Sophie De Schaepdrijver
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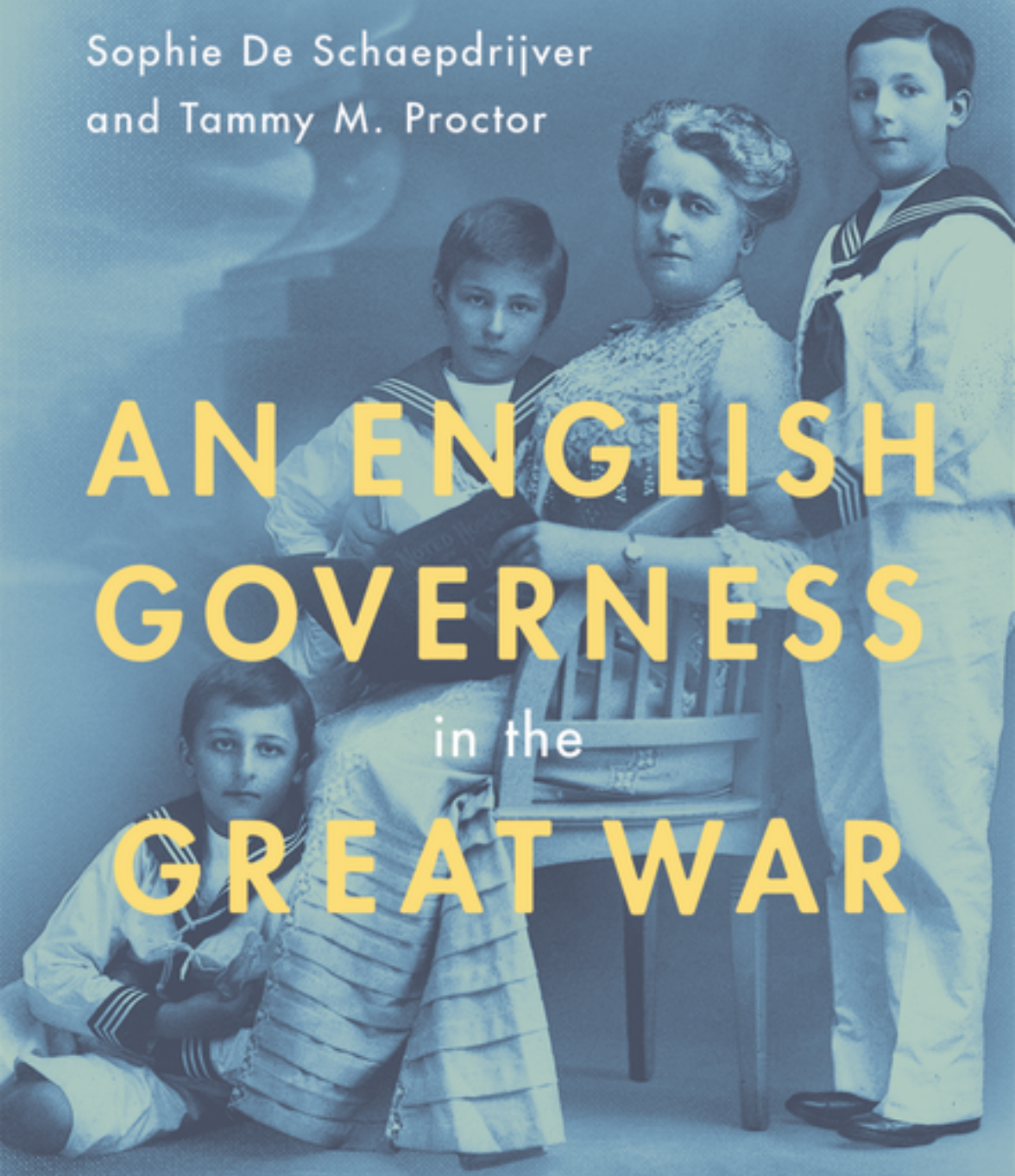

AN ENGLISH GOVERNESS in the GREAT WAR

The Secret Brussels Diary of Mary Thorp

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AN ENGLISH GOVERNESS IN THE GREAT WAR

Introduction

"STILL I FEEL I DID MY DUTY"

This is the diary of Mary Thorp, an English governess living in German-occupied Brussels during World War I. Though she disparaged her diary as a mere chronicle of "local gossip and 'side-shows' of the War," it lucidly observed civilian life under military occupation. It did so anonymously and in secret: Thorp did not leave her name in the manuscript, and she hid it because keeping a diary in wartime Brussels was dangerous. Her diary documents the daily indignities of living under enemy control, and it offers a personal story. As a foreigner and an educated woman in between classes, Thorp was alert to dimensions of life during occupation that might have escaped others.

Living under occupation was a war experience pertaining to neither battlefront nor home front. Across Europe, occupying armies controlled populations in an atmosphere made up of parts coercion, parts wary cohabitation. This existence was a slog: civilians were cut off from the outside world, they lived under constant surveillance, and many struggled to survive as economies stagnated. Some civilians kept diaries as a way to remind themselves that their lives were not on hiatus.

Mary Thorp was one of them. Keeping a diary was her way to try to make sense of the war and to express where she stood: what she hoped for, whom she felt responsible for, and what she felt to be her calling. She was painfully attuned to the war's events; it is no coincidence that she started her diary in September 1916, a time of hope for the success of the Somme offensive. At the same time, it was exceptional

for a civilian to start a diary in that month; most of the civilians who kept diaries in wartime Belgium started at war's outbreak, a time of dramatic events and great exaltation. That Thorp kept writing until January 1919 was unusual as well; many diaries lost momentum well before the Armistice.

Over thirty months, she kept up the (almost) daily discipline of making entries in tidy notebooks—five in all—covering both everyday and exceptional events; she chronicled what she saw around her as well as the echoes of global affairs. In one and the same sentence she could report on discussions in the *Reichstag* and deplore the dearth of potatoes. But then in a war diary, potatoes are never just potatoes. One could put the blame for their scarcity on civilian profiteering, as some diarists did; or one could, like Thorp, blame the occupying army. Either way the price of potatoes was a fundamentally political matter.

The diary's length, the time period it covers, and its richness of themes all give it particular value to historians interested in the history of the First World War "from below." We had both used the diary in our research and wanted to see it published. But who was the author? Because Thorp did not identify herself, the notebooks were deposited at the In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper in 1989 as an "anonymous woman's diary." We needed to find the woman who wrote with such a clear sense of herself and her world. We had two clues: her employers' names and their Brussels address. The Brussels population registers listed the inhabitants; among them was an English governess named Mary Thorp. Could she be our diarist? On we went to the foreigners' registers. We found Thorp's entry form. It bore her signature—in the same hand as the diary entries. We had found her! From that point on, records in Brussels, Bruges, London, Antwerp, and elsewhere allowed us to reconstruct her story, starting with the bare bones, then filling in details. The greatest of fortunes led us to the family archive of Thorp's employers, containing her governess notebooks, pictures of the family homes, and, a precious find, photos of Thorp herself.

