

MERCIER'S PLEA FOR CHURCH WINS AND IT ISN'T USED AS HOSPITAL

Mattresses Taken from 400 Old Men Despite Cardinal's Appeal—Request for Religious Help for Prisoners in Citadel of Diest Fails to Bring Response

Explanatory Comment

THE scope of the German confiscatory methods in Belgium was not fully revealed until 1917. The invasion had been an extravagant orgy of destruction. Later, when the pressure of the blockade was more acutely felt, a systematic plan for making use of all available material in Belgium, large or small and of whatever character, was devised and put into partial execution.

The greatest pains were taken to destroy scientifically machinery chiefly available to the looters because of its metal. A highly typical performance was the engaging of a professor, Herr Quasebart, of the Technical School of Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) to supervise the demolition of the great steel works of Ougree.

The Belgian bureau of information has since revealed an illuminating aspect of this savant's character. After the armistice, a commission was sent into Germany to look for stolen machinery. One of the officers was a nephew of M. Derson, a director of the works at Ougree.

In tracing the appropriated goods he had occasion to telephone to Professor Quasebart. Before he hung up the scientist pleasantly said: "Oh, by the way, please give my kindest regards to your uncle when you write to him!"

Robbing the aged of their mattresses was, of course, easy enough, and the Cardinal's protest in this instance was unavailing. There were times, however, when the ingenuity of the Belgians completely frustrated the German designs.

In the great Cockerill electrical works in Liege there was an enormous gas engine which the Germans coveted, but they could find no railway truck large enough to transport its parts. They hunted everywhere and to no purpose. Now the great truck is in the open again. Visitors who behold it are as puzzled concerning its hiding place as the Germans were.

are a certain number of unconsecrated buildings where the wounded could easily be lodged. I hope you will be good enough to use your good offices for the furtherance of religious liberty, and in so doing you will earn my gratitude. I may add also that, according to information received, your intervention is urgently needed.

Please receive the expression of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

The Cardinal's request met with a favorable reception. The church remained available for religious purposes.

CHAPTER XLVII The Religious Interests of Prisoners Detained in the Citadel of Diest

EARLY in March, 1918, the military authorities brought back a large number of civilian prisoners from Germany, principally from the camp at Holtzminnen, and interned them in Diest in a disused citadel. The Cardinal, hearing that the spiritual interests of these prisoners were neglected, requested the Governor General, using Baron von der Lancken as an intermediary, to authorize the parochial clergy of Diest to attend to their wants.

Archbishop's House, Malines, March 29, 1918. To Baron von der Lancken, Chief of the Political Department of the Government General, Brussels.

Dear Baron—At the present moment there are about 400 civilians, transferred from Germany, lodged in a citadel situated in the small town of Diest and rumor has it that their number will shortly be considerably increased. Some of them are prisoners, while others—and these are in the majority—have already expiated their offense, but I am told, are being detained as "undesirable" under police surveillance. None of these men ever comes into contact with the priests. At the most they receive but rare and flying visits from the German chaplain.

I earnestly request his Excellency the Governor General to kindly authorize the local clergy to provide regular religious services for those who are interned. I trust you will use your influence to procure this authority. At the same time that I thank you in anticipation, I ask you to accept the assurance of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

The Governor General refused to grant the Cardinal's request, but Baron von der Lancken, in replying to the above letter, guaranteed that the spiritual welfare of the prisoners at Diest, which had hitherto not been overlooked, would be even better attended to in the future.

The Cardinal acknowledged the receipt of the letter of Baron von der Lancken and while taking note of the assurance given by the Governor General, expressed his regret that his request had not been granted.

Archbishop's House, Malines, April 2, 1918. To Baron von der Lancken, Chief of the Political Department of the Government General, Brussels.

Dear Baron—I duly received yours of April 17, 1918, in which you very kindly inform me as to the care of the religious interests of those interned in the citadel of Diest.

Though I very much regret that Belgian priests are denied access to their compatriots, especially to hear their confessions, I am grateful for the guarantees given in your esteemed letter. In thanking you I would ask you to receive the assurance of my sincere esteem. (Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines.

CHAPTER XLVIII The Commandeering of Mattresses in the Homes for the Aged of the Little Sisters of the Poor—Divine Service in the Prison Attached to the Kommandatur at Brussels

AT THE time when woollen goods were commandeered, the Cardinal was informed that aged persons lodged in the homes of the Little Sisters of the Poor were threatened with the loss of their mattresses. He therefore requested Baron von der Lancken to intercede with the Governor General in favor of the unfortunate old people.

He also asked him to arrange to have mass celebrated in the Kommandatur prison at an earlier hour, so as not to prolong until a late hour in the morning the fast of the communicants. After an inquiry which lasted three weeks the Governor General decided that 400 old men, out of 450 inmates of the Rue Haute at Brussels, should be robbed of their mattresses. As regards the hour of divine worship at the Kommandatur no change could be made, Baron von der Lancken informed the Cardinal.

TO Baron von der Lancken, Chief of the Political Department, Government General, Brussels. Dear Baron—I must draw your kind attention to a rather delicate situation that has arisen at Hal, which, by an effort of good-will, could be settled without any unpleasantness.

The local authorities wish to convert a parish church, that of St. Roch, to be precise, into a hospital. To do so would entail the disorganization of divine worship in a parish of more than 3000 souls, at a moment when the services are exceptionally numerous. The dean of Hal informs me that there

are a certain number of unconsecrated buildings where the wounded could easily be lodged.

I hope you will be good enough to use your good offices for the furtherance of religious liberty, and in so doing you will earn my gratitude.

I may add also that, according to information received, your intervention is urgently needed.

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