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An Open Letter to Sir Arthur Doyle from James O'Donnell Bennett

Correspondent of The Chicago Tribune.

Metz, Germany, December 1914.

Twice I have read with strict attention, and with growing amazement an article of some 2,000 words contributed by you to the London Chronicle and entitled "*A Policy of Murder. How Prussia has degraded the Standard of modern Warfare.*" To me that article seems a very terrible and a very terrifying document—terrible in its wrath, in its passionate sincerity and in its massing of statements; terrifying in its effect upon the minds of neutral peoples if its statements are accepted.

In making some reply to your accusations I shall not so much try to say things that will call in question the things you have said as try to say things that will to some extent give another point of view than yours on one of the greatest and most perplexing questions of the time—the question of how Germany makes war.

I venture to cast my statements into the form of a personal, but not a private, letter to you because I wish to be temperate and mannerly, and constantly to make myself realize that I am, in a sense, speaking face to face with one whom I regard as a good and gifted man, a man who is not only a proved patriot but whose work is one of the adornments of the literature of his country.

I would not come into your library and storm at you. Nor will I do that merely because leagues of land and sea separate us and because I am unknown to you. It is for these reasons of propriety, and not because I wish to connect a little name with a notable one, that thus personally I address you. I owe you too much gratitude for many an hour of relaxation to wish in these troubled, feverish times to be either rude or patronizing.

On the wings of your high fame your words will travel far, and they will convince many. I have no fame but I have some facts. The opportunities I have had for gathering them may be estimated from this brief chronology:

On August 12th I arrived in Brussels from London, where I had just taken up my work as London correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. During the next five or six days I made brief trips to the east and south of Brussels—as far east as Landen and as far south as Namur. On these journeys by train and on foot I heard no reports that I was able to confirm of wanton atrocities perpetrated by German troops against the Belgian civil population which had observed the laws of war but I did hear of some instances of drastic punishment meted out to franc-tireurs. On August 20th I was in Brussels and watched for three days and a half the passing of thousands of German troops through the city. I was in many parts of Brussels for many hours of that strained and exciting time and I neither heard of nor saw an act of outrage or pillage. I did not see even an act of rudeness on the part of either the population or the invading soldiery. What I did see was friendly visiting between groups of civilians and soldiers at 7 o'clock in the evening.

That was four hours after the entry began.

On the following Saturday, August 23rd, I started on a trip that took me in the wake of German columns as far south as Beaumont. On Saturday I was far in the rear of the troops and in towns which the Germans had not yet garrisoned. At Nivelles the party of which I was a member visited for two hours with the townspeople and some peasants who had come in from the country-side. No outrages were reported. Half the next day we went on foot through a dozen Belgian villages and learned of no atrocities. The rest of the day our party marched alongside a German baggage train and saw Belgian women, apparently unterrified, giving cups of water to German soldiers. It is only fair to suppose, however, that they had been ordered to do that. In confectioners' shops we saw German soldiers civilly asking for chocolate and scrupulously paying, in marks and pfennigs, the price demanded.

On Tuesday we were compelled to rest all day at an inn in the Belgian town of Binche because our feet were badly blistered from unaccustomed marching. We moved freely among the population, making small purchases of equipment and larger ones of horse, dogcart, and bicycles. A German baggage train or two passed through the town but no German soldier hindered our movements. In fact we appeared to be identified by the Germans with the Belgian population, and they let us alone.

The next day we rode and marched by ourselves through many Belgian villages and towns. We heard stories of unprovoked atrocities when we visited with the inhabitants but always it was "in the next village, messieurs." Arriving at the next village we received the same assurance, and so on all day. Finally a Belgian burgomaster told us that he had been investigating the reports for two days and had come to believe that they were frantic inventions. Of the cruel signs of war we saw much and of the summary execution of franc-tireurs we heard something and we heard it from Belgians. That evening we caught up with a German column at Beaumont and we were placed under surveillance by German officers.

The next day surveillance became arrest, and on that day (Thursday) and on Friday and Saturday we had, of course, no opportunity to learn from Belgians how they had been treated or mistreated. But we did have ample opportunity to observe how the German soldiers behaved themselves. We found their conduct admirable. Even to five men whom they had gathered in as suspected spies they were considerate. They did not bully us but shared with us their food and drink.

On Friday night they put us on a train with scores of French prisoners of war bound for Cologne, depositing us at Aachen and seeming right glad to be rid of us. In Aachen we were under surveillance for three or four days by the civil police and then ceased to be objects of either suspicion or interest. The town being convenient to the Holland border where we could mail our letters to America, we made it our headquarters for nearly two months. During that period I made two trips to scenes of German military operations in France, each time under escort of German officers.