So, who was Mary Thorp? She was born into a lower-middle-class family in London on January 1, 1864, the first child of Thomas Thorp and Annette née Townshend. The family lived in London until the early 1870s and then relocated to Bruges, Belgium, where her parents lived until their deaths. Mary's complicated family background had a profound effect on her sense of her place in the world. Her father, who was born in 1816, married Mary Townshend, Annette's elder sister, in 1835. They lived in Marylebone, London. Local chronicles show Thomas Thorp to have been a respected citizen.[1] As a self-employed cab proprietor, he would have identified either as respectable working class or lower middle class. The couple's three eldest sons held skilled working-class jobs as a cab driver, a smith, and a house-painter/decorator.

Thomas Thorp's occupation left a trace in his daughter's war diary many years later, when she pitied small business owners whose workhorses were taken by the German army. "It breaks my heart," she wrote.[2] Her father made a living from the horse-drawn cabriolets (light carriages) nicknamed "cabs" that dominated the

London streets by the 1850s. A cab proprietor's business rose and fell on the health of his horses, whose average working life was only two or three years. Thorp probably managed and drove a single cab only, making his business precarious. The neighborhoods surrounding the major rail and road networks were spider-webbed with small streets known as "mews" that held combination homes and stables for those employed in horse trades. The Thorp family lived in a series of such houses near the Marylebone Road.

The Thorps may well have relocated to Belgium in 1873 because of personal and financial difficulties. The 1850s were a hard decade for them: their youngest child died, as did Mrs. Thorp's parents. In addition, Thorp's business failed, and he was confined to the Marylebone workhouse for debt in 1856.[3] While he was listed again as a "cab proprietor" in the 1861 census, other difficulties arose. His wife Mary died, and he married her sister Annette in September 1863. This was a problematic marriage in a legal sense. While many Victorian widowers relied on their single sisters-in-law to come and keep house for them, they were forbidden from marrying them by the 1835 Deceased Wife's Sister Act, which could annul such marriages years after the fact, rendering children illegitimate and disinherited. Yet historians have found that the law did not actually stop such marriages; many widowers preferred to break the law rather than live outside of marriage, especially if there was a sexual relationship—as there was in this case. Annette Townshend came to live with her brother-in-law to take care of his young children. The two were married in September 1863, and Mary Theresa Agnes Thorp, our diarist, was born on January 1, 1864.[4]

The marriage put a strain on the family. In early 1865, Thomas Thorp brought suit against one of his sons from his first marriage, Thomas Jr., regarding an unpaid loan. Tensions ran high: when, in 1864, Annette Thorp had asked for the money back, her stepdaughter-in-law had called her a prostitute. The account stated, "There had been some family disagreements, and the present claim was an afterthought." Thomas Jr. and his wife accused his father of not really being married to his stepmother, forcing them to produce their marriage certificate. In the end, the judge ordered Thomas Jr. to pay £1 10s and for the two parties to split court costs. As he left court, Thomas Jr. declared, "I will see my father d[amne]d first before I will shake hands with him."[5]

It was true that another one of Thomas Thorp's elder sons, William, continued to live with them[6] and remained in touch with his stepsister for many decades afterward, as Mary Thorp's diary shows; still, the family had fractured over Thomas's remarriage, which may have been another reason to leave the country in February 1873, to live first in Ostend and then in Bruges.[7] By then, they had three children: Mary's sister, Georgina, was born around 1866 and her brother Richard, "Dick," arrived in 1870. A fourth child, Leonard, was born in Bruges in 1874. Apart from financial uncertainty, age (Thomas was fifty-seven), and family difficulties, one reason for the move may have been employment: Annette listed her occupation as a "teacher" in the Bruges population registers.

Bruges, a handsome yet low-cost city, was a logical choice. Its English-speaking colony had its own shops, churches, schools, and community organizations. By 1869, there were about 1,200 British residents (out of a total population of 50,000). An 1895 guide called Bruges "an inexpensive place of residence" that offered high-quality and affordable education.[8] The author assured his English readers that even with poor French language skills, they would find a welcoming atmosphere. (They clearly were not expected to know Flemish.) In short, the Thorps found a thriving expatriate community with first-rate educational and cultural opportunities at a fraction of the cost of life in London.

As a result of her parents' move, Mary spent most of her life in Belgium. She did travel: she resided with a well-to-do maternal aunt and uncle in London around 1881 and visited cousins in the United States in 1893. And she corresponded with family and friends around the world, especially with her maternal relatives, the Townshends. They were her direct link to the educated middle class: her grandfather John Townshend ran successful businesses in London. His sons worked in law and medicine and several of his daughters married well-to-do men. Mary and Annette were exceptions. Still, Annette's daughter, Mary, kept in close touch with her Townshend cousins. In 1893, she visited her cousin Mary "May" Townshend Rennard in New York, the daughter of her maternal uncle John, a jurist who had done very well for himself in the United States.[9] May married John C. Rennard, an electrical engineer.[10] The family was well connected in New York circles.[11] A son, John Townshend Rennard, married the daughter of former New York City mayor William Gaynor. He served in the US Army in the First World War; Mary noted it in her diary, remembering him as a toddler from her New York visit.

Mary's family background informed her view of her place in the world. Her wealthy and well-connected relatives gave her a sense of herself as solidly middle class and linked her to the wider world. In addition, she was, as her writings show, a well-educated woman; her French, for one thing, was superb. Yet at the same time, given her immediate family's more precarious social status, she put this education to use not as an affluent woman managing her own household but as an employee in the homes of the wealthy.

Like many other well-educated middle-class young women, Mary Thorp turned to teaching to make ends meet. In 1911 Britain, one of every three working women was employed in domestic service. Governesses were only a small part of this group, but their numbers rose by the end of the century because the middle class grew and governesses remained cheaper than boarding school fees. Organizations placed governesses in respectable households; books gave advice. Emily Peart's *A Book for Governesses* (1869) advised keeping a distance from actual servants: "Have as little to do with them as possible; treat them with invariable politeness."[12] Thorp, as her diary clearly shows, did not see herself as part of the domestic help at all; she referred to them as "our servants." This aloof stance carried the risk of isolation, especially in the suspicion-ridden circumstances of wartime: as she noted in her diary, many

employers were afraid their servants would report them to the German military police. Thorp did not think of herself as a servant because she had not come to her work from a poor background. Typically, well-bred young ladies became governesses when their other options were exhausted, often because their fathers had died. Even in the respectable middle classes, limited savings and an absent safety net, paltry or no widows' pensions, and the absence of life insurance spelled poverty.

