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Rheims a Wreck Around Cathedral

***Davis Describes Heartrending Devastation and Says That if Kaiser's Excuse Is True
He Should Court Martial His Artillery Officers for Bad Marksmanship***

Paris, Sept. 25 (Delayed in transmission).—This morning in the Paris papers the official German excuse for the bombardment of Rheims was published. It stated that the French batteries were so placed that in replying to them it was impossible to avoid shelling the city.

It would not be proper for me to tell where the French batteries were, but I know exactly where they were, and if the German guns aimed at them by error, missed them and hit the cathedral the German marksmanship is deteriorating. To find the range the artillery sends what in the American army are called brace shots—one aimed at a point beyond the mark and one short of it. From the explosions of these two shells the gunner is able to determine how far he is off the target, and accordingly regulates his sights. Not more, at the most, than three of these experimental brace shots should be necessary, and as one of each brace is purposely aimed to fall short of the target only three German shells, or, as there were two French positions. Six German shells should have fallen beyond the batteries and into the city. And yet for four days the city was bombarded.

To make sure, I today asked French, English and American army officers what margin of error they thought excusable after the range was determined. They all agreed that after his range was found an artillery officer who missed it by from fifty to one hundred yards ought to be court-martialed. The Germans "missed" by one mile.

I walked over the district that had been destroyed by these accidental shots, and it stretched from the northeastern outskirts of Rheims in a straight line to the cathedral. Shells that fell short of the cathedral for a quarter of a mile destroyed entirely three city blocks. The heart of this district is the Place Godinot. In every direction at a distance of a mile from the Place Godinot I passed houses wrecked by shells—south at the Paris gate, north at the railroad station.

Aim at City, Then May Hit Battery

There is no part of Rheims that these shells aimed at French batteries did not hit. If Rheims accepts the German excuse she might suggest to them that the next time they bombard, if they aim at the city they may hit the French batteries.

The Germans claim that the damage done was from fires, not shells. But that is not the case; destruction by fire was slight. Houses wrecked by shells where there was no fire outnumber those that were burning ten to one. In no house was there probably any other fire than that in the kitchen stove, and that had been smothered by falling masonry and tiles.

Except for Red Cross volunteers seeking among the ruins for wounded, I found that part of the city that had suffered completely deserted. Shells still were falling, and houses as yet intact and those partly destroyed were empty. You saw pitiful attempts to save the pieces. In places, as though evictions were going forward, chairs, pictures, cooking pans, bedding were piled in heaps. There was none to guard them; certainly there was no one so unfeeling as to disturb them.

I saw neither looting nor any effort to guard against it. In their common danger and horror the citizens of Rheims of all classes seemed drawn closely together. The manner of all was subdued and gentle, like those who stand at an open grave.

The shells played the most inconceivable pranks. In some streets the houses and shops along one side were entirely wiped out, and on the other untouched. In the Rue du Cardinal de Lorraine every house was gone. Where they once stood were cellars, filled with powdered stone. Tall chimneys that one would have thought a strong wind might dislodge were holding themselves erect, while the surrounding walls, three feet thick, had been crumpled into rubbish.

In some houses a shell had removed one room only, and as neatly as though it were the work of masons and carpenters. It was as though the shell had a grievance against the lodger in that particular room. The waste was appalling.

Child's Doll Lies Smiling Amid Ruins

Among the ruins I saw a good painting in rags and in gardens statues covered with the moss of centuries smashed. In many places, still on the pedestal, you would see a headless Venus or a flying Mercury chopped off at his waist.

Long streamers of ivy, that during a century had crept higher and higher up the wall of some noble mansion until they were part of it, and clung to it, although it was divided into a thousand fragments. Of one house all that was left standing was a slice of the front wall just wide enough to bear a sign reading "This house is for sale; elegantly furnished." Nothing else of that house remained.

In some streets of the destroyed area I met not one living person. The noise made by my feet kicking the broken glass was the only sound. The silence, the gaping holds in the sidewalk, the ghastly tributes to the power of the shells, and the complete desolation, made more desolate by the bright sunshine, gave you a curious feeling that the end of the world had come and you were the only survivor.

