

# 300 WAR REFUGEES OF BELGIUM HERE

Rev. John B. De Ville of Chicago  
Brings Party He Gathered  
in the Stricken Land.

## JOIN FAMILIES IN AMERICA

Search for Them Greatly Aided by  
German Authorities, but They  
Hold Boys of Military Age.

Among the passengers who arrived yesterday from Rotterdam on the Holland-America liner Nieuw Amsterdam was the Rev. John B. De Ville of Chicago, who was sent to Belgium three months ago by The Chicago Herald to bring to this country relatives of Americans who had been stranded there through the war. The execution of his mission was carried out with great difficulty, he said, as many of the addresses given to him when he sailed from New York on Aug. 31 and others cabled to him afterward were discovered to be battlefields instead of farms or villages. He accredited a great measure of his success in being able to bring with him 300 men, women, and children to the courtesy of the German Army officials in Belgium.

This is the second party of refugees brought out of Belgium by The Chicago Herald. The first party numbered fifteen persons, who left Holland on Oct. 23 and reached Chicago on Nov. 10.

The 300 refugees with Father De Ville remained on the Nieuw Amsterdam for the night and will be taken to Ellis Island early today. They will take a special train for Chicago, it was said. They were met at the pier yesterday afternoon by several members of the Belgian-American Alliance, of which Felix J. Streyckmans, a Chicago lawyer, is President.

### Cheered by Liberty Statue.

Here is the story of Father De Ville's experience in Belgium searching for the lost families, told in his own words:

"Three hundred Belgians saw today for the first time the Statue of Liberty. They all came from their stricken country filled with love for generous America, that has bounteously cared for them in their hour of need, and hope to find on Columbia's hospitable shores the happiness that war has robbed them of; they look into the future with calm serenity and trust in this their land of adoption—praying that it may never experience the misery and ravages of bloody conflicts. I stood in their midst as we passed the symbol of freedom and I saw their faces light up with enthusiasm as I explained to them what it meant.

"Among them are sad-eyed old men and women, the lines of whose faces reveal recent and poignant sorrows; there are women with infants in their arms, with lips a-quiver and eyes poignant with tears as they think of the loved husbands whom they are soon to embrace. Many children are alone and remember their parents only vaguely. One little girl who is going to Edmonton, Canada, asked me how her papa looked.

"Has he still got his mustache?" she said with childish naïvete.

A little girl from the Flanders wanted to know if her mamma still wore the mother-of-pearl string as she did when she last saw her in Belgium five years ago. She could not undertake the voyage on account of her health and was left with the grandparents.

### Aided by the Germans.

"My work in Belgium was fraught with many perplexing difficulties, but I happily surmounted them all, thanks to the exquisite courtesy and splendid co-operation of the German officials. Baron von de Lancken, Mr. von Moltke, Baron Falkenhausen, Mr. Arnold, and others of the Foreign Office at Brussels assisted me in every possible way, and though I was compelled to annoy them almost daily they never waxed rude or impatient in the least.

"The work has only commenced. The people I bring with me now are those whose names were on my first list. Two subsequent lists were sent to me through the State Department so that my work was more than doubled because every new one made it compulsory to go through the same formalities in order to obtain the necessary permission.

"I finally made a personal appeal to his Excellency Baron von Bissing, Governor General and to the Quartermaster General, and got the coveted privilege of gradually taking them all out. I shall return for them as soon as possible. There were many who had received transportation to the States through the Consular offices or other agencies and whenever they happened to live in the same towns where mine lived, they were allowed to accompany the party.

"The people I was looking for were scattered all over Belgium, and therefore I had to deal with the authorities of the three different parts into which the kingdom is now divided, namely, the political Government of the territory under the jurisdiction of the Governor General, the Etappen or territory adjacent to the war zone and the Operationengebiet or war zone. Each one is absolutely distinct from the other.

"It was no easy matter to obtain a passport to or from the Etappen at the time when I was there, because the French offensive was in progress. While waiting for the military to pass upon the names I had submitted, I carried on my work in the provinces of the General Government, which kindly gave me carte blanche to go where I pleased.

"The weather was ideal and after having got a competent guide in the person of M. Bayer, who for many years was porter at the Metropole and has many American friends, I started out on my quest for future American citizens.