On those trips I had scores of opportunities to observe the iron discipline of the German troops, their sobriety, their scrupulousness in paying for meals at the French inns and their good understanding with the civil population in France, and it is of these matters that I would make some statement in detail.

In the opening paragraph of your contribution to the Chronicle you say that "a time has now come when in cold blood, with every possible restraint, one is justified in saying that since the most barbarous campaigns of Alva in the Lowlands, or the excesses of the Thirty Years' War, there has been no such deliberate policy of murder as has been adopted in this struggle by the German forces. This is the more terrible since these forces are not like those of Alva, Parma, or Tilly, bands of turbulent and mercenary soldiers, but they are the nation itself, and their deeds are condoned and even applauded by the entire national press."

Haltingly, owing to a meager knowledge of the German language, but pretty faithfully for more than three months, I have followed the reputable Cologne and Aachen papers on the war, and I have neither read, nor heard read, any such condonement or applause. Naturally what they do not concede they do not have to condone, and the German press does not concede that German troops have outraged the laws of civilised warfare.

You say in your next paragraph that "war may have a beautiful as well as a terrible side, and be full of touches of human sympathy and restraint which mitigate its unavoidable horrors," and you cite instances from the mediæval wars between England and France, and from the campaign in the Peninsula, in proof of that assertion.

And then you ask:

"Could one imagine Germans making war in such a spirit as this?"

I cannot only imagine it but I have seen it.

I thought it a beautiful thing to see my friend Captain Franz von Kempis of the Königin-Augusta-Garde-Grenadier-Regiment No. 4, standing uncovered on a chill October afternoon before the grave of the French officer who today is known throughout the German armies in northern France as "the brave Alvares." That soldier was commander of the Fort des Ayvelles near Charleville and when the garrison refused to make the stand against the Germans which he felt its honor demanded he killed himself. The victors buried him with military honors in a lovely evergreen grove behind the fort, and over his grave they erected a beautiful cross fashioned with patient skill from wood. And that cross bears this inscription in German text:

Here rests the brave commandant.
He was not able to live longer than
the Fortress entrusted to him.

By this simple cross of wood
the German soldier honors in thee
the hero of duty.

Second Landwehr Pioneers Company
of the eighth Army Corps.

Sept. 1914.

Some day in happier times I hope to show you the photograph of this shrine-place under the evergreens. In late October the German Wachtmeister in charge of the little force guarding Ayvelles was keeping the grave green with fresh boughs.

It seemed to me a beautiful thing to see French soldiers kissing the hands of German doctors who ministered to them in the hospital at Laon, and I have seen few finer, sweeter deeds in my life than the action of a German doctor who placed an arm under the back of a suffering and distraught Frenchman, and, drawing him to his breast, said, "I give you my word that you are not going to die, but you must help me to make you well by keeping yourself calm."

Two big tears rolled down the Frenchman's cheeks and there was a look of infinite gratitude in his eyes when the doctor gently lowered him to the pillow.

I thought it beautiful and touching to see two big German soldiers sitting in the front room of a house in the town of Betheniville, not many leagues from Reims, while a little French girl, perhaps 12 years old, gave them a lesson in French. It was they who seemed the children and she the adult, so awkward and simple and attentive were they and so monitor-like and strict with them was she.

The French children who were begging pfennigs with pathetic, pretty histrionism from the princes, generals, majors, captains and private soldiers who came and went through the railway square in the French town where great headquarters of the German armies are located seemed to me to afford decisive enough proof that these little ones were not much afraid of Mr. Kipling's "Huns." I noticed with pleasure that almost never did they meet with refusal.

And again, I could not convince myself that much personal rancor was existing between German invaders and Belgian non-combattants when a German officer, whose automobile was already well filled, stopped the car on a country road to ask a Belgian doctor whether he could not give him a lift to his destination.

And in desolated Dinant I both wondered and smiled when I saw Ober-Lieutenant Dr. Lehmann of Dresden busily helping the Belgian mistress of the inn to set the dinner table when a party of shivering officers and correspondents arrived unexpectedly one chill night in September. The eager officer was perhaps more of a bother than a help to the hostess but she took his activity in good part and there was much laughter and chaffing between them. He had made his quarters at the inn for many days, and every Belgian about the place seemed fond of him. A month later I was there again for a night and the first thing I did was to ask for the Ober-Lieutenant. "Oh! he is departed! He is gone these many days!" cried all the women folk in chorus and seemed genuinely sorry.

It was at Dinant, too, that I twice studied the method by which the German army is daily providing 600 destitute families of the town with bread, meat and coffee, charging them absolutely nothing, while families which can pay obtain food at cost. Meat is delivered to the local butchers, and German sergeants stand by in the shops to see that the people are not overcharged. In Brussels I heard

an assistant to the Belgian burgomaster ask the German commandant of the city, Major Bayer, for 10,000 sacks (that is 2,220,000 pounds) of flour for the poor. I heard the official stamp come crashing down on the typewritten request which the official also submitted, and I saw the paper returned to the Belgian functionary with a smile of acquiescence.

