

VICTOR DELEBECQUE,

(DIPLOMA A.M.I.E.E. 1900)

Engineer.

CEDAR COURT, No. 1,

18, CEDARS ROAD,

CLAPHAM, S.W.4.

March 21st 1934

C. D. Eaton Esq
109 Colmore Row
BIRMINGHAM

Dear Charlie,

Confirming my conversation with you this morning at Euston, I enclose herewith translated copies of correspondence between Wor. Bro. Charles Fagnette, Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Belgium, and the Grand Lodges of Germany.

Will you be good enough to acknowledge safe receipt of same.

Yours faithfully,

Encls

V. Delebecque

27th September 1914

Br. Charles Magnette
Grand Master of the Grand-Orient of Belgium
to the Grand Lodges of Germany.

Very dear and very illustrious Brethren,

The war which at this moment is desolating the whole of Europe, filling the civilised world with anguish, and the painful and terrible occurrences which are the inevitable consequences of it, must fill with sadness the heart of every Freemason.

For if the Freemason has the essential duty of loving and ~~defending~~ defending his threatened fatherland, he should at the same time look further and higher, not forgetting that he professes the cult of of humanity, and that the ideal would be that among nations and among races, all men should be brothers, just as in the Lodges.

It is with these sentiments that I invite our German Brethren to regard the situation, and to assist me in the task which I wish to undertake with them.

Assuredly, the responsibility for the present war cannot be made a question or be discussed, that is a problem which Freemasonry is not qualified to solve, or even to touch upon, and the Freemasons of the different countries interested may, with the most perfect sincerity, believe that right is on the side of their fatherland.

But as to what all Freemasons without distinction should be and will be in accord, is that it is desirable for the honour of the whole of humanity, to avoid a return of the horrors that all

civilised men deplore, and consequently, that it would be of the highest utility to look into the circumstances in which they have been committed.

To attain this double object, no institution is better qualified than Freemasonry.

I have hence the honour of proposing to you first of all to address, as much to the civil populations of the belligerent countries as to the armies in the field, a pressing appeal or a solemn invitation never to depart from the rules of humanity, from those of the rights of man, or from the code of war. I ask you at once to constitute in agreement with me, a commission of enquiry, to traverse the districts where the war has been and is still being conducted, which, after gathering all useful information, will submit a report of its findings. This commission would be composed of delegates from Grand Lodges belonging to neutral countries, for example, a Dutch Brother, a Swiss one, and an Italian, and naturally, there would be a German Mason and a Belgian Mason.

I am convinced that such a Commission would secure, for the accomplishment of its mission, the very benevolent co-operation of the civil and military authorities of all the countries engaged in this regrettable conflict.

I do not doubt, very dear and illustrious Brethren, but that you will appreciate the highly and solely fraternal and humane thought that actuates me in this matter, and I like to believe that you will be good enough promptly to submit my proposition to the masonic power competent to deliberate upon it, and to advise me of the decision arrived at.

Counting firmly upon a favourable decision, and thanking
you in advance, I pray you very dear and illustrious Brethren,
to accept my most distinguished and most fraternal salutations.

Ch. MAGNETTE.

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Translation of letter from the
Grand Lodge "L'Union"
Darmstadt, 7th October 1914.

To the Most Honourable Grand Master of the
Gr. Orient of Belgium.

Greatly esteemed and much loved Br.

Your fr. letter of the 27th September 1914, reached me in the
early days of October via Frankfort. The views that you express at
the outset of your letter do the greatest honour to your fraternal
heart, I agree with them entirely.

As to the object you have in view, I cannot support you. For where
was Belgian, French, and English Freemasonry in this war which has
been so criminally forced upon us. We do not know the position
that it has taken up, nor the steps taken to avoid it. And,
admitting that it may, in a truly masonic manner, have desired
energetically to prevent warlike fury in its countries, who,
among the conscienceless directors of the politics of these
countries, would have listened or wished to listen to it. What
would be gained in these circumstances by an appeal to the
populations of countries at war and to their armies. Messieurs
the politicians and generals will do what they believe themselves
authorised to do by iron necessity.

An appeal to the humanity etc. of our political leaders,
of our generals and of their soldiers is superfluous. They are
Germans, and Germans are men, even during the most violent struggle
And that German brethren, by an appeal such as you desire, should
insult our men in the field and the responsible ^{political} groups by doubting
their humanity! No! never will I consent to do that. Hence the
commission, the formation of which you have suggested, falls to

the ground as far as I am concerned. I have the firmest confidence in our armies, and the conviction that they will conduct humanely the rascally war directed against us, and that our administrative organisations will re-establish order humanely in the countries occupied. After the war it will be the duty and the business of masonry to enlighten the peoples in our sense, and to fill them with the masonic spirit, more than ever, to prevent the return of such terrible times, and to avoid that human beings should so lower themselves, as to our horror, we have been compelled to see and to hear, beyond our frontiers, on the part of notabilities and their subordinates. Let us devote ourselves meantime everywhere to the works of true human and divine love.

