

THE  
LAST PHASE  
IN BELGIUM

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STATEMENT  
BY  
VISCOUNT BRYCE  
ON THE  
BELGIAN DEPORTATIONS

MADE IN REPLY TO A LETTER FROM  
THE REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE NEW YORK "TRIBUNE."

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LONDON:  
W. SPEAIGHT & SONS.

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1916.



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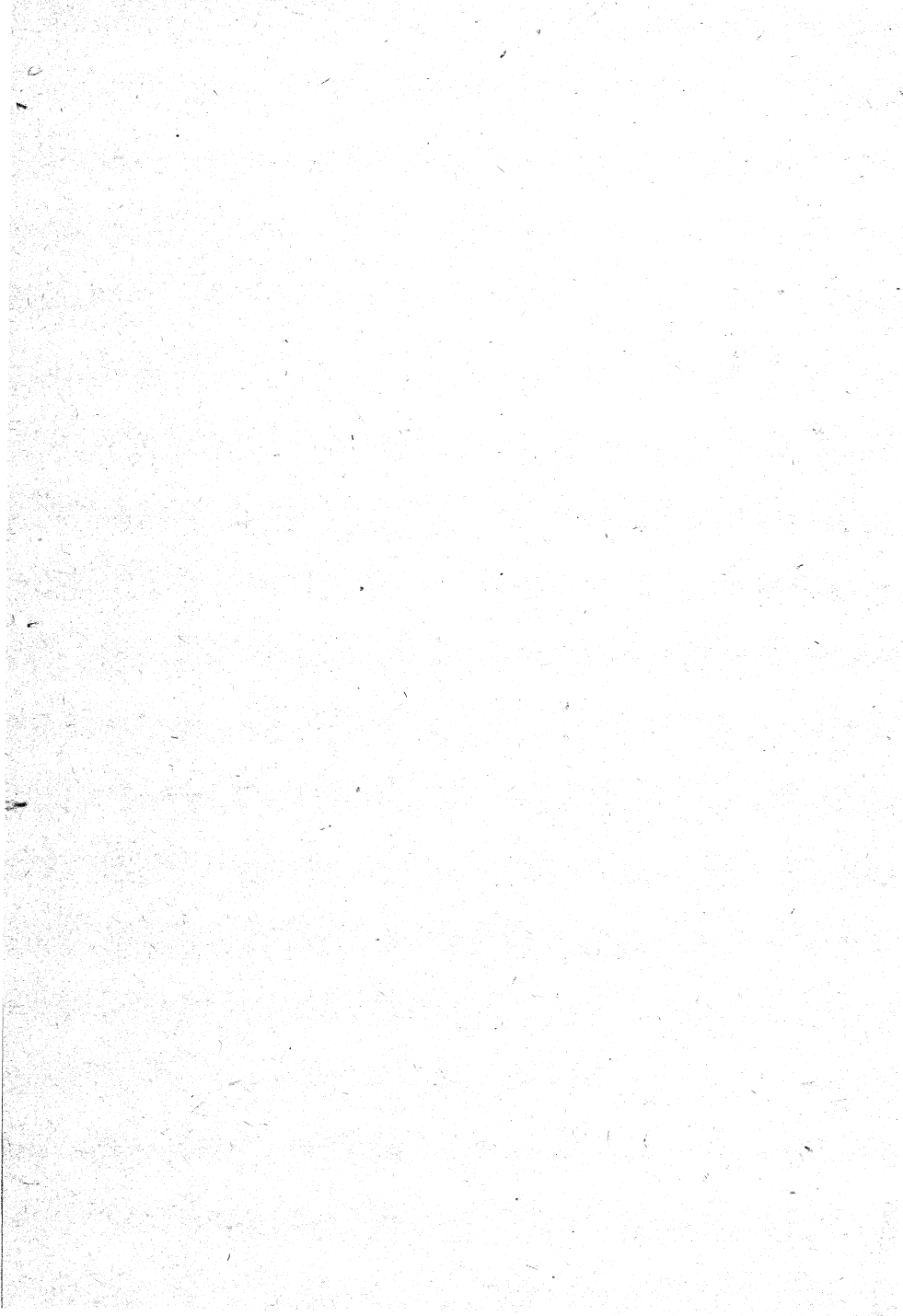
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**T**HE deportation of the men of Belgium by Germany is the severest abuse of power in the last two years. So I wished to be able to send to American readers a summary of it by Lord Bryce. It is essential that our country shall take action on these slave drives of the German military power, and the words of Lord Bryce carry more weight with our people than those of any other man in Europe. We must take action, because these deportations, if continued, will mean the destruction of the American Commission for Relief in Belgium. The Commission is destroyed if the feeding of Belgians means that the persons fed are to be considered by the Germans as unemployed, disorderly, and therefore susceptible of being herded into trains, and sent to parts unknown. "Parts unknown" means that the Belgians are distributed through the German Empire, under-nourished, and even imprisoned. The deportation means that many of these Belgians will never be heard of again. We know this, because last spring a

