and Louvain. Kept in the most rigorous seclusion; deprived, in spite of Von Bissing's promise, of the consolation of saying mass, the prisoners had to pass the whole day long in a wretched narrow cell without windows and into which air and light could only enter through chinks left between planks forming the ceiling.

The Cardinal, being informed of this severe treatment, asked Von Bissing to mitigate in some way this cruel state of affairs. He interceded on behalf of Fathers Quevit, O. P., and Van Nylen, S. J., Devroye, S. J., Mertens, S. J.

In each case the Governor General showed himself ready to meet the Cardinal's appeal. He even went so far as to answer him by wire that his wishes would be acceded to. But his good intentions, real or apparent, had no effect. The Kreischef of Malines and Louvain, on being requested by the Governor General to give him some information about the religious in question, sent back lying reports affirming that the prisoners had made no complaint. Von Bissing, on the strength of these reports, told the Cardinal that he had been making groundless complaints and even reproached him with being ill-informed of what went on in the prisons. The Cardinal refused to be discomfited. In his letters of November 6th and 12th he returned to the charge and proved without doubt that the Kreischef's reports were inaccurate.

The conditions of the prisoners continued unchanged in spite of the Cardinal's pressing and repeated endeavors. On one point alone did he obtain satisfaction. After negotiations, which went on for more than three weeks, arrangements were made by the German military administration for priests and religious detained under suspicion to say mass in prison.

Stands by Imprisoned Priests

Archbishop's House, Malines, October 7th, 1915.

To His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General, Brussels.

Sir—I consider it my duty to call your kind attention to a state of affairs existing at Malines and about which I feel sure you have no knowledge.

Two priests, both of them religious, Father Quevit, a Dominican, and Father Van Nylen, a Jesuit, are being detained on suspicion, the latter during the last few days, the former for seven weeks, in a dungeon of the Malines prison. They are deprived of holy mass, are condemned to a life of complete idleness, and altogether pass their days in demoralizing surroundings.

That needful measures should be taken to prevent the escape of the prisoners, one can understand; but surely your Excellency does not wish to impose upon them worse punishment than what condemned criminals have to suffer.

I put the situation before your Excellency with confidence, and I beg you to accept the expression of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

Germans Dodge Promise

Archbishop's House, Malines, October 15th, 1915.

To His Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General, Brussels.

Sir—I thank your Excellency for the kind feelings shown in the letter with which you honored me under date 13th instant.—P. No. 18495.

Since the day on which I intervened with your Excellency on behalf of the Rev. Fathers Quevit and Van Nylen, the former has been condemned to be deported to Germany. The latter is detained in the Lancers' barracks at Malines and is being forced, I am assured, to follow the common life of a prisoner; and that yesterday, Friday, he had not as yet obtained the authorization which your Excellency was kind enough to lead him to expect; that, namely, to say mass.

I have no doubt that your Excellency's instructions in this respect will be promptly carried out. Accept, sir, the expression of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

Governor General's Office, Brussels, October 30th, 1915.

To His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines.

Your Eminence's last letter dated October 15th, 1915, greatly astonished me, for it has been proved that my orders have been carried out without the least hitch. The necessary steps were taken immediately for imprisoned priests to say mass. Exceptions to the prison routine had already been made previously in favor of ecclesiastics, in the sense that they were treated in a way worthy of their rank; quite a number of exceptional permissions had already been granted them. The priests we are speaking of have never made a request nor offered any complaint, but to the questions put them they replied that they desired nothing. Your Eminence must have received information of an altogether false character to think yourself justified in reproaching me for the manner in which ecclesiastics are being treated. I inclose with my letter a copy of a report which the Kreischef of Malines made in obedience to my order; your Eminence will find therein a proof of my contention. I beg your Eminence to confirm my statement that you have been misinformed regarding the treatment hitherto meted out to ecclesiastics. I offer your Eminence the expression of my sincere esteem and I have the honor to be your devoted servant. (Signed) BARON VON BISSING, Major General.

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Prison Keeper's Defense

The Imperial Kreischef of Malines, Tpb. No. 97. October 24th, 1915.

To the Military Government of Antwerp.

In reply to the order received by telephone today, following on the telephonic order of the 19th instant and the written order of the 11th instant, relative to the manner in which ecclesiastics awaiting trial are treated, I make the following declaration:

Among those incarcerated at the Malines prison, there were to be found on the 10th of this month two ecclesiastics, Fathers Quevit and Van Nylen. Father Quevit, sentenced to two and one-half years' penal servitude for attempted military treason, was, following on the order of the 11th inst., which I have mentioned above, deported to Germany. Father Van Nylen, who is likewise under strong suspicion of military treason and who is still for the present detained on suspicion under guard of the military police, has had during his sojourn here a room to himself. He is treated with all the deference due to his rank; every possible facility—long walks, permission to write, to receive and pay visits, good food, etc.—has been given him. The facts have been corroborated by the Kreiskant and the military police. We have always tried to avoid bringing ecclesiastics into contact with common prisoners. At the Lancers' barracks there are practically none but political prisoners; they are watched only to prevent their communicating with one another.