I remain, appreciating fully your fraternal good intentions, etc

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Translation of note from Bayreuth 8th Oct.

Br. Magnette wishes

1. To succeed in preventing atrocities
2. To know and investigate the circumstances in which these atrocities are committed.

This problem in a sense, could be solved by a pressing appeal or by a solemn invitation.

1. To the cultured population of the countries at war
2. To the armies in the field, that they should never derogate from the rules of humanity, the rights of man, and from the code of war.

Br. Magnette thinks a solution of this problem would be arrived at by the formation of a committee of enquiry which should traverse the regions where the war has been or is being conducted, and which should prepare a report of its findings.

Such is the purport of his letter.

The wish therein expressed rests fully upon masonic views and aims, but the question arises whether they can be realised practically now, that is to say, whether they can be practically carried out. To the actual solution of this problem dangerous currents are opposed, for we know that the atrocities of enemies in the East and in the West are to be imputed to the direct orders of officers of high degree or the incitements of fanatical priests.

Consequently I regard it as impossible to intervene effectively at present, to say nothing of the possibility that this commission might be suspected of espionage. Br. Magnette believes that such a commission would meet with the benevolent co-operation of the civil and military authorities. That is a strong conviction

against which is ranged the judgment born of calm reflection.

Furthermore, we know that our troops have not committed cruelties. The severe and pitiless measures that have necessarily had to be taken up to the present were provoked by the conduct of enemy population. What are cruelties in time of war ! Doubtless the measures imposed by bitter necessity on our troops against the francs-tireurs and their habits. Cruelties have been committed by Belgians, by Frenchmen, and by Russians, when they mutilated defenseless wounded, and buried them alive, when without reason they assassinated women and children, and burnt villages.

Cruelties have been committed by these entire nations when they have made use of dum-dum bullets and have treacherously employed the white flag. We know too well the discipline of our German soldiers to believe them capable of such deeds. Unhappily they are accused of these cruelties, the lying news of English and French papers deals with it. Even the Queen of the Belgians, a Bavarian princess, has accused our troops of atrocities, and has complained to the President of the American Republic. She only knows these accusations through the Journals in question, the reports of our General Staff and of our journals not being communicated to the inhabitants over there, the lie remains, and finally gains general credence. Let. Br. Magnette question the wounded and prisoners who have fallen into the hands of the Germans, and ask them if they have reason to protest against the cruelties of the Germans. The considerations of our Belgian br. incontestably depend upon such lying reports of the English and French journals without which he should in the first place have addressed himself

to the English and French Lodges, to require them to spread the rules of humanity. If Br. Magnette can impute a single case of useless cruelty or atrocity to our German warriors, we shall be obliged to labour in common in the masonic sense. In the first place we should have to cause Br. Magnette to understand that his views regarding the German troops and their conduct, in so far as concerns the rules of humanity, depend upon erroneous information. This truly would be no ungrateful task, for the Lodge, if in this way we could fight against the hair-raising lying news of our adversaries.

In spite of my most lively, my most sincere desire that our troops may continue to be animated by humanity and equity in the worst situations and prove in the enemies' country that German culture has thrown healthy roots into all the homes of our people, I oppose at the present time the recommendation to our troops of sensibility and softness of heart. The perfidious attitude and conduct of our enemies truly does not deserve it.

(sng) KIESHELRING.

Grand Lodge St. George

Bayreuth, 8th October 1914.

Translation of a letter from Brother
Charles Magnette, Grand Master of the Grand
Orient of Belgium, to the various Grand
Lodges of the German Empire.

Very dear and very illustrious Brethren,

The letter that I had the favour of addressing, under date of the 27th Sept. last, to the nine Grand Lodges of Germany, have yielded me two replies, one from the Grand Lodge of Darmstadt, and the other from the Grand Lodge of Bayreuth. The first takes the form of a fraternal letter, the second constitutes a simple objective note. Both of them decline the proposition that I conveyed to them.

I have every reason to believe that all the German Masonic powers to whom I addressed my appeal have received it, since it should have reached them by the obliging intermediation of the German Consulate at Liege, and of our V.D.B. Bangel, of Frankfort on Maine, to whom I send the expression of my gratitude for this transmission.