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group of Belgian railway workers were deported. The present deportations have removed between 25,000 and 50,000 Belgians from Ghent, Antwerp, and the other cities. These men are performing military work for the Germans. They are being forced to work at the subsidiary processes connected with munition-making. We learn from Dutch sources that twenty-two attendants of the lunatic asylum at Evere-Les-Bruxelles have refused to work for the Germans, and have been deported to Germany, where they have been forced to work in a munition factory at Duisburg. There have been riots at Ghent when Belgians were forced to work in a munitions factory. They are therefore aiding in the creation of the defences and the materials of war which will destroy their own people. By their enforced labour they are freeing German workers for the army, who will go out and kill their brothers in the Belgian Army.

If the Germans continue to deport Belgians on their present plan, they will conscript 400,000 men. Only one nation can prevent this, the United States. It is time for us to speak, because this slave-drive is the most wholesale and immense injustice in the whole German campaign of frightfulness. They have moved on from point to point in unsettling the economic life of Belgium. They have destroyed her export trade. They have made it impossible for her to import raw stuffs to be manufactured into products. Then, when her machinery lay idle, they requisitioned the machinery on the ground that it was unused. And now that the workmen are unemployed, they deport

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them on the pretext that they are idle, "gambling, &c." By this progression of measures, they are freeing several new divisions of the German army, supplying their places by Belgian slave-labour. They are lengthening the war by several months. They are violating human rights on a large scale. And they have turned one of the most industrious nations in the world, first, into an idle unemployed community, and now into a serfdom.

Lord Bryce does not give interviews. What he asked me to do was to submit questions in writing, and to these questions he has written answers. He consented in this instance only because of the gravity of the Belgian situation—a situation which is growing worse each day, as the numbers of men increase.

The first question submitted to Viscount Bryce was this :—

"America has been startled by Cardinal Mercier's statement concerning the deportation of Belgian men, Our people will appreciate a statement from you as to the meaning of this latest German move."

Lord Bryce replied to me :—

"Nothing could be more shocking than this wholesale carrying away of men from Belgium. I know of no case in European history to surpass it. Not even in the Thirty Years' War were there such things done by any recognised government as the German Government has done, first and last, in Belgium. This last case is virtual slavery. The act is like that of those Arab slave-raiders in Africa, who carried off negroes to the coast to sell. And the

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severity is the more odious because these Belgians and the work forcibly extracted from them are going to be used against their own people. Having invaded Belgium and murdered many hundreds, indeed even thousands, among them women and children who could not be accused of 'sniping,' the German military Government dislocated the industrial system of the community. They carried off all the raw materials of industry and most of the machinery in factories, and then, having thus deprived the inhabitants of work, the invaders used this unemployment as a pretext for deporting them in very large numbers to places where nothing will be known of their fate. They were not even allowed to take leave of their wives and children. Many of them may never be heard of again. Women threw themselves on the rails in front of the locomotive about to haul out the train containing the miserable captives, and the German soldiers forced them off with bayonets. And von Bissing calls this 'a humanitarian measure.' Actually, it is all a part of the invasion policy. They defend it as being 'war,' as they justify everything, however inhuman, done because the military needs of Germany are alleged to call for it. It shows how hard pressed the military power is beginning to find itself at this latest stage of the war. It is said that Attila, when he was bringing his host of Huns out of Asia for his great assault on Western Europe, forced the conquered tribes into his army, and made them a part of his invasion. I can hardly think of a like case since then. In principle,



