

“UNJUSTLY OCCUPIED COUNTRY,” MERCIER COMPLAINS TO LANCKEN

Explanatory Comment

THE detailed indictment of German rule, contained below in the Cardinal's letter of September 15, 1916, occurs the first specific mention in this correspondence of the prime of the infamous system of monopolies in foodstuffs established by the occupying power. They were called “zentralen.” The “Buetterzentrale” had a monopoly of butter, the “Kartoffelzentrale” controlled potatoes, and so it went. In time there were “zentralen” for virtually everything edible, including jam!

In support of these institutions were decrees by the Governor General forbidding all trading by any one else in the particular article. It was asserted that half of the profits of the transactions made went to the German army. In some quarters, however, it was intimated and even proved that grafting officials manipulated a most convenient situation to the very finest personal advantage. With a sanctioned monopolistic authority, the managers of the “zentralen” would buy the products of the producers, laying aside from 5 to 20 per cent of it for consumption by the Belgians.

Local brokers, often Germans, would buy the goods from the “zentrale,” and to do this it was frequently necessary to bribe the officials. There is evidence that impressive fortunes were built up as a result of this co-operation between the brokers and the venal government employees.

Mention is also made in the Cardinal's broadside of the German theft of 625,000,000 marks from the National Bank in Brussels. All protest against this outrage at the time of its commission was unavailing.

In this connection, however, the following extract from the armistice terms is interesting: “immediate restitution of the cash deposit in the National Bank of Belgium.” Article 238 of the peace treaty pursues the same subject with its insistence on “restitution in cash of cash taken away, seized or sequestered, and also restitution of animals, objects of every nature and securities taken away, seized or sequestered in the cases in which it proves possible to identify them.”

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.

Brussels, August 16, 1916.

POLITICAL Department of the Government General of Belgium.

To His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines.

In accordance with the Governor General's decision, which has already been made known to your Eminence, I have the honor to make the following communication:

Dean Cooreman, of Overysse, induced the parish priest Van den Eynde, of Neerlysch; Coens, of Lambek; and the Curate Buscen, of Huldenberg, to hold the Corpus Christi procession without the sanction of the military authorities. The Curate Michiels, of Neerlysch, lent assistance during the procession. On these different ecclesiastics fines have been inflicted.

I offer to your Eminence the expression of my sincere esteem. Per interim.

(Signed) GRAF HARRACK.

More Priests Arrested

Brussels, August 24, 1916.

1 Rue Lambemont.

POLITICAL Department of the Government General of Belgium.

To His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines.

Putting into execution the decision come to by the Governor General, I have the honor to make the following announcement to your Eminence: P. Schmitz, S. J., of Louvain, has been arrested for assisting Belgians of military age to cross the frontier. An inquiry has been set on foot regarding the priests Van Linden and Peter Duwez, of St. Mary's Institute, at Brussels, for having evaded the orders of the censorship.

I take advantage of this opportunity to acknowledge with thanks the receipt of your Eminence's letter of August 16.

I have read it with interest and I shall do myself the pleasure of replying to it in detail.

I present to your Eminence the expression of my sincere esteem.

(Signed) LANCKEN.

Brussels, Sept. 11, 1916.

POLITICAL Department of the Government General of Belgium.

To His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines.

Pursuant to the orders of the Governor General, I have the honor of informing your Eminence that the parish priest Sculus of Laeken has been condemned to a year and two months imprisonment and in addition to a fine of 200 marks. He will undergo his imprisonment in Germany.

The Curate Pitwoers, of Kessel-Lo, has been arrested for playing the trade of a spy.

I offer to your Eminence the expression of my sincere esteem. Yours devotedly.

(Signed) LANCKEN.

Clergy Sent to Prison

Archbishop's House, Malines.

September 15, 1916.

To the Baron von der Lancken, Head of the Political Department of the General Government, Brussels.

Dear Baron—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated the 24th of August, but which, owing to circumstances outside my control or yours, was only delivered to me on the 6th of September. There you tell me that Father Schmitz has been arrested, and that proceedings are being taken against two professors of St. Mary's Institute: Mr. Van Linden and Mr. Duwez.

Some days ago I learned that M. Le Cure Bernaerts, of Antwerp, had been condemned to a year's imprisonment and sent away into Germany. He was guilty of keeping in his possession his own bishop's pastorals, and of having had a list drawn up of those of his parishioners who were in the army.

Canon Kips, director of St. Mary's Institute, at Schaerbeek (Brussels), has just been sentenced to three months' imprisonment and a fine for having been found in possession of two patriotic songs and two of his bishop's pastorals.