Thus Father Van Nylen, in reply to all the questions put him by the head of the police as to any complaints he might have to make, has always declared that he desired nothing more than what he already had.

He has never made any request to say mass, nor has Father Quevit during the whole of his stay ever manifested this desire. The Father Provincial and prior of all the Dominican monasteries in Belgium in the course of his numerous visits to the police station has never mentioned the matter.

That is the reason why no steps have ever been taken to fit up a room for the celebration of holy mass. The execution of the order of October 11th, 1915, was fraught with certain difficulties, for we had no suitable or appropriate place at our disposal. We had also to meet the difficulty of surveillance. We had to take into account the scarcity of guards and the fact also that the prisoners had already succeeded in escaping from the barracks.

After frequent negotiations with the Catholic chaplain Gierlich, a room possessing all the requirements for a chapel has been fitted up at the Lancers' barracks. We have considered the requests made me by the chaplain during a conversation I had with

IL PLEBISCITO DI FIUME POSTO

Il Ministro Scialoja Riferisce sui Negoziati di Londra e Parigi

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Fiume, 10 dicembre.—Il plebiscito col quale s'intendeva determinare se le forze di Gabriele D'Annunzio avrebbero dovuto abbandonare la città di Fiume, e' stato postposto. Tale plebiscito doveva tenersi oggi.

Roma, 20 dicembre.—Eurico Malatesta, l'anarchico recentemente eletto alla Camera dei Deputati, ha ricevuto un passaporto dal Governo italiano per far ritorno in Patria. Egli trovava in Londra, ove prese rifugio dopo il movimento rivoluzionario in Romagna nel maggio 1914.

Il Governo Francese ha rifiutato di accordare che Malatesta traversi la Francia, considerando "d'alto" pericoloso. Il Malatesta ha notificato agli amici che tornera' con un vapore greco che fa servizio tra l'Inghilterra ed il porto di Genova.

Roma, 19 dicembre.—Vittorio Scialoja, ministro italiano per gli Affari Esteri, in un Consiglio di Ministri oggi tenutosi, ha rapportato i negoziati recentemente avvenuti a Parigi e Londra riguardo la questione di Fiume.

Il Messaggero, il popolare giornale romano, cosi' disse in un suo articolo: "Gli Alleati evidentemente non reallizzano che la loro attitudine verso il problema italiano e' la principale causa della dissidiazione ed inquietudine che predomina in Italia tredici mesi dopo la fine della guerra. Nonostante le profonde anse causate da tale attitudine, l'Italia continuerà ad essere leale verso i suoi alleati, fiduciosa nel finale riconoscimento dei suoi speciali diritti."

L'On. Margliani, controllore per i vivi, in suo rapporto ha detto che la Nazione nel presente anno ha prodotto sedici milioni di quintali di farina, mentre nell'anno precedente la produzione fu di diciotto milioni. I bisogni della popolazione civile—egli ha detto—ammontano a 42 milioni di quintali all'anno.

Stante l'alta rata del cambio con l'America e l'Inghilterra, sono in corso dei negoziati per la compra della farina in Bulgaria ed in Romania. Parecchi deputati hanno protestato contro le nuove tasse sul vino. L'On. Scotti, un deputato onnoleno e' stato quello che ha maggiormente protestato.

STEEL PIER MANAGER WEDS

Telegraph From Jacob Bothwell Surprizes Atlantic City Friends

Atlantic City, Dec. 20.—A telegram from New York briefly announcing his marriage to Mrs. Alice E. Lowrey today greatly surprised a host of friends of Jacob Bothwell, owner of the Hotel Bothwell, and one of the best-known amusement promoters at the shore, having been manager of the Steel Pier for a score of years.

Mrs. Lowrey met Mr. Bothwell in New York on Wednesday, where they were wedded and started in a few hours for Old Point Comfort. The bride was a close friend of the first Mrs. Bothwell, who died about two years ago.

NEW USE FOR EAGLE BOATS

Will Be Used to Watch for Whiskey Smugglers Along Coast

New York, Dec. 20.—(By A. P.)—Small naval boats will be used by the coast guard in running down whiskey smugglers, according to information received here from the Treasury Department today. The coast guard was notified that a number of navy eagle and gasoline boats would be turned over to it for this purpose.

Special attention will be given to ships which may attempt to drop liquor overboard outside the three-mile limit, to be picked up by smaller craft and landed at isolated places along the coast. Instructions will be issued to maintain a close patrol of the coast.

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