To go back to Dinant, I saw little human tokens like the words chalked in German on the door of a poor Belgian house, "Here lives a grandmother 98 years old. Keep out!", and on the door of another Belgian house the words, also in German, "Here is a new baby. Be quiet."

Within a stone's throw of the first of the forts which the Germans took in the fighting around Liege I saw in October the grave of a Belgian soldier. It was strewn with green boughs and above it was a wooden cross on which had been lettered in black paint, "Here lies a Belgian soldier." The humble, but as the times go, sufficient memorial was the work of German soldiers now guarding the ruine of a fort around which was some of the hardest fighting of the war.

Such things, Sir, I have seen.

In your article in the Chronicle you cite many instances of atrocities but in not one statement do you give the name of either the accuser or the accused.

In the citation of humane deeds I can be more explicit than that. I can give you the name of Mrs. Mannesmann who, struck to the heart by the agonies of French soldiers writhing and jerking with tetanus in German-superintended hospitals at Hirson and Laon, undertook a perilous and exhausting journey to Germany in order to purchase the serum for tetanus and convey it to France. She is the wife of one of the Brothers Mannesmann of the great German firm of Mannesmann-Mulag. That noble woman I have had the honor to meet and, since she speaks as good English as you or I can write, I was able to talk understandingly with her. During our talk she uttered not one rancorous word concerning the English or the French. Indeed, Sir, it is only within recent weeks of the war that I have heard opprobrious words fall from the lips of Germans when they spoke of the allies.

Let me also give you the name of Miss Bessie Sommerville, an English governess in the family of Baron Mumm von Schwarzenstein of Aachen. That lady wrote a letter which was forwarded with letters written by English prisoners of war to their families in England and in it she said:

"I wish you would let the English papers know of the kindness and consideration we English receive at all times from the Germans. It makes me furious and at the same time sad to read the things that are being said of Germans in English papers. I mean how they treat their prisoners and so forth. They are vile lies. I have plenty of opportunity of knowing how Belgian, French and English prisoners are treated. I have heard only of kindness and courtesy, and all prisoners that have passed through Aix-la-Chapelle must say the same. I only hope the Germans will have the same to say

when they return from England. I could write much more but space doesn't allow."

I hoped that Miss Sommerville's letter would be printed in the London papers because it seemed to me that it would bring comfort to many an anxious, aching heart. But I have been unable to find it in any of the numerous English journals which have come under my eye. I sent it to the paper which I serve and my editor gave it a conspicuous position.

Another little incident from Aix:

Baron Mumm asked Captain Lyster, an English officer who was prisoner in Aix, what could be done to make him comfortable. "Better than anything else," the Captain replied, "I would like a briar pipe and some tobacco,"—and he named his favorite mixture. Baron Mumm spent some time in seeking that brand and when he returned, the Captain asked, "How much do I owe you for this?"

"Nothing at all, my dear fellow," said the baron. "In happier times you and I will have a good dinner together at the Carlton and this will be pleasant to remember then."

May I give you another specific incident with names and places? An English woman of prominence who is a cousin of Sir Edward Grey and is a large landowner and president of the Red Cross in a northern county, was enabled through the good offices of Robert J. Thompson, American Consul at Aix, to fulfill a mission which took her to a military prison in Germany. She confessed that she came through Belgium with fear and loathing of the Germans in her heart. She returned over the Dutch frontier with tears of gratitude for what she described as "the unfailing courtesy and kindness of German officers," who she said, had not only allowed her to visit a captive English officer who was under suspicion of espionage, but also had given her opportunities to accomplish her mission in the fullest possible way. She viewed the prison and observed the treatment its occupants received and she remarked several times, "Why, it is just like a boys' school in England!" And she later told the consul how her countrymen had their playgrounds, their sports, their money, their servants and their newspapers. She was full of admiration for the perfection of the system and for the human, brotherly feeling which characterized the working of it.

The consul told me, he could never forget the tears and the deep, womanly feeling of this lady as she expressed herself in parting on the dark, stormy night when he took her over the German border into Holland. Her last words to him were renewed assurances of her gratitude to "the courtly German soldiers".

Here is another bit of testimony from an English subject whom slander of the Germans has sickened. He is Captain J. B. George of the Royal Irish Regiment and he wrote from Mons in September:

"I had bad luck. I was knocked out in the first half hour. I was two days in a German hospital. They could not have treated me better had I been the crown prince, from the lowest orderly to the senior medical officer. I hope you will tell this to anyone who is running down the Germans."