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it resembles the Turkish plan when they formed the Janissaries. The Turks used their Christian subjects, taken quite young and made Moslems, and enrolled them as soldiers (to fight against Christians) to fill their armies, of which they were the most efficient part. These Belgians are not, indeed, actually made to fight, but they are being forced to do the labour of war, some of them probably digging trenches, or making shells, or working in quarries to extract chalk to make cement for war purposes. The carrying off of young girls from Lille was terrible enough, and it seemed to us at the time that nothing could be worse. But the taking away of many thousands of the Belgian population from their homes to work against their own countrymen, with all the mental torture that a sudden and forced separation from one's family brings—this is the most shocking thing we have yet heard of. I have been shown in confidence the reports received from Belgium of what has happened there. The details given and the sources they come from satisfied me of their substantial truth. The very excuses the German authorities are putting forward admit the facts. In Belgian Luxemburg I hear that they have been trying to stop the existing employment in order to have an excuse for taking off the men."

The second question was :—

"How are such acts of German severity to be accounted for?"

Lord Bryce replied :—

"When the early accounts of the atrocious conduct

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of the German Government in Belgium were laid before the Committee over which I presided, they seemed hardly credible. But when we sifted them, going carefully through every case, and rejecting all those that seemed doubtful, we found such a mass of concurrent testimony coming from different sources, and carefully tested by the lawyers who had examined the witnesses and taken their depositions, that we could not doubt that the facts which remained were beyond question. You ask how German officers came to give such orders. The Committee tried to answer that question in a passage of their report. They point out that for the German officer-caste morality and right vanish and are no more when war begins. The German Chancellor admitted that they had done wrong in invading Belgium, but declared that they would go on and hack their way through. The German military class had brooded so long on war that their minds had become morbid. To Prussian officers war has become, when the interests of the State require it, a sort of sacred mission. Everything may be done by and for the omnipotent State. Pity and morality vanish, and are superseded by the new standard justifying every means that conduces to success. 'This,' said the Committee, 'is a specifically military doctrine, the outcome of a theory held by a ruling caste who have brooded and thought, written and talked and dreamed about war until they have fallen under its obsession and been hypnotised by its spirit.' You will find the doctrines I have summarised set

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forth in 'Kriegsbrauch im Landkriege,' the German Official Monograph on the usages of war on land, issued under the direction of the German Staff. What military needs suggest becomes lawful. You will find in that book a justification for everything the German Army has done, for seizing hostages, *i.e.*, innocent inhabitants of an invaded area, and shooting them if necessary. You will find what amounts to a justification even of assassination. The German soldiers' diaries captured on prisoners offer the proof that the German officers acted upon this principle. As the Committee said, 'This is not the only case that history records in which a false theory, disguising itself as loyalty to a State or a Church, has perverted the conception of Duty, and become a source of danger to the world.' These doctrines spread outside military circles. I do not venture to say that they infected anything like the whole people. I hope that they did not. But national pride and national vanity were enlisted, and it became a widespread system of doctrine accepted by the military, and even by many civilians. The Prussians are far more penetrated by the military spirit than the Americans or English or French, and such doctrines ministered to the greatness of the power of Prussia. It was part of Prussian military theory and sometimes even of practice a century ago. But in the rest of Germany it is a new thing. There was nothing of the kind in southern Germany when I knew it fifty years ago.

"In an army there will be individual cases of

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horrible brutality, plunder, rape, ill-treatment of civilians. There will always be men of criminal instinct whose passion is loosed by the immunities of war conditions. Drunkenness, moreover, may turn a decent soldier into a wild beast. But most of the crimes committed in Belgium were not committed by drunken troops. The German peasant, the 'Hans' whom we know, is a good, simple, kindly sort of fellow, as are the rural folk in every country. But in the Army he is merely the passive instrument of his officers. In that Army there is a habit of implicit obedience. The officers are extremely severe in military discipline. They will shoot readily for a minor infraction. It is the officers more than the private soldiers that are to blame. And some of the officers were shocked by what they were forced to do. 'I am merely executing orders, and I should be punished if I did not execute them,' said more than one officer whose words were recorded. But how can an officer in war time disobey the orders of the supreme military command? He would be shot, and if he were to say he could not remain in an army where he was expected to commit crimes, to retire in war time, if he were permitted to retire, would mean disgrace to his name. It is the spirit of the Higher German Army Command that is to blame. The authority that issued the orders is guilty. The German people, as a whole, are not cruel, but many of them have been infected by this war spirit.