Thorp took her first job as a governess in December 1887, one month before her twenty-fourth birthday. It was a time of crisis for the family. Earlier that year, her younger sister had died from complications of childbirth, leaving her two young children with their twenty-three-year-old father. He was addicted to drink and incapable of caring for them, so the children went to live with Thorp's mother. Thorp's father died in March 1888 and may have needed expensive medical care before that. All in all, circumstances seem to have propelled Thorp to make her own living. But she was either luckier or better connected than other young governesses; records indicate that she worked only for well-to-do families. Her English birth, her education, and her familiarity with Belgium (including fluent French) helped: governesses of English, Swiss, or German background were in great demand in Belgium.

Governesses assumed control of boys' and girls' education from the ages of seven or eight years. Employing a governess, especially a foreign one, conferred prestige. It could be a lonely life, as governesses were often isolated as "workers between two worlds."[13] Thorp took her first job in the region of Ghent. After that, by early 1888, she was ensconced with the Boulez family in Waregem near Bruges; she was to maintain very fond ties with them, as her diary shows.[14] By 1910, she was working for one of the wealthiest families in Belgium, the Wittoucks.

In May 1910, Thorp moved into the Wittoucks' grand townhouse in Brussels, where she worked with their three boys, Paul (Pavlick), Michael (Micha), and Serge, aged ten, eight, and six, respectively. Her employers were Madame Wittouck, born Catherine de Medem, a Russian aristocrat,[15] and Paul Wittouck, owner of one of the largest sugar refineries in Europe in the town of Tienen (Tirlemont). An American journalist who interviewed him in November 1907 in his Brussels "palatial home" described him as "the king of beet-sugar." He found Mr. Wittouck perfectly affable but unwilling to grant permission to visit the Tienen factory. The journalist went anyway to find the plant heavily guarded. Though Paul Wittouck declined to disclose how much he had invested, feeling it to be "a typical American question," it was clear that the Wittoucks were extremely wealthy.[16]

Their residences were decorated with the requisite Old Master paintings, and they were among the very few Belgians to own a car. In his wartime journal, US Minister Brand Whitlock mentioned them often.[17] In January 1915, he attended a party chez Wittouck; the lady of the house, "despite the fact that a war is on, and that social functions are not being given, wore an elaborate heliotrope satin gown with roses on her corsage and at her knees, and sat there on the [car] fender smoking a cigarette with another in her fingers when that had been smoked up. Much of

her silk stockings showing and her long shoes. Her husband is a country man, very rich, and son of an ouvrier [laborer]."[18] In reality, Paul Wittouck was not a country laborer's son at all; the family had been Brussels patricians since the mid-eighteenth century. Paul's brother and business partner, Frantz, married an Austrian woman;[19] the family was, then, quite cosmopolitan. But Whitlock presumably took his cue from Madame Wittouck, who was aware of her status as an aristocrat.[20] She certainly propelled the household to the center of Brussels social life; the Wittoucks were written up more than once in the Paris high society press.[21]

The family maintained two homes. Their town residence was the so-called Hôtel Wittouck on the chic Boulevard de Waterloo, an 1875 urban palace with two carriage entrances and various salons decorated in different styles.[22] In April 1910, the month Thorp came to work for the Wittoucks, they acquired a summer residence called La Fougeraie (Fern Meadows). This was a somewhat nondescript modern château in the elegant suburb of Uccle; Paul Wittouck commissioned the French architect Louis Süe to completely rebuild it in Louis XVI style. A prestigious landscape designer remodeled the expansive grounds. With the family, Mary Thorp spent summers in La Fougeraie, the rest of the year in Brussels.

In spite of her more modest pedigree, Thorp appeared to fit well in this world because of her education, her international connections, and her social confidence. She made close friends among upper-middle-class and aristocratic Belgian women. She was at ease in cosmopolitan circles; during the war, the diplomats she met at the Wittoucks' house clearly appreciated her conversation. She moved with facility between the elevated world of formal dinners and the domestic world of sick children and schoolbooks.

In this domestic world, she was an authority. Her teaching notes, which the family has kept to this day, show her to be a demanding and dedicated educator. They also show that she was often disapproving of what she saw as the boys' lack of diligence. Her hopes were highest for the second boy, Micha. She counted on him to show his two brothers a good example; "he, at least, understands that dissipation only bears bad fruit," she wrote in May 1914. According to family lore, if Micha seems to have been Miss Thorp's favorite, the eldest, nicknamed "Pavlick" ("little Paul" in Russian), was his mother's favorite. But he did not find much favor with his governess. "When will I be able to give him a favorable report!" she scolded in November 1913. Pavlick refused to speak to her in English during their lessons. He paid no attention, his homework was sloppy, his desk untidy—"he lazes about on every score."[23] What irked Thorp most about her eldest pupil was what she saw as his entitled attitude and lack of politeness. He was, she noted, especially rude to the German teacher, to the point of mocking her attire. "How I wish for him to become a fundamentally thoughtful person [she used the term *générosité d'âme*, a staple of moral injunctions] and to rid himself of his selfishness," she wrote in May 1914.[24] That she was not afraid to report her disapproval to her employers shows she did not feel a need to ingratiate herself. She was appointed as a transmitter of values and acted as one.

Many indicators point to Thorp's valued position in the Wittouck household. The Wittoucks' grandson, Éric, was born after Thorp's death, but he recounts his father's description of Thorp as "une maîtresse femme" [roughly, "a woman in charge"].[25] Her central position in the household was obvious; at the death of her employer, Paul Wittouck, she wrote, "We are in the greatest grief. Our best friend has gone."[26] When Madame Wittouck died, in 1928, Thorp was still registered as living with the family. She herself died in Uccle, close to the Fougeraie, in 1945; in all probability, upon retirement the family had provided her with a pension and a residence.

Thorp's wartime dinners with the Wittoucks and their guests made for many conversations with people from the Belgian elite as well as with diplomats, which she recorded. She was, as her entries show, as well-informed as a civilian under occupation could be. She also engaged in those activities that were open to civilians under occupation: she volunteered in a wartime charity for the impoverished lower middle class, a cause probably dear to her because of her own background, but also a cause that women of the Belgian elite (including Madame Wittouck) took on with especial zeal. Another connection she shared with those around her was faith: though christened Anglican, Thorp had at some point become a devout Catholic. A June 1911 photo shows her dispensing catechism to her charges: she is enthroned—the term is not excessive—amid the three boys, meekly arrayed around her in their sailors' costumes. This image once more shows Thorp's *maîtresse femme* status in the household—a pillar, not a servant. When it came to something as crucial to this household as religious education, Thorp was entrusted with it, and she acquitted herself of the task with her customary vigor. Her faith provided solace in wartime. The cyclical celebrations of the Roman Catholic calendar gave rhythm to years that otherwise would have seemed hopelessly lost. And throughout her diary, but even more so in moments of despair, she called for divine intercession.