And here is testimony from a French officer—Surgeon-Major Dr. Sauve, Rue Luxembourg, Paris:

“I have seen in the German hospitals at Somepy and Aure the French wounded receiving exactly the same treatment as the German. I may add that not only the French wounded but also the French prisoners whom I saw were very well looked after.”

With the following letter I cannot give you names but I have no reason to believe that it is a forgery. It was first printed in newspapers published at Kiel and is said to have been given to the press of that town by relatives of the German captain mentioned in the letter. It was then copied by several other German papers, among them the extremely cautious Cologne Gazette, from the November 9th issue of which I translate it. A French baroness living in Lille writes to a German captain who had been billeted at her house:

“Lille, October 20th.—My dear Sir, I must tell you that I pray God may guard you until you again see your mother, who surely has given you a tender and careful upbringing. I will care for your officers as if they were our own. Believe me, dear Sir, with deepest feeling, Baronne de B.—”

Toward the close of the second paragraph of your article you state that in the Peninsula campaign, to prevent the destruction of an ancient bridge, the British promised not to use it on condition that the French would forego its destruction, “an agreement,” you add, “faithfully kept upon either side.”

And then you ask:

“Could one imagine Germans making war in such a spirit as this? Think of that old French bridge and then think of the University of Louvain and the Cathedral of Reims. What a gap between them,—the gap that separates civilization from the savage.”

Now may I ask a question or two?

Why not think of the exquisite Hotel de Ville at Louvain which was saved from destruction by fire solely through the heroism, energy and ingenuity of German officers who, though comrades of theirs had been shot in the back by civilians firing from attics and from cellar-windows, worked to save one of the most precious memorials of ancient times, and worked to such good purpose that today the superb structure stands unharmed? I have seen it.

Why not think of the choir-stalls, the paintings and the silver ornaments which German officers removed from the cathedral of St. Peter at Louvain and entrusted to the present burgomaster of Louvain, who, in turn, deposited them in the Hotel de Ville across the way?

Why not think of the great buildings of the University of Louvain which are not destroyed? You say they were, but on a Sunday in October I saw them standing. It was the *library* of the University which was destroyed.

“Think of that old French bridge,” you say, “and then think of the Cathedral of Reims.”

Why not think, in this connection, of the three parlementaires which the Germans sent to the French, requesting them not to use the tower of the Cathedral as a point for signalling to the

French batteries the effect of their fire? One of these parlementaires never came back! As a final warning the Germans blew down a smokestack near the Cathedral, and when they finally opened on the towers, so as to drive away the men who were signalling, they used very thin shrapnel. Days later I saw the towers still standing, and the statement as to the parlementaires I had from German officers of high rank, in whose speech I found nothing to warrant me in calling them liars off hand.

Why not think of the art commission headed by a German privy councilor and head of an imperial museum in Berlin, which Germany sent through Belgium from Liege to Mons to tabulate works of art in churches and convents within the zone of danger and to remove them to places of safety,—not places of safety in Germany but places of safety in the Rue Royale in Brussels? And these treasures when delivered there were placed under the control not of German but of Belgian curators.

Why not think of the fact that, almost without exception, burgomasters, curators of museums, bishops and priests worked loyally and frankly in the cause of art with the German commission?

Why not think of the fact that one of the treasures they removed from possible peril was van Dyck's "St. Martin Dividing His Cloak," a masterpiece which, merely on the basest grounds, is calculated to make an appeal to the cupidity of an invader, for its money value, so experts say, is not less than £50,000!

At the opening of the fourth paragraph of your article you ask this question:

"Can any possible term save a policy of murder be applied to the use of aircraft by the Germans?"

You are speaking more especially now of the dropping of bombs on unfortified cities by German airmen, and you say that "occasionally these men have been obliging enough to drop their cards as well as their bombs."

And you add:

"I see no reason why these (cards) should not be used in evidence against them, or why they should not be hanged as murderers when they fall into the hands of the allies."

I am glad, Sir, that you are not a British general, for it is my conviction that, if you gave orders as you write articles, you would add fresh horrors to war. And also it seems strange to me that a publicist who so passionately extenuates the Belgian franc-tireurs' mad defiance of the laws of war should be so keen for reprisals against German airmen who have done only what English airmen have done. For, Sir, English airmen *did* drop bombs on the unfortified city of Düsseldorf in an attempt to destroy balloon sheds. That attempt was only partially successful, but the next morning the Cologne Gazette described the long flight and the dropping of the bombs as "a brilliant feat" and said that German airmen would hope soon or late to return the compliment of the visit to Düsseldorf. As a sporting proposition the incident made an impression which was not lost on the German mind, and hearty recognition of the fact was made.