If I were to make use of the words “to punish severely” with regard to these vexatious measures, which for two years have been inflicted on our beloved and noble clergy (blow after blow) you would cry out in protest, my dear Baron. In your inmost heart, however, you may well think that I am speaking euphemistically. For, after all, I take it that only soldiers by profession, whose horizon does not extend beyond the barracks walls, suppose that momentary success justifies the misuse of force; but that men put in charge of the civil administration of an unjustly occupied country, that professional diplomats can approve of proceedings at once useless and vexatious, that passes my understanding. Unhappily, whether you submit to the orders of the military or whether you make your own, the outcome is the same for our poor country and our splendid clergy. It is and will remain the same for the great fame of the German empire. When the victims are able to speak freely, it will not be those who sat in judgment on them who will cut a good figure at the bar of impartial history.

Specimen of German Justice

Do you wish for another specimen of which you seem not to be aware of German justice?

Two pupils of the Malines Grand Seminaire—MM. Willems and Malve—are among the ecclesiastical criminals of recent date.

Mr. Willems has been in prison for six weeks, no one knows why. I presume that he is suspected of having sent a letter of encouragement to his brother at the front. And the “preventive detention” still goes on. I say nothing as to the hateful kind of questioning which he and one of his companions, the Rev. Mr.

Soille, had to undergo. Their case has become known to every one.

It is on this case of Mr. Malve that I wish to fix your attention for a moment, especially as you are not, I understand, altogether unacquainted with it.

The young cleric, Mr. Malve, in a private room of a private house—the seminary, to wit, was enjoying his playtime with two of his fellow students. He had sung sundry tunes, some religious, some secular ones. It came into his head to strike up the “Marseillaise,” without thinking that outside in the street a German was listening. The next day the police thrust their way into the seminary and threatened all there with a penalty—always the same respect for The Hague convention!—if the author of the mischief did not make himself known.

The generous-minded student, not personally known to me—I am anxious to emphasize that fact—hurried before his judges, anxious above all to shelter his fellow students.

A man of good sense, I do not say one of warm heart, would have pardoned him, would he not? or else have congratulated the brave young man on his act?

By no means. Mr. Malve was condemned to three months' imprisonment. More than that, the rector of the seminary, deemed answerable for a bit of fun of which he could not have been aware, was also condemned to a fine of 300 marks.

Nor is this all. After a whole month's detention your political department makes it known to the heads of the seminary that if a petition for pardon is presented Mr. Malve would be set free. The petition was duly drawn up. It was put into your own hands, Baron. You received it. But at that moment it seemed to you that German justice could only stoop to mercy after fresh inquiries and new reports, which amounts in plain words to (waiting) until the prisoner had undergone his full sentence.

In face of facts so edifying—and there are plenty of others we could cite—one hardly knows whether to be angry or to smile when a good man writes in the Monthly Correspondence, published by the committee for the defense of German and Catholic interests (much more German than Catholic) during the war (issue of July, 1916, p. 82) that the Belgian clergy ought in justice to appreciate “the frank benevolence of the foreign holders of power” (in Belgium).

It is true that the esteemed Mr. Krebs, professor at Friburg in Breisgau—for it is to him that this matter relates—asserts that he keeps himself “au courant” of the newspapers and has made a journey through to study things there.

He does not like inquiries in which the voices of opposing sides are given. He deems it surer to hold them by himself alone.

Protected by German Bayonets

But how is it that this good gentleman does not feel how * * * well, unchivalrous it is to attack under the protection of German bayonets a body of clergy which he knows to be gagged?

When your newspapers banded on my letter, “On My Return from Rome,” as if on some prey, and put into my mouth a prayer that an epidemic might break out among your troops, I asked his Excellency the Governor General if he would loyally transmit to my German and Austrian brethren in the Catholic episcopate a letter, in which I showed that my accusers make me talk nonsense. It will be enough for you to read page 5 of the accompanying document * to become quite aware yourself that this is really so. The context of my pastoral shuts out any logical possibility of this hateful interpretation.

The Governor General refused to agree to my request, alleging that my pastoral had been published in Germany, and that those who read it were in a position to make correction, which I urged, for themselves.

But my pastoral had not been published in Germany. I should be very anxious to learn in what paper, in what magazine, its authorized text has been given. Thus calumny runs its course.

An article, the source of which is not known to you, in the Frankfurter Zeitung, of Monday, August 7, has picked it up and set it again in circulation.

Is it too much to ask you, Baron, to deny this untruth or to obtain for me the means of denying it?

Perhaps, therefore, you will consent to inform the Monthly Catholic Correspondence more accurately upon “the frank benevolence of the foreign holders of power” (in Belgium).

The foreign holders of power solemnly bound themselves, by the Governor General's circular dated April 22, to make requisitions upon me “in kind.” And our provinces here paid forty millions as the price of this undertaking. But the monopolizing of vegetables, potatoes, flour, eggs and butter, the requisitioning of horses go on as cruelly as ever. Is this freedom? Is this benevolence?

The foreign holders of power, who have already extorted forty million (francs) a month + soon to amount to a thousand million (francs), are at this moment forcing the doors of the National Bank and despoiling us of six hundred and twenty-five million marks, which are on their way through the channel of the German banks, to swell the German Imperial Loan, i. e., to furnish our enemies with munitions of war (to be used) against us: Is this freedom? Is this benevolence?