Remaining active was a form of solace, too, as she sometimes remarked to herself. She was steeped in the concrete details of life: for one thing, she did the arduous rounds of shops for the boys' wardrobes, which brought her face to face with the soaring prices of scarce goods. In short, her position straddled the world of leisure and work. She herself was aware of her closeness to the affluent and their rich tables, and she made a point of redistributing her riches by taking rare treats like sugar or butter to impoverished friends. On occasion, the family's privileged status emerged in non sequiturs: in one June 1917 entry, Thorp worried first about Russia's flagging war effort and then about the Wittouck boys' dwindling supply of tennis balls—apparently a rare commodity in wartime.

But this positioning between worlds also made her vulnerable. As a British national, the German occupation authorities classified Thorp as an enemy alien. She had to check in regularly with the military registration office, and she suffered the sequestration of her life savings by the Germans, which made her even more dependent on her employers. This vulnerable position only added to her strong sense of Englishness. She was particularly proud of those British institutions that provided

help to British expatriates in occupied Belgium (among whom she had close friends). Thorp's sense of self as an Englishwoman, then, was key: an element of her identity possibly even more important than her religious belief, her education, her social class, and her attitude toward her profession.

Importantly, she saw herself as someone who had a duty to fulfill abroad. "If I were in England," she wrote at some point, "how glad I should be to volunteer for the civil service, in such great need just now; still I feel I did my duty in remaining at my post & trying to make good men of the three boys—they are still in great need of guidance, moral & other."[27] While, in fact, there was little for her in England and her livelihood was in Brussels, the sentiment squared with her sense of self as someone who had *chosen* her path and was no less English for it.

Thorp's understanding of Englishness comes through with special clarity in her interactions with her nephew and godson, Richard "Dick" Dodson, a civilian internee at Ruhleben camp outside Berlin. Dodson was held there because, though born and raised in Belgium and married to a Belgian national, he was classified "English" during the war; his parents had been English, and his birth was registered as a foreign one. Thorp spent much of her diary worrying about Dick and his sister, Edith, who by the end of the war was working for the American Red Cross in France. Edith and Dick led very different but equally dangerous wartime existences. Edith crossed the submarine-infested Atlantic, while Dick was interned. Thorp sent letters and parcels to Dick and to his family in Antwerp, and she asked neutral diplomats to intervene to make his life in the camp a little easier.

It seems likely that Thorp saw herself in loco parentis for these two, who lost their mother, Georgina, at a very young age. Mary's sister, two years her junior, had married another English expatriate born in Bruges, Richard Raikes Dodson, around 1885. He appears to have tried to care for the children initially, but this was not a success. He was repeatedly arrested for being drunk and disorderly. The Bruges police described him as having "sunk very low," for all that he was extremely fond of his children. Before long, Edith and her little brother came to live with Annette Thorp, their grandmother.[28] Richard Jr. left for work in Antwerp in 1906, and Edith joined her father in Brussels when her grandmother died in 1910.[29] Annette's death left Thorp as the responsible family member; moreover, she was Dick's godmother. She extended her care and concern to the Dodson family more broadly; her diary records visits with Dick's aunt, Ellen Rinquet, and her husband, Ernest.[30]

Thorp, then, went out of her way to look after others: her direct and extended family, her friends, the charity cases in her care. She maintained her network and she volunteered her time even as she took her work as an educator very seriously. Her diary gives the impression of a woman who found purpose in working for and with others. She set aside time to keep the diary that allowed her to make sense of the war, of its "side-show," and of her own role. But at other times she was in motion. Thorp's diary shows a woman at home between worlds who, though grieving over the miseries of war, had faith in her own ability to negotiate whatever life might bring her.

NOTES

1. *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, February 13, 1848.
2. MT (Mary Thorp), (diary entry for) January 25, 1917.
3. Thorp admission to workhouse January 25, 1856; London Workhouse Admission and Discharge Records 1659–1930; *Perry's Bankrupt Gazette*, November 13, 1858.
4. Kensington marriage register, September 1863, v. 1a, p. 96; Kensington birth register, January–March 1864, v. 1a, p. 79; Belgium, State Archives, Foreigners' file 470286 (Mary Thorp).
5. *Marylebone Mercury*, March 25, 1865.
6. 1871 UK census entry, Kensington District, Kensington Town, 9 Lancaster Mews.
7. Belgium, State Archives, Foreigners' file 470286 (Mary Thorp).
8. William Reed-Lewis, *Bruges: An English Guide* (Bruges: English Printing Works, 1895), 5–6.
9. Obituary, *New York Times*, August 12, 1911.
10. Obituary, *New York Times*, March 7, 1945.
11. *New York Times*, April 29, 1919, and December 19, 1933.
12. Quoted in Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes, eds., *The Governess: An Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 28–29, 107.
13. Valérie Piette, *Domestiques et servantes: Des vies sous condition* (Bruxelles: Académie Royale de Belgique, 2000), 455.
14. The Boulezes were wealthy landowners. Thorp's friend Dame Anna Boulez, an avid horsewoman, launched the Waregem thoroughbred race, which remains Belgium's Ascot to this day.
15. The de (or von) Medems, an aristocratic family originally from lower Saxony, established in the Baltic since the sixteenth century, came to prominence in the eighteenth century. Some branches of the family were in the service of the Habsburgs, others in royal Prussian service, others in the service of the tsarist state. Catherine de Medem was a descendant of the "Russian" Medems. Her forebear General Count I. F. de Medem had played a major (and brutal) role in Russia's eighteenth-century imperial expansion.
16. Samuel G. Ruegg, "Tirlemont and Beet-Sugar in Belgium," *Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer* 54, no. 7 (1915): 110–111.
17. The United States did not yet have an embassy in Belgium so Whitlock was the "minister" in charge of the US Legation.
18. January 27, 1915, journal entry; Box 2 Journals; Brand Whitlock Papers, Library of Congress.
19. Frantz Wittouck, a younger brother of Thorp's employer Paul Wittouck, with whom he had purchased the Tirlemont sugar refinery in 1894, died shortly before the war. His widow, Albertine Brandeis, was the daughter of Heinrich Brandeis, scion of a Viennese Jewish banking family. Albertine Brandeis's widowed mother, Margarethe, lived with her daughter in Brussels until her death in 1915. The Wittouck-Brandeis mansion was exactly opposite that of the Wittouck-de Medems, on avenue de la Toison d'Or (Mr. Éric Wittouck, correspondence, January 16, 2016). The Wittouck-Brandeis family also owned a country house near Brussels, Villa Les Bouleaux (also known as Villa Wittouck) at Tervuren, a focal point of Brussels musical life. These Wittoucks had three children: Jean, b. 1901; Élisabeth, b. 1903; and Marie-Thérèse, b. 1905.
20. In the family, the Wittouck-de Medem marriage is remembered as a social mismatch. The couple met when Catherine de Medem was vacationing at Karlsbad with her father in 1897; family lore has it that she had vowed not to return from that holiday without a fiancé, given that her younger sister had already gotten engaged. The couple were indeed engaged very shortly afterward. They were married in August 1898. Mr. Éric Wittouck, personal communication, March 8, 2016.
21. In 1910, for instance, the Paris *Le Gaulois*, a periodical known for its chronicle of high society, reported a soirée with a performance by Parisian singers and actors at the mansion

of "Madame Paul Wittouck, née Baroness de Medem." *Le Gaulois: politique et littéraire*, May 31, 1910.