"First of all we visited the district of Brussels, and the very first person we saw was a pretty, dark-eyed Flemish maiden, the fiancée of Henry Fin of Chicago, who is on board with us. One frequently meets with southern types all over Belgium, living witnesses and reminders of another foreign yoke, Spanish domination. Anna was overjoyed when the message was delivered and thanked us most effusively.

"Our next call was in behalf of Mr. Jansen, also of Chicago, who wanted his son William, 21 years old, living at Dieghem. I tried my very best to obtain a passport for him and fourteen other boys of military age, but failed. I reiterated my efforts just a few days before I left Brussels by appealing again to the Governor through the Foreign Office. The answer I received was to the effect that though the Governor was anxious to favor me, nevertheless the precedent thus established would cause endless complications. The boys were at the station to see me off and loaded me with messages and photos for their dear ones. Altogether I am taking with me over 100 photographs to be delivered to anxious friends, and it was as a very special privilege that I was allowed to do so.

"In some places we found that the family we sought had moved without leaving any address, and we could only locate it with great difficulty, going from one place to another. In such cases we invariably appealed to the police authorities at the Hotel de Ville. While waiting in one of these places a strange mortuary notice affixed to the wall attracted my attention. It stated that Oswald Hennessey, a soldier of the Eighth Regiment de Ligne, had fallen on the field at Namur on Aug. 23, 1914, and my mind began to conjure up the strange circumstances that brought this son of Ireland or his sires to Belgium.

### Many Sad Scenes.

"Thus going from place to place, sometimes by train but oftener on foot, we visited about forty families during

the first ten days. We found some women with large families on the verge of despair and very poor, because for so many months they had not been able to communicate with their far-away husbands and had utterly exhausted whatever little resources they had. To them we represented Providence, and their happiness was sufficient recompense for whatever inconvenience we might have experienced in order to reach them.

"In other places we brought consternation instead of joy. One late afternoon in October we reached the farm of Grandfather L., whose name I shall not mention, sixteen kilometers from Antwerp. He was standing by the gate with his son, and when we asked him, in the name of the mother, his daughter, for the little girl, his face clouded and the weary eyes filled with tears. He said he was afraid to tell his wife for fear it might break her heart. The son, with bowed head, went inside to inform her, and she soon made her appearance with a determined, defiant stride. There were fight and fire in her eyes. Just then the little girl returned from school, and, after a frightened look at us, instinctively sought refuge in the arms of her grandmother. She held her tight, close to her bosom.

"'Never shall I give up my little girl,' she cried out, 'not even to her mother. I raised twelve children, she was born in my house, and it was I that cared for her since she was an infant. She is my babe. She learnt her first prayers on my lap, she made her first communion under my tutelage, and she goes to the sacraments with me every day. She is not only my babe, she is my pal. No, you shall not have her.'

"She lifted the little girl in her arm and ran into the house. The old man was crying unrestrainedly; so was his son, a husky peasant about 40 years old. The mother in America will wait in vain for the little blue-eyed angel we left amid the green, the flowers, and the love of the old farm near Antwerp. Every mother should be careful not to forfeit the love of her children by protracted separation or indifference. The time will come when she will crave it, and, finding it not, is heartbroken, lonely, and desolate in her old age. The greater her love, especially during infancy and maidenhood, the greater will be the radiance shed upon life in after years by the reflected love of the children.

### Visited Cardinal Mercier.

"This case was typical of at least a dozen. Humble and suppliant, the old folks would beg us not to insist on the children going and thus take the sunshine out of their lives. On Oct. 4, having walked from Dieghem to Velvorde, we drove to Maline in a wretched barouche with other eight portly men and women. There is no fun in riding over the cobblestones in a vehicle of that sort, constantly bumping against each other, in a humor all but angelic.

When we arrived at Maline I tried a feat of agility—a foolish thing, indeed, for a man of my size—by trying to jump over the high wheel, and fell ignominiously on the sharp cobbles. This caused an abscess, which the ship's doctor had to attend to because I had neglected it. This and a badly bruised finger, caught in the door of an automobile, were the only accidents I encountered.