I can hence only consider the silence of the seven Grand Lodges which have not judged it desirable to reply to me, as a rejection of the propositions contained in my letter, and act accordingly.

I shall consider also that the reasons alleged by the two Grand Lodges that have been good enough to reply, are equally those that have determined the others to oppose to me the tacit refusal that their silence constitutes.

It is my duty to examine these reasons, and to point out to our German Br.. the weakness of the arguments they bring against me.

First of all I must thank my ill.. Colleagues of the Grand Lodges of Darmstadt and of Bayreuth, for having been good enough to recognise that my proposition was solely inspired by sincere and profound masonic sentiments.

It thus only remains for me to rebut the practical motives which prevent them from giving to these sentiments an external and efficacious manifestation.

I am asked where was the Masonry of Belgium, of England, and of France when this raceably war was loosed upon Germany.

Evidently this is neither the place nor the time to discuss whether this deplorable war was started by Germany or against her. Let it suffice for me to say, without wishing to pronounce officially on this grave question, that the violation of Belgian neutrality was announced long years ago, that military authorities considered it inevitable, and that many Germans estimated that, if war were not declared now, the reinforcement of the military power of Russia, of France, and even of little Belgium, would be in the very near future have rendered the struggle more than risky for the German Empire.

And it may be recalled that Germany did not wish to adhere to the proposition of a conference of the European Powers to settle the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Servia, the aggravation of which has been the occasion, if not the cause, of the colossal international combat which at this moment is shaking the entire universe.

But the ground of the debate is not there, and I do not wish to indicate anything in this order of ideas; I shall limit myself to the purely masonic domain.

I have not however to reply for the attitude of English Masonry
nor for that of French Masonry.

As Grand Master of the Belgian Freemasonry, I declare and I
affirm solemnly and sincerely that it has constantly and with all
its strength, combated the abominable scourge of war.

In our political councils, Freemasonry has no direct
action, as I know it equally has none in the countries of the
Empire.

And had it been able to exercise a serious influence, and
supposing, impossibly, that this influence could have been
exercised in a direction contrary to that which the unanimity
of the Belgian people wished to follow, still the suddenness of
events would have prevented it from usefully attempting any
effort at all.

It must not be forgotten that Belgian Freemasonry celebrates
every year at a solemn meeting, the Feast of Peace, commemorative
of the first Hague Conference.

It must not be forgotten also that the Grand Orient of
Belgium was the first of the Masonic Powers to decide to be
represented officially at the international Masonic reunion for
peace, which was to have been held this year, actually, from the
11th to the 19th August, at Frankfort-on-Main, and to which more
than sixty venerables of German Lodges had given their adhesion.

Still more, I do not know that discussions have taken place
as to the respective attitude of the adversaries, on English,
French or German territory, and it is precisely in poor Belgium
where excesses and atrocities have been committed, which have
stirred my heart as a man and a mason.

Finally, I do not doubt, although I am not qualified to speak for those concerned, but that the English and French Masonries would be quite prepared to assist in a serious and impartial enquiry into the deeds which have astounded the civilised world.

It is as to these facts themselves, their respective gravity and the responsibility of their authors that disagreement occurs.

I had hoped, and still believe, that this disagreement could be removed by the acceptance of my propositions.

In affect, I declare that you will regard as fixed and firmly established, that, for all the regrettable deeds that have taken place, the responsibility, as that for the war itself, fall upon the enemies of Germany.

Now, that is the whole question; it is not solved, even by an energetic affirmation; it remains to be solved.

I do not for a single instant doubt either your conviction or the sincerity of your affirmations, but I wish to say to you just this;

You have not seen, you have not heard;

You have relied upon allgations, on statements, upon newspaper accounts.

You have heard but one voice, but one bell, but one sound.

And you declare yourself; Do you not know however, that a good judge does not decide and does not deliver sentence until after hearing all parties in the case ?

Do not believe that we, here, are instigated and deceived by the press of allied countries.

Firstly, the journals of this press reach us rarely and with difficulty, and secondly, the organs of the German press

circulate and are abundantly read in our country.

Thus we have the elements of comparison, of criticism, and of judgment.

And nevertheless, I do not declare myself, I will not formulate any condemnation.

He who has the favour of writing these lines, has himself seen; has heard with his own ears, he knows for himself.

And in spite of that, he reserves his judgment, he asks only for one thing; that after hearing all parties, there should be light, an impartial, brilliant, complete light, which should be projected in all senses; which should leave nothing, no deed at all, in the shadow.

Why do you refuse this light?

Do you not fear lest it should be said that, if you will not have it, it is because you are afraid of it?