22. Mr. Éric Wittouck, correspondence, January 16, 2016. The house was sold in 1985 and became derelict. Completely gutted today, with only the façade remaining, it serves as the Brussels "flagship store" of the Abercrombie & Fitch clothing chain. "L'hôtel Wittouck attend ses protecteurs," *La Libre Belgique*, December 13, 2005.

23. According to Mr. Éric Wittouck, her verdict on Paul's lack of drive was prescient: Paul Wittouck Jr. would never work a day in his life.

24. *Bulletin enfants 1913–1914*, manuscript notebook, Mr. Éric Wittouck personal archive, with thanks. Pavlick as the personal favorite of Madame Wittouck and his nonworking lifestyle. Mr. Éric Wittouck, personal communication, March 8, 2016.

25. Mr. Éric Wittouck, personal communication, July 24, 2015.

26. MT, November 12, 1917.

27. MT, March 6, 1917.

28. Belgium, State Archives, Foreigners' file 510766 (Richard Dodson Sr. and Jr.).

29. Belgium, State Archives, Foreigners' file 510766 (Richard Dodson Sr. and Jr.) and 2344455 (Edith Dodson); New York Naturalization Records, 1936 (Richard Sr.) and 1938 (Edith). The two immigrated to the United States in 1911. Richard Dodson Sr. died in 1947 (USA), and Edith died in New York in September 1970 (US Social Security Death Index).

30. West Flanders Civil Registers, Bruges. Charlotte Hélène "Ellen" Dodson (b. April 10, 1872) married Ernest Antoine Désiré Rinquet.

Life in an Occupied City: Brussels

On July 12, 1916, the German governor-general of occupied Belgium warned the populace that "it is forbidden to celebrate the Belgian national holiday in any way." Violators faced six months in prison or a 20,000-mark fine.[1] It was in the midst of such restrictions that Mary Thorp kept a secret diary. Observing life in Brussels, Europe's largest occupied city, gave her diary a particular urgency.

Before the war, Brussels was a growing and thriving capital city, with some 750,000 inhabitants, or 1 out of 10 Belgians. It was not a metropolis, but it stood at the heart of a constellation of other large and midsize cities. Unlike France, Belgium was not divided between capital city and provinces: many in Belgium's upper classes lived in other cities, which had their own circles of prestige.

Still, Brussels was a locus of ambition, where enterprise, banking, political energy, social-reform thinking, and the arts converged—as did the colonial spoils that paid for much of the city's elegance, so attractive to visitors. "What boulevards, what parks, what palaces, what galleries, what cafés, and above all what restaurants!" wrote the English novelist Arnold Bennett in 1914, looking back on his first visit to the city twenty years earlier.[2] Next to the chic boulevards with apartment buildings built in the 1870s in the manner of France's Haussmann, a style more specific to Brussels had emerged in the 1890s: Art Nouveau. Its sinuous lines suited the city's steep

inclines; and most of the residential buildings were single-family homes, reflecting the Belgian middle classes' dislike of apartments. This preference drove many out of the central city, transforming villages into city districts. But even as Brussels spread outward, Belgium's fierce particularism ensured that all boroughs kept their own municipal government; there was no burgomaster (mayor) of Greater Brussels. Brussels had no large factories yet was Belgium's most important manufacturing city because of a plethora of small businesses—machine-building workshops, bronze foundries, breweries, carton factories, and so on. It also, of course, had an energetic service sector with many jobs for women, which, though often badly paid and precarious, still promised independence. Mary Thorp's own professional opportunity emerged from a convergence of destinies possible only in a city like Brussels: the union of Belgium's "king of sugar" and a Russian noblewoman of Baltic descent had produced three boys in need of the firm guidance that only an English governess with a command of the French language could give.

The war cut deeply into the life of this city. Brussels, so tightly connected to the outside world, was suddenly shut off. The war paralyzed manufacturing and the service sector. Struggling middle-class families could no longer afford to pay their servants. At the same time, Brussels offered a vision of abundance to unsuspecting visitors. Theaters, cinemas, cafés, restaurants, and bars sprang up all over the city. Yet this booming entertainment sector was, in a way, an outgrowth of misery and corruption. Sucking on cheap sweets on an empty stomach, people congregated in warm cinemas to flee their unheated lodgings. While bona fide business languished, entertainment venues catered to the middlemen who made money dealing with the German army. They also catered to German troops, for whom Brussels was a rest and recreation center, and to German officials, their families, and their secretarial staffs.

Brussels had a specific position in this war. It was not, like Ypres, situated in the firing line. While bombs occasionally fell on Brussels, it was not targeted by Allied bombing and shelling as were Ostend and Bruges. Nor had Brussels suffered at the hands of the invading army, like Leuven (Louvain) and other "martyred" towns. In short, Belgium's capital city found itself in the lee of war's direct and extreme violence. But this position did not preclude other forms of violence. The city experienced curfews, fines, arrests, executions of resisters, and deportation of forced laborers.

As the capital city of a country whose invasion was internationally decried, Brussels held another specific position. It was a front in the battle for legitimacy between the military occupying regime and the civilians. In the first year of the occupation, October 1914 to October 1915, patriotic outrage over enemy occupation had been most intense. Thorp's diary still echoes this outrage, partly because she moved in those circles where the sentiment was strongest. Her diary demonstrates the resilience of this patriotic culture and how it had a practical dimension, expressing itself in charity. But her diary also documents the strains on this collective effort as the occupation wore on.

On September 15, 1916, Mary Thorp finally started the diary she had been wanting to keep since the start of the war. She had been, in her words, "dissuaded from doing so, because it was considered dangerous; a Jesuit father was shot during the tragic Louvain days of August 1914, for having written a few impressions."[3] As she started writing, Belgium had been under military occupation for two years, and the "tragic days"—the invasion armies' massacres of civilians, which claimed a total of 5,500 victims from August through October 1914—had long given way to a regime of measured coercion. Most of Belgium, except for the northwestern corner where the 1914 German advance had been halted and where Belgian and British forces held the line, was under German occupation. The German military had made conquered Belgium into a hinterland for its front. The areas closest to the front and the coast, comprising one-third of occupied Belgium, were under exclusively military control; this region was known as the Étape (staging area).[4] The other two-thirds of occupied Belgium were under a more mixed civilian-military occupation regime. That region, called the Government-General, was ruled by a German governor-general who resided in Brussels. Three elderly aristocratic Prussian career officers served in this function: Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz from September through November 1914; General Moritz von Bissing, from December 1914 until his death in spring 1917; and General Ludwig von Falkenhausen. The governor-general was not an official of the German state: he answered only to the German emperor in his capacity as "supreme war lord." This means that the governor-general's authority was essentially military in nature. But he was assisted by a civilian administration (*Zivilverwaltung*), which answered to the German government, and which, though always subordinate to military priorities (or what was defined as such), possessed real power.