"At Maline I had a long and most pleasant visit with Cardinal Mercier, who gave me his picture with a dedica conveying his blessing to the Belgians in America and his gratitude to the American people generally for their help and generosity, and to The Chicago Herald in particular for having fostered the work in which I am engaged. His sombre Eminence is one of the most attractive personalities I ever met—tall, intellectual, and most benign.

"On returning to Brussels we passed through Epeghem, where 187 Belgian and German soldiers are buried side by side. A few simple crosses and simple flowers are planted beside the little mounds of earth. There are evidences of fighting all along the road. The next day I had to go to Louvain and spent the noon hour with another very fine prelate, Mgr. De Becker, rector of the American College. The property is intact and two United States flags cheerily wave over the edifice. Mgr. De Becker and I sat for a long time chatting together in the back garden, seated upon one of the rustic benches of the slope.

"He told me about his trying experiences and said that the thing he regretted most was the fact that for a long time the clerical students of the various European nations could not dwell under the same roof in harmony and good fellowship the same as before. Now and then he grew mutely reminiscent, his gaze fixed upon some invisible spot in the distance. During those pauses I could distinctly hear the booming of cannons.

"The next week I spent in and around Charleroi, the Walloon country. In going there we passed through the village of Waterloo, and saw in the distance the statue of the roaring lion made out of

French cannons, exactly on the spot where the Prince of Orange was wounded the second time.

### Many Aid Mission.

"My work in the Etappen, which comprises Flanders, was much made difficult, owing to the lack of transportation facilities and the rigors of martial law. I personally visited about fifty towns and hamlets, but to go everywhere would have required a year. Major Hain, commandant of the Etappen at Ghent, a splendid German officer, did everything possible to help me, and to him I am indebted for the success of my mission in Flanders. Many people we could not otherwise reach were notified to meet us in Ghent through the Mayor of the town upon request of Major Hain, who sent special estafettes around the country for this purpose.

"Mr. Meuleman of that city, a well-known business man, also rendered invaluable service in the furtherance of the work. While in Ghent I paid my respects several times to the beloved Bishop of the Diocese, who is an uncle of Father Stillemans, Director of the Belgian Bureau in New York. I also had the pleasure of visiting the family of Father Julius E. De Vos, the beloved and well-known Belgian priest of Chicago, who is also the President of the Catholic Colonial Society.

### Difficult to Get Away.

"The actual work of getting the people out of Belgium was most strenuous. Major Hain gave me the services of two gendarmes three different times, and both did splendid work.

"It is impossible to reach Holland the same day, so it is necessary to spend the night at Antwerp, and there we found assistance of the most valuable kind in the officers and personnel of the Home for Belgian Refugees. It is a civic institution, splendidly managed by one of Antwerp's leading citizens with the co-operation of his sister. The next evening, after a day which seemed a year to me, we arrived in Rotterdam, where I learned to my consternation that as yet no cable authorization for the passages had arrived. The next day the steamer was to sail.

"I rushed to Amsterdam and asked my friend, Baron Lehman, to use his influence with the officials of the line to allow us to sail. He promised to see the Directors personally and do all he could. The next day I had to return to the frontier to meet the last group, and when I returned to Rotterdam about 5 P. M. I learned that nothing had been done yet. The steamer was to sail that night, and there I was with a crowd on my hands, and little money.

"I hired an auto and drove at furious speed to The Hague, where, in company with my friend, Robert Perry of The Associated Press, who constantly stood by me in all difficulties, went to His Excellency the American Minister, Henry van Dyke. He at once called up the Managing Director, Mr. Wierdsma, and spoke so earnestly and eloquently that the matter was settled and we were allowed to sail, the company accepting my note. At Falmouth the Holland-America Line cabled me that the next day the expected authorization had arrived and the passages had all been paid for. Words fail to express the gratitude I feel for Mr. van Dyke for his timely help.

"Our Minister at Bruxelles, Mr. Whitlock, who is spending a well-merited holiday in the States; M. Hugh Gibson, the charming Secretary of Legation, and Colonel Listoe, Consul General at Rotterdam, deserve the highest praise for the help and co-operation accorded me. I also wish to state that the American commission in Belgium ought to be a source of pride for all Americans for the splendid work done there. Dr. Fletcher alone, the economist of the commission, is saving Belgium millions of francs yearly by his advice and work of elimination, gratuitously given as his contribution to the typically American, unparalleled philanthropy."