These deeds of violence, whether they originate in the “military justice” or in the “political administration,” repress patriotism also in stifling its expression; but do not believe, I beg of you, that silence (as to this) indicates peace. Think on the words of Tacitus: “They enforce silence and call it peace.” Let us not pile up inextinguishable hatred in the Belgian heart. War and its doings are only to be justified in so far as they are helps toward peace.

Accept, Baron, the expression of my sincere esteem.

(Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER.

*With this letter, addressed to Baron von der Lancken, was also sent a copy of my letter of August 24, which his Excellency Baron von Bissing had refused to forward to the German bishops.

†By an order dated December 10, 1914, the Belgian people had to pay a monthly contribution to the war of forty million francs during a year. By a new order, November 10, 1915, this monthly contribution had to be paid until further orders.

‡On September 12 the German Government had taken by violence all the money in German marks existing in the National Bank and in the Societe Generale.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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SONG RECITAL PLEASES

Old English Lyrics and Negro Melodies at Witherspoon Hall

Edwin Evans, baritone, was much applauded last night by an appreciative audience of members of the University Extension Society, in a recital of old English lyrics and modern negro songs at Witherspoon Hall. Stanley Addicks was at the piano.

Negro melodies on the program made a strong appeal. They included “Weeping Mary” and “Oh, Didn't It Rain,” by Henry Burleigh, and “Little Wheel a-Turnin' in My Heart” and “Don't Be Weary, Traveler,” arranged by William Arms Fisher.

Several songs were sung for the first time in Philadelphia, including “Top of the Morning,” by John C. Egan; “Ask Me No More,” by Edwin Evans; and “Treat Me Nice,” by John Alden Carpenter.

Prominent Hagerstown Man Killed

Hagerstown, Md., Jan. 6.—Dr. Edgar A. Pirey, a dentist, was killed early this morning when an automobile in which he and J. P. M. Healey, a merchant, were riding was struck by a locomotive at a grade crossing. Healey escaped with slight injuries.

FEATHERS PREY OF FLAMES

Fire Damages Curing Establishment, 418 Addison Street

Several thousands dollars' worth of damage was caused by a fire which swept the first floor of the feather-curing establishment of Joseph Goldia, at 418 Addison street, shortly before 10 o'clock this morning.

The fire, which started in the first floor, is believed to have been caused by a spark from a gas engine falling on a pile of oily cloths. It was discovered by James Smith, a negro employee, who turned in the alarm. Before the blaze was put under control, it spread to the second floor, where a stock room was badly damaged by fire and water.

Fire Near Nurses' Home

Fire in the S. and J. Tool Co.'s plant at 2217 Chestnut street, damaged the basement and first floor to the value of \$500 early this morning. The origin of the blaze, which started in the basement, is unknown. There was some excitement in the Philadelphia Hospital nurses' home which adjoins the tool plant, but firemen soon put the blaze under control.

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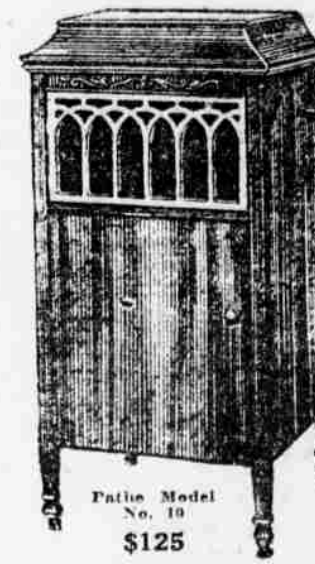
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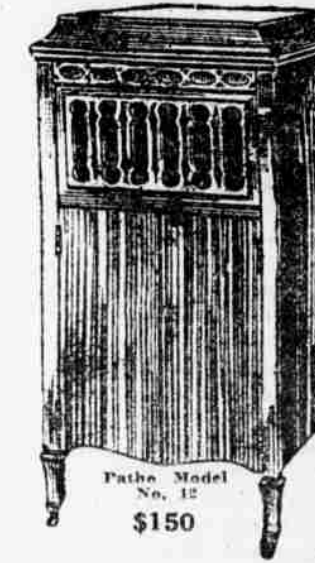
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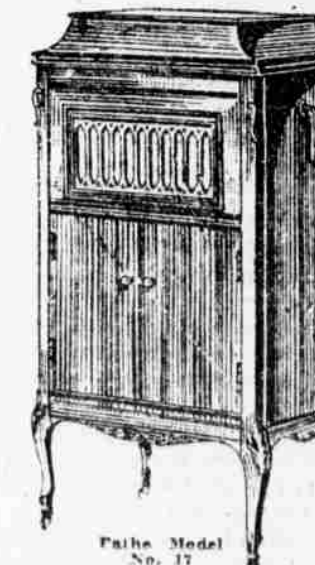
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