As Thorp started her diary, Belgium's second governor-general, seventy-two-year-old Moritz von Bissing, had consolidated control. This energetic conservative was keen on establishing durable German rule in Belgium. On his watch, a growing force of German occupation officials strove to manage ever-widening aspects of civilian life in an effort to base German authority on more than just military power. His Political Department worked with especial energy to anchor the occupation regime's authority. It was headed by Oscar baron von der Lancken Wakenitz, a brilliant, polyglot diplomat; "some people here say he is practically the governor of Belgium," wrote Thorp.[5]

Conversely, Belgian authority shrank. The Belgian government had gone into voluntary exile in the autumn of 1914, as had King Albert, who commanded the Belgian army. Cabinet ministries either closed down or were reduced to routine tasks. Only local authority still functioned fully. Town governments were the ones that had to interact with the occupation regime to tend to the population's needs. This required a complicated dance with a power that relished throwing its weight around but also needed the local authorities as indispensable intermediaries—for brute force would have led to inertia and possibly riots. To forestall civilian resistance, the occupation regime greatly restricted civilians' mobility. By and large, civilians were stuck in their own town or village, and even the shortest trip outside of municipal boundaries

required a permit. Thorp, for one, was able to leave greater Brussels only once, in the summer of 1917, for a day's visit to relatives in Antwerp.

Men of military age had to register weekly at the Meldeamt (registration office) to demonstrate they had not attempted to join the Belgian army. Civilians found the landscape of their daily lives suddenly crisscrossed with a web of borders, checkpoints, and no-go zones. The boundary between the Government-General and the Étape was an actual border, very heavily guarded. On the other side lay an occupation regime much harsher still, as Thorp often remarked. Many of her friends lived in those parts; she commented on the lack of communication between Government-General and Étape, on the even greater restrictions under which people in the Étape lived, and on how they were in permanent danger of losing their homes if these were in the path of war operations.

Another harsh military frontier was the previously porous border with the neutral Netherlands. In the summer of 1916, a German engineer corps put the last touches on an electric fence that completely sealed off the Dutch-Belgian border—the first such wall in history. To deter civilians from trying to cross it, the occupation authorities circulated grisly pictures of electrocuted corpses. In June 1917, Thorp reported on the deaths of two acquaintances who had tried to cross the wire. Only one was subsequently confirmed, that of a fifty-five-year-old industrialist from Liège who had been denied a passport to travel to the Netherlands to check on his business interests abroad and had tried to cross the wire by crawling through a barrel. Thorp's employers experienced restrictions themselves. Madame Wittouck requested a passport for Holland in June 1918 but was "flatly refused."[6] The Wittouck boys were denied permission to ride their bikes to school.

Still, the Wittoucks retained advantages that others in occupied Belgium did not have. Madame Wittouck's "fine new Minerva motor car," requisitioned in early October 1918, was "quietly sent home" after two weeks.[7] It was true that she had been forbidden from driving it during the war. No sooner was the ban lifted than Madame Wittouck ordered her driver to cross a roadblock, telling the German sentry that she refused to put up with any further nonsense. He merely shrugged. Things could have gotten out of hand, but German soldiers, even as military authority was crumbling, remained deferential to the car-driving set; they were not "Russian Bolchevists," as Madame Wittouck remarked.[8]

The flow of information was as restricted as the flow of people. Civilians could not correspond with the front. Other armies communicated with their home fronts through millions of letters a week, but the men in the Belgian army were entirely cut off from their families and friends. News of loved ones from the front had to be acquired by roundabout ways. As correspondence with the Étape was particularly arduous, Thorp had the greatest of difficulties in communicating with her friend Valérie in heavily occupied Ghent; "to think we are losing three years of the happiness of friendship! it means so much at our, & especially her age."[9] Civilians could barely correspond with Allied or neutral countries—even those civilians with

good contacts in the diplomatic world. Thorp's modest request to send her photo to friends in England via the US diplomatic pouch was rejected. In March 1917, Madame Wittouck tried in vain to send a telegram to Petrograd via the Spanish envoy, to find out whether it was true that her brother-in-law had been murdered in Russia.

Inside the Government-General, communication was likewise stifled. Civilians had to send their letters in open envelopes through the mail; sixty-five German censorship offices across the territory inspected them. To accommodate the censors, the only languages allowed were French, Flemish, and German. Mail was slow as a result: Thorp's messages from her nephew Dick at Ruhleben camp near Berlin arrived in Brussels the next day, but it took up to twelve days to forward them to his wife in Antwerp. People caught carrying even private messages were severely punished. In August 1916, Madame Wittouck had to spend a night in prison and was fined 300 marks for carrying two letters from the Liège region to Brussels. And, of course, civilians could not use telephones.

Public information was as restricted as private communication. In December 1914, the Government-General's Press Office had decreed that all printed matter not expressly authorized by the Governor-General was banned.[10] In protest, most Belgian newspapers stopped publishing. Allied newspapers and magazines did not reach occupied Belgium, save for the odd smuggled copy. Neutral newspapers did enter the Government-General, the papers from the Netherlands especially. The Brussels bourgeoisie (which, before the war, did not usually read Dutch) avidly perused these dailies for signs of liberation. The educated also read German papers, including the socialist *Vorwärts*, for signs of war-weariness. Such fare occasionally, as Thorp noted, led German soldiers and Belgian civilians to blame Germany's military leadership in unison.

In response to the Belgian press strike, the occupation government had launched its own newspapers, such as the ostensibly "native" Brussels daily *La Belgique*. Next to local news, updates on rules and schedules, job ads, and other necessary information, these new papers offered curated news from the fronts, as well as reports and editorials that suggested the durability of German rule. They also belittled expressions of patriotism. In late November 1916, for instance, an editorial deplored the curfew imposed on Brussels after churchgoers had sung the national hymn, and claimed—possibly correctly—that an ever-growing number of *bruxellois* blamed the demonstrators for making their fellow citizens' lives even harder. It was true that the curfew was particularly hard on Brussels' nightlife and on the people who depended on it for their income.[11] Thorp, who had rejoiced over the hymn-singing and scoffed at the curfew, thought it a "horrid article."[12] But she did read *La Belgique*, as did many others, for the public were starved for news. And even the censored papers could not keep major developments such as the US entry into war from civilians.[13] Still, even such news could be editorialized into insignificance. The Brussels journalist Charles Tytgat (who, like Thorp, started a diary in the late summer of 1916) observed how

many civilians failed to understand the importance of the American entry into war because the censored press assured them that the United States had already spent most of its resources in helping the Allies, and to no avail.[14] In November 1918, after liberation, memories of the censored press's steady drip of disheartenment would lead furious crowds to set fire to newspaper stalls.