You tell me also that you do not believe the German soldiers capable of the excesses with which they are reproached. Evidently we respect your conviction in this matter, but still once more, since there are statements and witnesses to the contrary, will you not assist in a contradictory verification, easy to be made, which would, in your belief, establish beyond possible dispute the innocence of your soldiers?

As to me I have no fear that it would be possible, in any way, to convict of espionage the commission to undertake these declarations and verifications; the quality of the men that would be chosen, and their word of honour, would reply for their discretion.

Nor could anybody regard as an offense the

exhortations that would be addressed to the troops in the field.

Everybody know alas! that war provokes the worst violences, that the best and gentlest often, in the intoxication of war, allow themselves to go to excesses that they would never have committed in cold blood or in ordinary civil life, and moreover this appeal to the humanity of the combatants and the civil populations would be addressed to all without distinction, a generality which would remove every offensive characteristic, if it ever had any.

To conclude, it remains for me to examine a last point of view, which you take up in declaring my proposition unacceptable. Just as much as you regard it as impossible that German troops should have been able to commit atrocities, pillage and devastation, you equally hold it as certain that the Belgian population have committed on these troops a series of acts of barbarism and cruelty such as you cite in your reply.

I, in my turn, must protest against these accusations, which tend to represent my fellow countrymen as savage and barbarous beings. On the contrary, our people are, on the whole, hard-working, simple, brave, honest and good. Devotion and pity are, as much in the working classes as in the higher strata of society, dominant qualities, of which proofs abound. Criminality is not more marked than in other countries, on the contrary.

As to the tirailleurs or franc-tireurs, they have never existed save in the imagination of those who had an interest in making it believed.

That Belgian citizens, non-military, little acquainted

with the laws and usages of war, seeing from one hour to another their country over-run, their property and their persons threatened, before the public powers had even been able to make known to them the recommendations and regulations relative to a state of war; that others belonging to the civic guard, non-active and unprovided with uniforms or distinctive signs, may have raised arms against the regular German troops, I will not deny, any more than I can admit it.

But the deed is possible, and it can be explained. The whole question is to know whether these incidents have been substantial, whether they have been frequent enough and grave enough to justify the terrible repressions that they have provoked.

May I not recall that in a great country, a neighbour and ally if your own, a chief of bands of tirailleurs has become a national hero, and that Austria-Hungary has raised a statue to Andreas Hofer in one of the principal cities of the Empire? That an admirable picture, reproduced throughout Germany in hundreds of thousands of copies, represents Andreas Hofer at the head of his peasants, stealing along, arms in hand, to surprise the enemy? That Germany has also had her Andreas Hofer? That if Napoleon I took severe measures of repression, it might have been thought that in a century, the laws of war would have been humanised?

However that may be, such investigations would have been within the scope of the proposed commission of enquiry.

This commission would also have to investigate the pretended acts of cruelty of which the civil population of my country

have been guilty.

We should thus pass beyond vague accusations, lacking proofs or precision, which have been made against the Belgian nation, and we should have either to have justice done as to these calumnies, or to admit and condemn the acts committed.

But until proof has been rendered, you will understand that the Belgian population protests and is indignant at these legends of eyes put out, of breasts cut off, of wounded dispatched, of doctors or sisters of mercy brutally assassinated etc. etc.

Even already, it appears that the truth is making headway and is relegating to the background these blue, or red stories, which would cause one to smile, if they had not cost so many tears and so much blood.

It is, apart from certain timid reservations of the German press, the protest of the great Dutch paper "De Tyd" which, in its issue of the 27th October, reproducing an article from the "Colnische Volkszeitung", treats as an "oude fabel" (old fable) the accounts which state that German soldiers have had their eyes put out in Belgium. And "De Tyd" reproduces the attestation of the celebrated Prof. Dr. Kuhnt, the well-known oculist of Bonn, who declares that he has not found a single such case in his clinic, this although an individual hawked it about that he had himself seen in this clinic twenty soldiers so deprived of sight and, nearer to us, a few days ago, a German doctor of the highest authority, the Oberstabsarzt Müller, in his turn, made a declaration that it is important to bring into the light. Speaking on the occasion of the closing of the ambulance organised at Liège by the Jesuit Fathers, he admitted that, when

he arrived in Belgium, he was animated against the Belgians with prejudices, suspicions, and fears derived from the reading of newspapers and from accounts, that had been reported. Now, he added, these prejudices were speedily dispersed, and he would and would render homage to the devotion and to the charity with which the Belgians had treated all the wounded who had been confided to their care, without distinction of nationality.