The truth is that aircraft are, like automobiles, a phase of "the new war," and the world must accept them if the world is to continue warring. The principle of war is, as we all know, to strike terror, physical and spiritual, into your enemy. This the airmen do with superlative success. There is, too, an ancient saying that war is most merciful when it is quickest, and the operations of airmen certainly expedite disaster and destruction.

In your fifth paragraph you say:

"As to the treatment of Belgium, what has it been but murder, murder all the way," and you add that "it is said that more civilians than soldiers have fallen in Belgium."

I should not be surprised if that second statement were true. There is a reason why it should be. It would not have been so, I am confident, had the population of Liege, of Louvain and of towns and villages lying between Liege and Louvain kept their obligations as civilians, or, donning uniforms, gone into the army as soldiers. My observations in September, and again in October, in Northern France, convinced me that the civil population of Belgium and not the Belgian army was the principal cause of Belgium's woes. For in France the German army encountered very few franc-tireurs, with the result that there were few instances of reprisal against citizens. Village after village I passed through in the track of the German army, and nothing at all was destroyed. In scores of inn parlors I have sat while German officers and privates ate. The landlady and her daughters would go busily and politely about the serving of food and at the end of the meal not only was the food scrupulously paid for, but the girls would receive really handsome tips. This I saw so often that I came to take it as a matter of course, as, in truth, it was.

And always when the officers left there were courteous adieus and wishes for a pleasant journey on the one hand and on the other laughing assurances from the soldiers that they hoped they might come back to so good an inn "in happier times."

In Belgium, too, I witnessed numerous unforged and genuinely obliging exchanges of civilities between the invaders and the invaded. Two incidents were typical and they were observed not only by me but by two other American correspondents and by the American consul stationed at Aachen.

In the Belgian town of Huy, where the bridges had been blown up by the Belgians in their retreat, not by the Germans, the can containing extra benzol for the car of the German officer with whom we were travelling began to leak as we were passing up the main street. A Belgian ran up to the car, told Captain Mannesmann, who was in uniform, what was happening, and offered assistance. The benzol had to be transferred from the unsound can to a sound one and for that a funnel was required. A baker came out of his shop and offered the loan of one. A third Belgian gave advice and assistance when the cans were again lashed to the rear of the car.

When we moved on we were hailed and a Belgian, waving his hands and smiling, ran after us for 400 feet with a wrench that had

dropped from the car. These friendly offices were not performed in a truckling or a cringing way, nor, apparently, in the expectation of a fee, but with simple good will to travellers. I may add, as indicating the kind of discipline the German authorities have laid on Belgium, that in Huy it is impossible for anybody—Belgian, German or neutral—to buy any heavy spirits. Only beer and mineral waters are to be had. The number of altercations that so wise a regulation prevents in a difficult situation you will comprehend. At Chimay, also in Belgium and the seat of the prince of that name, who, by the way, had fled to Paris, we talked with an innkeeper when no German officers were by. We asked him how affairs went in the town under the administration of its German commandant, von Schulemann. "They go well," he said, "for in all our difficulties we know we will get justice from the commandant."

In Maubeuge we heard a French woman who was going to the mairie to get from a German sergeant her slip of requisition for German flour, say she was glad her husband was a prisoner of the Germans for now she knew he was safe and getting enough to eat. In the same town another woman said she was glad the Germans had come because it meant that "the thieving, filthy Turcos," as she called the black colonial troops of France, were out. Mr. Cobb and Mr. McCutcheon told me they heard the identical remark in other French towns. I tell these things to you not because I personally am glad that France is invaded but to give you the point of view of humble folk who seemed to feel that they had suffered from allies of France more than they would suffer from the avowed enemies of France.

No man, however, who has crossed the eastern and southern provinces of Belgium would be so absurd as to contend for one instant that the German operations in that kingdom have not been a bitter business for Belgium. Were the traveller to make such a contention, a score of desolated and deserted villages and towns would give him the lie. Nevertheless there has been exaggeration, almost as appalling as the desolation, in the statements concerning the extent of the damage done. The wife of a socialist member of the Belgian ministry, for example, lectured in Chicago a few days ago on behalf of the Belgian relief fund and after speaking of the "murderous Germans," and what they had done, she made, among many other sweeping remarks, the statement that "Louvain can be spoken of only in the past."

That is not true.

A liberal estimate as to the part of Louvain that lies in ruins is one seventh. More conservative observers are of the opinion that one tenth of the entire city is destroyed. I am inclined to accept the larger estimate. So far from being "a city of the past," Louvain is coming out of the heavy bewilderment which its sorrows laid upon it, and, under German auspices and with German assistance, is making good progress in clearing away the wreckage. In the day-time the people move freely through the streets and do not seem terrorized. The street vendors, for example, drive a brisk and good-natured trade in picture postcards with German soldiers.