The need to counteract this disheartenment generated an underground press with periodicals such as *La Libre Belgique*, whose title, "*Free Belgium*," was a rebuke to *La Belgique*. These periodicals sought to keep up civilians' spirits by assuring them that a regime built on military might was doomed to end. Most professed a patriotism rooted in religious faith, not unlike Thorp's. But she seldom mentioned the clandestine press; because of persecution by the German police, it was at a low ebb when she started her diary. Thorp, then, pieced together war news from those papers that reached her. But the Wittoucks' circle of diplomats, especially those from the US Legation and the Spanish and Dutch embassies, also provided important information. Less-well-connected civilians had to make do with the censored papers as well as the German posters in the streets bearing decrees, announcements, military news—and, from time to time, printed on a threatening red background, the news that resisters had been executed.

Repression was central to the occupation regime's quest for order. A vast police apparatus dealt with various forms of civilian resistance. In greater Brussels, the Military Police was 1,000 men strong by 1917, not counting the hundreds of military patrolling the railway stations and tracks. In addition, the Political Police, using Belgian, Dutch, and French informers, infiltrated networks of civilian resistance. Some of these networks specialized in helping trapped British soldiers and Belgian army volunteers escape into the neutral Netherlands so they could join their armies. The English nurse Edith Cavell, executed in Brussels in October 1915, belonged to such a network. Another type of resistance was espionage: thousands of men and women collected information on the German troops for the benefit of Allied armies.

In reaction, the occupation regime took ever more energetic measures to clear the German army's hinterland of civilian resistance. In 1916, the German police services dismantled one network after another by arresting and interrogating hundreds of people on the slightest suspicion. These actions found an echo in Thorp's chronicle. To make suspects talk, the police kept them in solitary confinement; Thorp heard stories. Military tribunals then handed out fines, prison sentences, and, for some, the death penalty. As the military governor of Brussels stated in 1916, the safety of the German army required "unrelenting action."[15]

This included repressing subversion among the Germans' own troops, as well as, of course, punishing civilians for insulting the German army. In 1915, for instance, Thorp's friend Mary d'Alcantara, a thirty-year-old aristocrat from Ghent, had been fined 80 marks over a disparaging remark. She denied the occupying army her money and took the alternative punishment of ten days in prison. As the occupation wore on, fines rose vertiginously. In January 1917, the director of a Brussels

department store was fined 10,000 marks for selling toy German soldiers in a posture of surrender. These heavy fines show that, next to order, the occupation regime had another priority: that of siphoning off occupied Belgium's resources for the German war effort.

The invasion of Belgium had brought random requisitions and all-out plunder, but these were soon followed by an orderly system of exploitation. From December 1914, the occupied country had to pay a monthly war tax of 40 million francs, which was twenty times the sum total of all taxes yielded by the prewar Belgian economy. In addition, civilians had to pay heavily for all manner of permits; and heavy fines for even minor infringements regularly hit municipalities, institutions, businesses, and private citizens. In November 1916, for instance, a Mass in two Brussels churches ended on a chorus of the Belgian national anthem; to retaliate, the military governor imposed a curfew and a fine of up to 10,000 marks for trespassers.

As Thorp started her diary, exploitation took a turn for the worse. In November 1916, against von Bissing's protests, the Prussian minister of war (an appointee of the new German leadership under Hindenburg and Ludendorff) increased the monthly tax from 40 to 50 million francs. The German army massively stepped up its requisitioning of valuable goods.

The seizing of private households' copper utensils crossed a line: private homes were no longer safe. Some requisitioning parties ransacked houses and drilled through walls. Others were more reticent: the men who came for the copper chez Wittouck were, Thorp wrote, apologetic. Still, they took not only freestanding copper items but fixtures too, such as the kitchen boilers. For Thorp, as for other civilians, the vexation of seeing one's home opened up and one's possessions carted away was compounded by the grief of knowing the metal would be used against Belgian and Allied soldiers. To boot, in May 1917, the monthly tax rose to 60 million francs, and, soon after, the German army requisitioned wool mattresses and pillows. The loss of bedding compounded malnourished civilians' misery, especially among sick and old people too poor to heat their lodgings—for coal was in ever-shorter supply. Belgium's coal mines still produced enough to cover domestic needs, but the German military seized a large part of production in both direct and indirect ways. Its Kohlenzentrale (Coal Central) was ostensibly organized to prevent a black market in coal and to make sure it would reach those who needed it most. In reality, the relief services received only a small part of the coal; most went to the German army to operate its own black market or to use in rewarding civilians willing to cooperate.

The Coal Central was not unique: an entire system of "Centrals" placed Belgian resources under German jurisdiction. These Centrals tallied, seized, and distributed local produce. Belgium's own modest grain harvest as well as its more abundant yield of potatoes, beet sugar, fruit, dairy, vegetable oils, and other goods were now channeled by the Zuckerzentrale, the Ölzentrale, the Obstzentrale, and so on. Centrals also seized stocks of fabrics, leather (a military necessity), and other resources. The Centrals allowed the Government-General to control domestic distribution, to

export goods to neutral countries, to ship goods on which there was no ban (such as vegetables) to Germany, and, for contraband goods, to create black-market schemes with complicit Belgian producers and middlemen to circumvent the ban and siphon them off to the German army or home front. Only a small proportion of native goods made it to the relief services, or, at extortionate prices, the market. Meanwhile, in the Étape, the military did not even bother with Centrals but continued to seize domestic goods outright.

Meanwhile, Belgium's industrial equipment was being dismantled. A decree of February 1917 placed Belgium's ailing industries under complete German control. Unless firms agreed to work for the occupation army, which most did not, their equipment was seized. Machines, boilers, furnaces, and other equipment were taken apart and shipped to Germany; factory halls were demolished. Earlier that winter, Thorp had feared for the sugar refineries, too. While their disappearance would not have displeased sugar manufacturers in Germany, Belgium's sugar refineries, like other food-processing industries, remained relatively unharmed because it was not in the occupying army's interest to dismantle them. But other industries suffered. The military, in accord with Germany's heavy-industry interest group, overrode the arguments of the ailing von Bissing (he died in mid-April 1917) that a reasonably prosperous protectorate was more in Germany's interest.