The impression was aided by the sight of many rare and valuable articles with no one guarding them. They were things of price that one may not carry into the next world, but which in this are kept under lock and key.

In the Rue de l'Universite at my leisure I could have ransacked shop after shop, or from the shattered drawing rooms filled my pockets. Shopkeepers had gone without waiting to lock their doors, and in houses the fronts of which were down you could see that, in order to save their lives, the inmates had fled at a moment's warning.

Bursting Shells' Fantastic Trick

In another house everything was destroyed except the marble mantelpiece over the fireplace in the drawing room. On this stood a terra cotta statuette of Harlequin. It is one you have often seen. The legs are wide apart, the arms folded, the head thrown back in an ecstasy of laughter. It looked exactly as though it were laughing at the wreckage with which it was

surrounded. No one could have placed it where it was after the house fell, for the approach to it was still on fire. Of all the fantastic tricks played by the bursting shells it was the most curious.

Outside the wrecked area were many shops belonging to American firms, but each of them had escaped injury. They were filled with American typewriters, sewing machines and cameras. A number of cafes bearing the sign "American bar" testified to the nationality and tastes of many tourists.

I found our consul, William Barder, at the consulate. He is a fine type of the German-American citizen and, since the war began, with his wife and son has held the fort and tactfully looked after the interests of both Americans and Germans. On both sides of him shells had damaged the houses immediately adjoining. The one across the street had been destroyed and two neighbors killed.

The street in front of the consulate is a mass of fallen stone, and the morning I called on Mr. Bardel a shell had hit his neighbor's chestnut tree, filled his garden with chestnut burrs and blown out the glass of his windows. He was patching the holes with brown wrapping paper, but was chiefly concerned because in his own garden the dahlias were broken. During the first part of the bombardment, when firing became too hot for him, he had retreated with his family to the corner of the street, where are the cellars of the Roderers, the champagne people.

There are worse places in which to hide in than a champagne cellar, and I hope Secretary Bryan will not hold it against him. He had no choice. In Rheims the grape juice cellars are very few—of Mr. Bryan's sort.

Mr. Bardel has lived six years in Rheims and estimates the damage done to property by shells at \$30,000,000, and says that unless the seat of military operations is removed the champagne crop for this year will be entirely wasted. It promised to be an especially good year. The seasons were propitious, being dry when sun was needed and wet when rain was needed, but, unless the grapes are gathered this week, the crops will be lost.

Bad Outlook For Broadway

Of interest to Broadway is the fact that in Rheims, or rather in her cellars, are stored nearly fifty million bottles of champagne belonging to six of the best known houses. Should shells reach these bottles, the high price of living in the lobster palaces will be proportionately increased.

Mr. Bardel asked me to send his love to his son. H.T. Bardel, of 1635 New York Ave., Brooklyn, saying "We are all safe and well." I was delayed in sending this message because, outside of Rheims at a certain place, with my companions, Gerald Morgan, of "McClure's Magazine"; Ashmead Bartlett, of "The London Daily Telegraph," and Captain Granville Fortescue, I was arrested.

Under escort we were taken to Paris. Once there, every courtesy was shown us. We were detained only one night at the headquarters of the General Staff. The following morning, Mr. Herrick, our ambassador, acting through our military attaché, Colonel Spencer Cosby, arranged that we should be set at liberty on our giving our word that for eight days we would not leave Paris or in any way communicate with any one concerning what movements of the Allies we might have seen.

As the destruction of Rheims does not come in that category, I have concluded the account of my visit to that unhappy city at the point where the gendarmes so abruptly interrupted it.

The story of our arrest my companions can tell. This year I have been so frequently in jail that you readers must be as weary of it as I am. Then, again, perhaps I flatter myself. In any case, I would be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge the prompt assistance of Mr. Herrick and Colonel Cosby and the courtesy of the French officers of the General Staff. We were less prisoners than their guests, and should I be invited to spend another week end in Cherche Midi-Prison, I would accept with pleasure.

But I have a feeling that next time I am arrested it will not be in Europe for trying to see this war, but in Westchester County for overspeeding. I have investigated enough European jails. At home there must be some equally bad. One should see America first.