German officers and officials with whom I have talked have never spoken lightly of the sufferings of Belgium and they are sorry for Belgium. "You have been in Dinant," said the Secretary of the German Foreign Office, von Jagow, to me. "So have I," he added, "and it is terrible, but war is war and it is tenfold more dreadful when the civil population takes a hand in it."

And when it comes to the kind of resistance or reprisal—one cannot call it war—which the franc-tireur makes, you, Sir Arthur, know what the Walloons of eastern Belgium are. Turbulent, truculent, and unschooled, they fight—no, one cannot say fight—but fire from cellars, from attics and from behind hedges, using the while the protection civilian garb confers on veritable non-combattants but not accepting the honorable risks that go with the uniform of a veritable soldier. The adjectives which mankind has applied to the lower orders of this Walloon population, and the facts of their annals, are to be found in any guide-book or school history. Brave, in a lawless way, they certainly are but often devious and sometimes treacherous. You know the old proverb concerning the inhabitants of the ancient province of Hesbain, now a part of the province of Liege—"Qui passe dans le Hesbain est combattu lendemain." And the fact was, and is, that the enemy who passed that way got his fighting in the back "on the morrow."

The Belgian government felt a lively apprehension of the suffering which the Walloons, and their compatriots further west, would bring upon the kingdom and throughout the week or ten days of the advance from Liege to Brussels many burgomasters, and the minister of war, issued daily, and sometimes hourly, proclamations in which they pleaded with the people to observe the laws of war as bearing on the obligations of civilians and gave them the most explicit warning that the participation of civilians in the hostilities would bring the most terrible penalties on whole communities and on innocent women, children, and the aged. Copies of these proclamations, addressed "Aux Civils" I have by me. Their language is often passionate in its solicitude.

I asked an American gentleman who has lived for five years in Belgium and who loves the country, though he does not love the people (I refer to Mr. Lawrence Sterne Stevens, an artist), why these warnings had had so little effect upon the Walloon peasants, miners and metal workers. "Because," he replied, "the number of illiterates is so large in Belgium that thousands upon thousands of the people could not read the proclamations."

And so, impotent and fruitless, these placards stared the people in the face from hoardings and dead walls, and the firing from behind walls and hedge-rows began. It was tragic but it was not war. And it was so utterly barren of permanent results, and it drew such severe reprisals, that I could quite understand the point of view of Major Bayer, German commandant of Brussels, when he said, "These Belgians do not know what war means."

The event proved how justified were the apprehensions of the Belgian government regarding the sense of their obligations as civilians which was entertained by the humble folk of the country-

side and of the mining villages. Hundreds of misguided persons were shot and thousands of dwellings were burned. And yet, widespread as is the ruin I have witnessed, I was amazed at the discrimination the enemy displayed in meting out punishment. In Dinant, for example, the second and the fifth house in a long terrace of, say, ten houses, would be destroyed. All the rest would be intact. Manifestly the houses from which franc-tireurs had been burned. The rest had been spared. When you consider that this discrimination was exercised during the terrible hours of street-fighting, you will realize that, though the Germans, God knows, had been severe, they had not been ruthless. My compatriots, Messrs. Thompson, McCutcheon and Cobb, observed time and again during our Belgian wanderings the proofs of this reasonably accurate justice dispensed under trying conditions.

In Brussels, forty days after the entry, I moved freely among the native population and made a sincere effort to learn whether the German garrison had subjected the Bruxellians to humiliations or hardships that were not inevitable in the administration of a captured city by invaders. I could learn of none that were scandalous. For two hours I talked with Mr. Louis Richards, the American proprietor of the Restaurant de la Monnaie, and I persistently sought from him specific instances of abuses which had come under his observation. He was in a very resentful state of mind, naturally, for not only is he fond of the land of his adoption but also the effect upon his business was deplorable. But when it came to the citing of instances of oppression, the most drastic example was given when he said, "Well, they take all our pigeons. They are very expensive birds used by the Belgians in their popular sport of flying matches. It seems a high-handed thing to do."

As the boom of the German guns around Antwerp could that instant be heard in Brussels, and as information from the outside world might have been invaluable to the forces defending the beleaguered city, it did not seem to me unreasonable that the Germans should have confiscated the carrier pigeons.

And, on the other hand, it seemed to me that much was to be said in explanation of the strict regulations as to lights, hours of closing and public assemblings which had been made for the better ordering of the city by officers like General von Jarowitzky and Major Bayer. For those officers, among hundreds of others, some of whom had not come off so luckily as they had, had been shot at from ambuscade, from cellar windows and from attics by civilians. As a consequence their attitude toward the Belgian population was not precisely trustful.