It was not the first time Germany's Supreme Command and industrial lobbies had the better of the governor-general. By fall 1916 they had managed to push through a measure that von Bissing condemned as "unworthy of a civilized state,"[16] namely, the deportation and forced labor of working-class men. Starting in the Étape, by and by the deportations reached the Government-General and drew nearer to Brussels. In mid-October 1916, Thorp wrote of the general fear that the Germans wanted to "[empty] Belgium of all able bodied men."[17] On November 17, Brand Whitlock noted that "Brussels is in terror; the net closes in."[18]

The municipal authorities played for time by refusing to hand in the lists of unemployed men, invoking constitutional liberties. The military retaliated by fining or arresting municipal employees and seizing lists of relief beneficiaries. And local authorities could only stall. The deportations in greater Brussels started in late January 1917. Of the 8,000 civilians ordered to report for work, many did not show up. Others did, fearing that the punishment would be even harsher than the work or hoping to be selected out. Over four days, in the bitter cold, the Brussels South railway station was the theater of grim, brief selections. The sick were generally spared, as were men older than fifty-five and adolescent boys. In the end, the military loaded 1,400 men on trains bound for holding-camps in Germany. Those who had signed a work contract under duress were sent on to factories, mines, and farms. Those who had not remained in the camps to be beaten and starved into compliance. Thorp feared for her eldest charge, Pavlick. She had little reason to fear, for the deportations hit the working class almost exclusively; it was no coincidence that more than half of the Brussels deportees came from one industrial borough.

But although the deportations did not concern the social class of Thorp's employers, they were more of a reality in her own circle. In Antwerp, her nephew's wife, Sidonie, witnessed her stepfather being taken away in November 1916. The family's food parcels were pilfered en route. Thorp, through her diplomatic acquaintances, took steps on his behalf. He was freed in late March 1917. By then, the deportations had been halted anyway, in response to the global outcry. (At least, they ceased in the Government-General; in the Étape, where perceived "military necessity" trumped all, they continued until the very last days of the war.) But many men returned in a terrible state. Of the 120,000 men taken from both the Government-General and the Étape, 2,500 died during deportation and a large number shortly thereafter; many remained invalids for the rest of their lives.

This horror played out against the backdrop of deepening material misery, a recurring theme in Thorp's diary. Time and again she observed the staggering cost of everyday goods and their shoddy quality. She had to pay cutthroat prices for footwear containing only token bits of leather. Soap was prohibitively expensive yet mere "muck": "when shall I get my good Pears soap again!"[19] And things were much worse in poor households, where, she noted, the lack of soap and washcloths led to an epidemic of skin disease, and where ill-clad people were freezing to death in unheated rooms. For all the material hardships she herself experienced, she was keenly aware that she wrote from the relative comfort of the Wittoucks' well-provisioned household. In June 1917, Thorp noted that while she herself was better off for having lost weight since late 1915 ("tant mieux for me," she joked), others were wasting away.[20]

Most people relied on the "Alimentation," subsidized food stores where civilians could obtain staples such as rice, beans, canned meat, and flour. These food stores were part of an international effort to help the civilians of the occupied territories behind the Western Front survive the war. This extraordinary effort, sustained over fifty months, was one of the first global humanitarian actions in history. Yet it had started small. At war's outbreak, Belgium had faced famine. The most densely populated country in the world at the time, with a population the size of Canada's on territory no larger than Maryland's, it imported three-quarters of its food. But food imports were in disarray. In response, an ad hoc committee of businesspeople in Brussels, working with local government and enlisting the protection of neutral diplomats, began purchasing food abroad. The German military pledged not to seize it so as to avoid food riots. An emissary from this committee, sent to London to purchase grain, contacted a business acquaintance and London-based mining entrepreneur: Herbert Hoover, the future US president. Hoover put together what would become the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB), a volunteer group of private citizens from the United States tasked with purchasing food, raising funds, overseeing shipping, and liaising with the Brussels committee. In the meantime, the Belgian government in exile had earmarked 25 million francs a month to pay for the imported food. This was complemented by worldwide donations in cash to "Brave

Little Belgium." These, however, were to dwindle considerably, forcing the Belgian government in early 1917 to increase its monthly outlay on food relief to 37.5 million.

To safeguard the goods from the German army, the CRB imported them under the protection of neutral diplomats from the United States, Spain, and the Netherlands. Thorp knew several of these neutral "dips" (as she called them). These men found themselves playing a crucial role in the relief effort and, beyond it, the championing of the occupied civilians' interests. Civilians often exaggerated the extent of their influence with the occupation regime. In late September 1916, for instance, Thorp wrote that the neutral diplomats were investigating a bombing that had killed ten people in Brussels. The Germans blamed Allied planes; civilians blamed German anti-aircraft guns.[21] People in Brussels told each other that US Minister Brand Whitlock had confounded von Bissing by presenting him with shards of German flak shells. In reality, neither Whitlock nor his Spanish counterpart, the Marquis de Villalobar, planned to intervene in a matter that was very much out of their hands; and Whitlock in his private diary wrote scathingly of civilians' naiveté in blaming only Germany for the air-raid victims—"Such children as they are!"[22]

Whitlock, a prolific writer who would, in 1919, publish a well-regarded memoir of his years in wartime Belgium, was a major presence in wartime Belgium. Thorp, who thought highly of him, probably met him in 1915 when he was a frequent guest at the Wittouck house; but her 1916–1919 diary does not mention a single conversation. Her relationship with Whitlock, then, was a distant one, but she was friendly with his assistant, Albert Ruddock, as she was with Maurits Willem Radinck Van Vollenhoven, counsel at the Dutch legation, and the Spanish envoy Don Rodrigo de Saavedra y Vinent, Marquis of Villalobar. She mentioned both men frequently. She particularly admired Villalobar, a diplomat of long aristocratic pedigree whose savvy and wit had allowed him to build a brilliant career in spite of severe physical handicaps. Before she knew Villalobar, Thorp scathingly called him "the diminutive grandee" and thought that he tried to take all the credit for the relief work. But over the course of 1917, the marquis drew closer to the Wittoucks. Thorp and Villalobar sparred amicably over politics, and she came to share his wish for a negotiated peace.

Inside occupied Belgium, the CRB had a local counterpart that distributed the imported goods. This was the National Committee for Relief and Victualling (Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation; hereafter Comité), chaired by the energetic Belgian financier Émile Francqui; like Hoover, he was a rich and well-connected man with a brisk executive outlook. Thorp, who called Francqui "the alimentation man," approved of his work, though she frowned on his having married his niece.[23]

The Comité was a remarkable organization. An ad hoc, unincorporated entity that did not exist on paper so as to evade German control, it employed some 125,000 agents across Belgium. It rationed out the nonperishable food brought in under CRB auspices in warehouses known, fondly, as "the American stores." The Comité also purchased Belgian-grown food to sell and tussled with the German "Centrals" in the process. The destitute had access to relief goods at little or no cost; others were