"And we little realise how strict is the German censorship. The voice of truth has been silenced.

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The German people have been fed with falsehoods. So far are they from believing in the record of their own army's cruelties, that they have been made to believe in cruelties alleged to have been committed by French and English troops. They have been fed on stories of soldiers with their eyes put out by Belgians. The Chancellor of the German Empire in a press communication said :—

“ ‘Belgian girls gouged out the eyes of the German wounded. Officials of Belgian cities have invited our officers to dinner and shot and killed them across the table. Contrary to all international law, the whole civilian population of Belgium was called out, and after having at first shown friendliness, carried on in the rear of our troops terrible warfare with concealed weapons. Belgian women cut the throats of soldiers whom they had quartered in their homes while they were sleeping.’ ”

“There was no truth at all in these stories.”

The next question put to Lord Bryce was as follows :—

“Have the German Government made any effort to prove their general charges and to disprove the detailed charges of your report and the report made by the French Government ? ”

Lord Bryce writes in reply :—

“The diaries of German soldiers referred to have been published throughout the world, and no question has been raised of their authenticity. They contain testimony to outrages committed in Belgium and France that is overwhelming. No answer to them

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is possible. The German Government have never made an official reply to the Report of the British Committee, though I have heard of one or two newspaper articles and seen one unofficial pamphlet. None of these really attempted to deal with the British Report. They have attempted to answer some of the reports made by the Belgian Government. But their answer was really an admission of the facts, for it consisted chiefly in allegations that Belgian civilians had given provocation, and many of the worst cases were left unnoticed, not even provocation being alleged. They endeavoured to prove that Belgian civilians had shot at them. It would not have been strange if some civilians had shot at those who suddenly burst into their country, but no trustworthy proof has ever been given of more than a few of such cases, or of the stories of outrages committed by Belgian priests, women and children on German soldiers. Even if such occasional shooting by civilians had taken place, as very likely it did, that did not justify the wholesale slaughter of innocent persons and the burning of whole villages. In the burning of the twenty-six houses at Melle, which you tell me you witnessed, no allegations were made of shooting by civilians. The little girl murdered at Alost, to whom you refer, had not shot at the Germans. The woman, eighty years old, had not shot at them. These severities were committed as a method to achieve an end. That end was to terròrise the civilian population, to break the courage and destroy the spiritual resources of the nation."

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The final question was this :—

“ As the result of this war, what hope have we of reconstruction and an altered policy in Germany ? ”

Viscount Bryce answered :—

“ It is to be hoped and expected that the Allies will so completely defeat Germany as to discredit the whole military system, and the ideas out of which the horrors of German war practice have developed. It is essential to inflict a defeat sufficiently decisive in the eyes of the German people for them to have done with their military caste and its nefarious doctrines, and it is essential to discredit the methods themselves—discredit them by their failure—in so thorough a manner that no nation will ever use them again. The way, then, of ending what is called ‘ Frightfulness ’ is by a complete victory over it. It is our task to show that shocking military practices and total disregard of right do not succeed. We must bring to pass the judgment of facts to the effect that such methods do not avail. In this determination our British people are unanimous as they have never been before. The invasion of Belgium, the atrocities committed there, and the sinking of the *Lusitania*—these three series of acts united the whole British people in its firm resolve to prosecute the war to a complete victory. Now on top of these things, and of isolated crimes of the German Government, like the shooting of Miss Cavell and Captain Fryatt, come these abominable deportations of Belgians into a sort of slavery.”

In all communication with Lord Bryce, one feels the

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accurate fair-minded scholar. He is without heat and partisanship. He added in a note :—

“ We know that our British soldiers fight hard, but they fight fair, and they have no personal hatred towards their enemies. I have been at the British front and have seen their spirit. I was told that our men when they take a prisoner often clap him on the back, and give him a cigarette. There is no personal hatred among our officers or men. Efforts are very properly made here at home to keep hatred against the German people as a whole from the minds of our people, but it is right that they should detest, and do their utmost to overthrow, the system that has produced this war, and has made it so horrible.”