Nor would it have been surprising if German officers who had seen 60,000 dum-dum bullets taken out of the Maubeuge forts had not been in a very placable mood. But Major von Abercron, the commandant of Maubeuge, had been so scrupulous and tactful in his dealings with the unhappy and anxious population of the town that the mayor of Maubeuge said to Consul Thompson, when no German officer was by, "As to the conduct of the German soldiers we have nothing to complain of."

Of the 60,000 dum-dum bullets I do not speak from hearsay. I helped to open and helped to photograph several boxes of these diabolical missiles.

In your Chronicle article you make the question-rhetorical a potent instrument. Permit me one such. What then, Sir, of these 60,000 dum-dum bullets packed in reinforced boxes that were piled high in the mairie at Maubeuge?

And in view of the fact that the Germans had almost begged the French not to use the towers of the cathedral at Reims as points for signalling to their batteries I thought it rather a splendid thing that, in spite of refusal, the Germans did not demolish the towers.

That their guns were not trained on the towers I had proof in the late afternoon of September 29th, when I walked along the ramparts of Fort Brimont about five miles from Reims, and again on the glorious afternoon of Sunday, October 25th, when I stood on the heights at Fort Berru, about four miles from Reims and looked down on the ancient city. The truth is that in the protection and conservation of historic edifices not a nation in Europe is more systematic as to the method or more pious as to the spirit than Germany is. The owner of a shrine place is not permitted to demolish it and he can make alterations in it only by official sanction and under official supervision. He is, however, permitted to sell it to the government. As to the so-called vandalism, which has been one of the special charges made against the Germans in this war, one has only to refer to that sole remaining castle in the Rhineland which stands today as it stood in ancient times, and stands so only because it lay off the track of a successful French invasion. The path of war is, indeed, the path of destruction, and there is no nation, least of all Great Britain, which unnecessarily destroyed the capital of the young American Republic in 1813, that is in a position to read Germany a lecture in these matters. Who that has wandered among the shrine places of England has not felt a pang at some of Cromwell's work, but what republican does not feel that England is freer today because of Cromwell? These burnings and bloodlettings are terrible but they seem sometimes to be part of the discipline of pain by which humanity finds its way to what is righteous and wise.

As to the minor matters of caretaking and the observance of the decencies of everyday existence I can say that there was not a room in a single French château where they were quartered that the German officers with whom I travelled for hundreds of miles did not leave in as good order as they found it. And in several instances I know that they left the bathrooms more tidy than they found them. In the saloons of châteaux, notably the château of the Prince of Chimay at Chimay, which had been occupied for a month by a large staff of German officers, the most fragile ornaments were unharmed, though many of them stood uncovered on mantelpieces and marble tables.

At the stately staff dinners and in the barrack rooms I have found sobriety and decorum the rule among the German soldiers.

In all my travels in German cities, and with German columns in Belgium and France, during the last four months, I have seen just three German soldiers who showed signs of too much drink. All were privates. One was surly and suspicious; the second was effusively good-natured. Both were in an inn at Beaumont. The third was in a melodic mood and was singing in the streets of Aachen. He was the only drunken soldier I have seen in a German city since the first of September and I have stopped in Metz, Trier, Coblenz, Bonn, Brühl, Köln and Aachen. The Germans are, as all the world knows, a drinking but not a drunken people. In war time this decent moderation is not abandoned. In all my travels I have observed the soldiers closely and I have found them neither profane nor drunken. On the contrary I have time and again—at Laon and at Charleville in France and at Metz and Aachen in Germany—seen them kneeling in prayer before the high altars of the cathedrals.

Of the womanly devotion of the German Kriegsschwester, and of the homage accorded them by officers of the highest rank, I will not speak in detail because I know that such devotion is not peculiar to the women of any one nation, nor is the homage vouchsafed to war-sisters withheld by any man worthy of the name of man.

The stately etiquette observed at the staff dinners which I have attended may be worth a word of mention because it will assist you to differentiate the German officers from Mr. Kipling's "Huns." That formality and courtliness I have noted at the table of the sterling von Zweel, which was laid in a grove on the firing line, of the venerable and benevolent von Heeringen, of the suave d'Elsa and of the unassuming and friendly von Gebattel.

At not one of these dinners, though the wine went round freely, have I ever heard an oath or an indecorous tale. Nay, I must modify that statement a little. An old captain who was riding with us one day did tell us a racy story, but it was not vile and it had a very funny point to extenuate its coarseness.

One other fact as to the moral of the army. Constantly the Young Men's Christian Association is following the troops, and no sooner is a Belgian or a French town garrisoned than the association establishes in that town reading and writing and dining and visiting rooms for the soldiers. These quarters, known as "Soldatenheime," are directed by both Evangelical and Catholic chaplains, and both Evangelical and Catholic services are given under the auspices of the Y. M. C. A.

