

# THE KAISER AS I KNEW HIM FOR FOURTEEN YEARS

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(Continued.)

This society was formed by a company of clever Jewish businessmen to buy food from foreign countries and sell it to the people, a small percentage of the profits going to the government. It not only developed into a most successful enterprise from a standpoint of profit, its prosperity being augmented by graft, but it provided a haven for the slacker sons of the proprietors and stockholders. Just before I left Berlin, this company, to hide their war profits, bought a building for three million marks, which they claimed was needed for the business.

One of the subterfuges resorted to by some of the war profiteers to conceal the extent of their gains and escape taxation was to invest their surplus earnings in works of art and other expensive luxuries. As the tax assessments were based principally upon the individual's bank deposits and the tax-collecting machinery was very much out of gear it was comparatively easy to evade the law by careful manipulation of one's bank account and by disbursing profits received without having them go through the bank. A German whom I knew told me that he had disposed of an oil painting which had cost him \$300 for no less than

\$85,000, the price of works of art and antiques having increased to a remarkable extent because of the demand for them from tax-dodgers. Under the stress of the changed food conditions, the hungry German soon replaced the honest German. Germans had always had a reputation for honesty, but their claims to such distinction disappeared with the food supply. Necessity soon brought out all that was worst in the German character.

Although the government decreed a high fine and imprisonment as punishment for buying or selling anything which had been commandeered, speculators sprang up on every side and people bragged openly of what they had stored away. An officer on a train was overheard to say: "One-half of the women in this town should be in the insane asylum and the other half in jail." When asked the reason for this cryptic remark, he explained: "Well, half of the women ought to be in jail for 'hampering'—hoarding—and the rest of them, who are not hoarding, must certainly be 'crazy'." I think the officer must have been wrong in his calculations, for I, at any rate, never ran across a single German at this time who might be included in the insane half. Every patient who came into my office bragged about some forbidden article of food which he or she had purchased, and complained of the awful price exacted for it.

One speculator used to telephone my wife regularly, identifying himself by the password: "This is your good friend. Are you going to be at home this evening?" Needless to say, my wife usually managed to be in, as it meant food. This speculator looked like a cutthroat, but we used to treat him with the greatest consideration, offering him the best chair in the house and a good cigar. After he made sure that no one was listening at the door, he would reveal what he had for sale. Sometimes he had fifty pounds of butter at \$5 per pound. Another time it might be 200 pounds of dried peas at 75 cents a pound. Whatever it was we usually took all he had to sell, as it was a simple matter to share it with our friends.

From one man we bought 200 pounds of flour and the same quantity of sugar at \$1 per pound. The huge sacks were brought to us through the streets by men disguised as soldiers, their military garb protecting them against molestation by the police, who believed that it was being carried from one barracks to another. The men who brought the sacks to us declared that the stuff had been stolen from a soldiers' hospital. I know of a German doctor at the head of a big field hospital at the front who sent an American friend in Berlin fifty pounds of beans. There is no question but that the officers were sending food to their families from the supplies intended for their men at the front.

One soldier who was in a hospital at Berlin but well enough to visit his family occasionally was always asked by the officer commanding the hospital to deliver to the officer's wife a large bundle of what was apparently soiled laundry. One day, his suspicions aroused by the weight of the package, he opened it and found that instead of laundry it contained a supply of all the delicacies which the recuperating soldiers needed and were not getting. Things had changed—the soldiers at the front were sending food home instead of receiving the gifts which were showered upon them in the opening months of the war.

Many of my patients live in the country and there, of course, it was much easier to evade the food control regulations than in the cities. There they had practically everything they needed and they used to bring me presents of butter or delicacies—which I carefully locked away before beginning the consultation. Some of the so-called delicacies appear to me in a very different light now. One patient from Dresden told me, for instance, some sausage made from an elephant which had died in the Zoo! Another offered to sell me a very cheap ham—\$20. When it arrived it turned out to be half of a pig's head, smoked, with the teeth, an eye and an ear very much in evidence. As a rare treat I was able to buy some Polish sausage which I remember I ate with great relish. Later on I heard that in the town where my sausage was made the people were falling dead of starvation in the streets, which made me wondering whether I had been exactly prudent in eating it.

I bought a leg of lamb which turned out to be a goat and a quantity of butter the bought a speculator melted into an ill-smelling brown liquid. One was afraid not to take advantage of the offers made by the speculators, sometimes out of ten the stuff purchased was inedible or, at any rate, differed from what it had been held out to be. As time went on there seemed to be almost no real food to be had, and I feel that I possibly owe the life of my child to Mrs. Gerard, who so kindly left us a large supply of her good American stores when she left Berlin, and to the manager of the Quaker Oats Company at Hamburg, who sent me a large box of Quaker Oats.

Even the things which the Germans had been able to buy from Denmark, Holland and Switzerland had a way of disappearing in transit. Batocki, when he was food controller, told a friend of mine that six carloads of oranges which the government had bought were stolen, the cars arriving empty and two cars of cheese from Holland evidently met a similar fate for the cars arrived loaded with stone! The people felt that there was plenty of food in Germany, but the controllers were limiting its distribution. How could they believe otherwise when they read daily of the wonderful crops and the large stores of food taken in Rumania and of the inefficiency of the English blockade? The only way the diminishing food supplies could be reconciled with the constant reports of victories which were published in the inspired press was on the basis of restrictions imposed by the authorities.

Everyone I knew, rich and poor, had some little scheme of getting something "under the hand," but it was constantly growing more difficult and the quality of everything was so poor that there was very little nourishment even in what was available. People were always hungry and the result was that they ate too much of bad food—when they had the money or the influence to procure it.

(To Be Continued.)

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