Such evidence, of which none can contest the value, given publicity, is worth more than the news, as frequently sensational as it is false, launched by the newspapers, and avenges my fellowcitizens for the inconsiderate incriminations of which they have been the object.

But still once again, I do not demand that we should be believed on parole. I ask simply but energetically that all these conflicting statements should be verified, scrutinised, tested, and that a sentence should follow to which the whole world would bow.

For you inform me that if I could inquire of the prisoners detained in Germany, I should be edified as to the humane sentiments of the Germans, and as to the benevolent treatment ~~ask~~ that they reserve for their prisoners, well, I beg you to believe that I have made these enquiries, that I have been able to read letters from prisoners, heard the accounts of those who have seen them, and that if truth compels me to recognise that many have nothing to complain of in the manner in which they are treated, truth authorises me also to proclaim that many formulate in this matter very sharp

complaints.

For the last time I repeat; I do not wish to force anyone to believe it.

But how then compel ourselves to accept as certain, facts that we have the gravest reason to believe erroneous?

I apologise for the length of this letter; I have been impelled to take up with masonic frankness, all that appeared to me open to criticism in the two replies that I have received.

I have no great confidence that my arguments will effect any change, if not in the opinion, at least in the decision of the authorised bodies in German Freemasonry.

But it is a masonic duty to say what one thinks, because sooner or later truth always finishes by gaining the victory.

In terminating his note, my ven.. Colleague of the Grand Lodge of Bayreuth declares that he would not recommend the German troops to show pity, goodwill, and moderation, because the attitude of their enemies did not permit him to do so.

I deeply regret such a manner of thinking. Goodwill and the sentiment of humanity are highly masonic qualities, which are not to be exerted solely on behalf of those who possess and show the same sentiments.

As to myself, I can declare that if the war should be transferred to hostile territory, we should make every effort that the ills and rigours of war should be lessened as much as possible, and that all, soldiers and civilians, should respect those grand principles of goodwill, equity, justice and humanity to which my Grand Orient and my lodges remain

unshakeably faithful.

Please to accept, very dear and very illustrious brethren,
the expression of my fraternal sentiments.

(signed) CH. MAGNETTE

P.S. I consider it useful and interesting to annex to this letter the text of the proclamation made by the Grand Orient of Belgium on the eve of the outbreak of hostilities, and an article from the newspaper "De Tyd", dated the 15th November, giving the words of Oberstabsarzt Muxter, of which I spoke above. I am assured that other papers have spoken of these incidents also, but I have not been able to confirm it personally.

I annex finally to my letter, an article in extract, by the celebrated publicist, Maximilian Harden, a German, who loudly proclaims that it was Germany that wished and sought for the war.

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A PROTEST BY THE GRAND ORIENT DE FRANCE

On different occasions recently the Grand Orient de France has been the subject of various discussions and opinions. It will be seen below in what energetic terms the French freemasons have stigmatised German acts,

The Council of the Order of the
Grand Orient of France

2 After having knowledge of correspondence and publications from which it results notably that German masonic Powers and German freemasons strive to show that the responsibility for the war falls upon the Governments of the Triple Entente.

Considering that, as it is superfluous to reply to such shameless assertions (the truth being apparent today in the eyes of all civilised peoples) the Grand Orient de France nevertheless cannot forego to make known its indignant protest.

Considering that it is monstrous, on the part of the German freemasons, to place to the account of the heroic Belgian people the acts of vandalism the cruelties and the atrocities that their own fellow-countrymen have committed in Belgium.... and renewed in France,

Considering that freemasons holding such views dishonour our beautiful institution, all the members of which should be imbued with the purest sentiments of humanity and justice, that their particular culture, fashioned by that Prussian militarism which it is necessary to overthrow at all costs, places them under the ban of universal Freemasonry,

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Stigmatises all those Germans, freemasons or not, who spread such scurrilous lies and sanction the most abominable excesses, recalling the barbarity of another age,

Witnesses its affectionate sympathy for the victims of the occupied countries, and wishes to unhappy exiles their speedy return to their family hearth,

Affirms anew its devotion to the Fatherland and to the Republic

Proclaims its ardent desire to continue to labour in support of the splendid national unity that must conduct us triumphantly to victory,

Salutes with emotion and grateful recollections the memory of all those who have fallen on the field of honour,

Sends the expression of its strong and sincere admiration to the valiant defenders of the Fatherland, who are fighting at the same time for Right, for Justice and for Civilization.

Long live France, Long live the Allies,

Done deliberately, in plenary sitting of the Council of the Order, the 13th December, 1914.

A true copy,

The President of the Council of the Order.

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