There are three or four more points in your article which I should like to touch on briefly. They come in the massing of statements towards the close of your remarks.

Notably you say this:

"Do you imagine that the thing has been exaggerated? Far from it, the volume of crime has not yet been appreciated." And you ask your readers to "peruse the horrible accounts taken by the Belgian Commission, which took evidence in the most careful and conscientious fashion."

Now my observation is that there has been the most frightful exaggeration. War, as everybody knows, is a breeder of lies. This

one is no exception. Everybody believes what he wants to believe, and most persons seem to resent the truth if it fails to fit in with gossip and rumor already accepted. Partly, in the case of Belgium, this is so because the sympathies of the world have been passionately enlisted for Belgium, and partly because it is not in poor human nature to wish to change our opinion of persons of whom we have believed the worst and for whom we have expressed the deepest loathing.

Lies, lies, lies, have multiplied with the passing of the weary days of August, September, October, November and December, and not always have they sprung from malevolence so much as from credulity. Anything was believed, from the preposterous statement that eggs were costing one mark each in Germany, to forged proclamations and edicts, purporting to be addressed by the German emperor to the empire and beginning, "It is our royal and imperial will." Every traveler who pays two marks in a German hotel for an early breakfast of three eggs, bread, butter, cheese, jam and coffee knows that eggs are not costing one mark each, and everybody who is at all familiar with the wording of imperial proclamations knows that when the German emperor addresses the empire he does not touch on the fact that he is also king of Prussia by speaking of his "royal will." Your own amazing ingenuity in deduction has long since taught you the worthlessness of evidence given by persons who testify in rancor or from hearsay. Of that character, I firmly believe, have been the wicked stories told in turn about combattants of every nationality engaged in this war. Many of them have been the stock slanders of every war, stories as old as the annals of the race. They were told during the Civil war in America. I heard them in Cuba during the Spanish-American war. And the wisest words I ever read on that whole matter were written by the good and chivalrous Lord Roberts only a few months before his death. They are these:

"May I give a word of caution to my countrymen against the unsportsmanlike practice of abusing one's enemies. Let us avoid what Kipling, during the Boer war described as killing a Kruger with your mouth When we read charges against German troops, let us remember that gross charges, absolutely untrue, were brought against our own brave soldiers fighting in South Africa. But whether the charges are true or not, let us keep our own hands clean and let us fight against the Germans in such a way as to earn their liking as well as their respect."

There never was a truer saying than that a good soldier respects a good soldier. In my talks with German soldiers I have had repeated proof of that. They did not curse or blackguard the French, the English, the Russians, the Belgians or the Indians. And General von Heeringen said to the party of which I was a member, "The English are good boys! They stand." Of the Scotch soldiers a German officer whose name I have forgotten, said, "There is only one thing to do with a Scotchman—capture him or kill him." The compliment was not softly worded but it was an honest soldier's honest tribute.

The Germans are not liars. They are so loyal to the truth that their loyalty sometimes lapses into gross bluntness of speech. They call a spade a spade and their bluntness sometimes leads them to use the crude word when another would do as well. They consider a lie not clever but ignominious and their point of view was given with beautiful terseness one day by Captain Alfred Mannesmann, who was storming about some peculiarly hideous slander which had appeared in an English journal which the Germans call "The Daily Liar."

"That statement," said the captain, "is not true. We Germans have explicitly denied it more than once and we are not liars. We hate lies. My father used to say to me and my brothers, 'You must be too proud to lie.' He brought us up on that saying—'You must be too proud to lie'."

Unscrupulous correspondents, too, have been a deplorable factor in this war. Of one of them—I regret to say a countryman of mine—who had written, and got printed in America, the most hideous charges against the Germans, the American Minister to Belgium said to me, "The man is a rat and a disgrace to journalism." I violate no confidence when I add that this diplomate's sympathies, though he had not publicly expressed them, were believed to be with the Belgians. But he none-the-less hated lies about the enemies of Belgium.

I mention the case of this correspondent because you speak of the "consistent, systematic lying of the German press." This chartered liar, whom Minister Whitlock denounced and who was getting his lies printed in England and America, wrote things that for falseness and scurrility and bombast I have not seen even faintly approached in the least trustworthy sheet in Germany.

Just one more point. In a document addressed a few days ago by British women living in Aachen "to his Britanic Majesty's Government" I find this sentence:

"The British women in Germany submit that up to the present they have been treated with the greatest forbearance and consideration by the German authorities, as befitted the representatives of this great nation."

That is testimony from your own people.

My testimony is the testimony of an American who loves England and who has not a drop of German blood in his veins. What things I have seen I have here set down because I believe that what raises the man of my calling above the level of a scribbler is the telling of the truth.

James O'Donnell Bennett

Correspondent of The Chicago Tribune.

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