

A Brave Belgian Lady Shuts Up German Hater, Ernest Hemingway

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Talks French Where to Use Language Is to Invite an Attack—And Goes Through the Line Like Lionel Conacher.

GUARDS AND GUIDES WRITE FOR THE STAR

The following is the fifth of a series of articles on the Franco-German situation by Ernest M. Hemingway, staff correspondent of The Star.

By ERNEST M. HEMINGWAY. Special Correspondence elsewhere to The Star.

Frankfurt-on-Main, April 28.—On the frontier between Baden and Wurtemberg I found my first Hater. It was all the fault of the Belgian lady who would insist on speaking French. In the roaring dark of going through a tunnel the Belgian lady had shouted something at me. I didn't understand and she repeated, this time in French: "Please close the door."

When we came out of the tunnel the Belgian lady beamed an enormous beam and began talking French. She talked French rapidly and interesting for the next eight hours in a country where to say one French word is to invite an attack.

During those eight hours we changed trains six times. Sometimes we stood on a platform at a little junction like Schiltach with a crowd of at least six hundred people waiting for the train to come. There would be four places vacant in the train. We always got two of them. That was the Belgian lady.

"You wait with the baggage," the Belgian lady would say as the train came in sight down the track, "I will go in ahead of these boche and get two places. I will open the window and you throw the bags through. We will be comfortable."

Bucking the Line.

That was exactly the way it happened. The train stopped. The Belgian lady would go through "these boche" like the widely-advertised Mr. Lionel Conacher through the line of scrimmage. Four hundred perspiring and worthy Germans would be assaulting the door. A window would fly open. The smiling face of the Belgian lady would emerge triumphantly shouting "Voici Monsieur! The baggage. Quick!"

Some way or other I would get aboard a platform of the train and in half an hour of apologetic threading my way, get through the sardine-packed aisles of the cars to where the Belgian lady was saving my "platz."

"Where have you been, monsieur?" she would ask anxiously and loudly in French. Everyone in the car would look at us blackly. I would tell her I had been making my way through the crowd.

The Belgian lady would snort a terrific Belgian snort.

"Where would you be if you did not have me to take care of you, I ask you? Where would you be? Never mind. I am here and I will look after you."

So guided and guarded by the brave Belgian lady I crossed Baden, Wurtemberg and the Rhenish provinces in safety.

As we crossed the frontier into Wurtemberg a tall, distinguished-looking man with grey mustaches, came into the car.

An Extraordinary Moment.

"Good day," he said and looked around keenly. Then asked politely but severely: "Is there an auslander in this car?"

I thought my time had come. There are at least four special visas that no one ever bothers to get in Germany, for the lack of which you can be thrown into jail and fined anything up to a million marks. It is much better to have these visas, but if you take the time to get them you will spend eight out of every twenty-four hours in police and passport control offices, and these officials will discover that you lack nine other special and highly-necessary visas that you have never heard of and throw you into the jug on general principles.

The grey mustached man took my passport and luckily opened it to a page covered with Turkish, Bulgarian, Croatian, Greek, and other incomprehensible official stampings. It was simply too much of a mess for him. He was too much of a gentleman to go into that sort of thing, he folded the passport and handed it back with courtly gesture, first carefully identifying the brave Belgian lady, from the picture of Mrs. Hemingway in the back of the passport, as my wife!

The lady whose picture appears in the passport has bobbed hair and has just finished a very successful season of tennis on the Riviera. I will not attempt to describe her, being prejudiced. The brave Belgian lady weighs, perhaps 180 pounds, has a face like a composite Rodin's group of the Burghers of Calais waiting to be hanged, and sets this face off by a series of accordion type double chins. This evidence is offered in the case of The People vs. Passports.

The Hater in Action.

It was just after the passage of the knightly official that the Hater got into action. The Hater sat directly opposite us. He had been listening to our conversation in French, and some time back had begun to mutter. He was a small man, the Hater, with his head shaved, rosy cheeks, a big face culminating in a toothbrush mustache. The strain of his rapidly increasing hate was telling on him. It was obvious he could not hold out much longer. Then he burst.

It was just like the time a bath heater blew up on me at Genoa. I could not catch the first eight hundred words. They came too fast. The Hater's little blue eyes were just like a wild boar's. When my ears got tuned to his sending speed the conversation was going something like this:

"Dirty French swine. Rotten French change hyenas. Baby killers. Filthy attackers of defenseless populations. War swine. Swine hounds, etc."

The brave Belgian lady leaned forward into the zone of the Hater's fire and placed one of her twelve-pound fists on the Hater's knee.

Squelched By the Lady.

"The Herr is not a Frenchman," she shouted at the Hater in German, "I am not French. We talk French because it is the language of civilized people. Why don't you learn to talk French? You can't even talk German. All you can talk is profanity. Shut up!"

It seemed as though we ought to have been mobbed. But nothing happened. The Hater shut up. He muttered for a time like a subsiding geyser, but he gradually shut up and sat there hating the brave Belgian lady. Once more he broke out as he got up to leave the train at Karlsruhe. He was always too fast for me and I didn't get it.

"Qu'es-ce que c'est, ca?" I asked the brave Belgian lady.

She snorted, her most devastating Belgian snort. "He makes some charge against France. But it is not important."

The B. B. lady was traveling through Germany without a passport. She avowed that she didn't need a passport anywhere. She and her "mari" were on the same passport and he was in Switzerland on business. If anyone demanded a passport she could always tell them that she was going to meet her husband at Mannheim.

"My husband is a Jew," she said, "but he is tres gentil. One time in Frankfurt they would not let us stop the night at a hotel because he was a Jew. I showed them. We stayed there a week."

Wanted Tip on France.

We talked finance for a long time. The B. B. lady wanted me to tell her confidentially whether the dollar was going to rise or fall in France. She said it would be extremely important if her husband could know that, and she wanted me to tell her so she could tell her husband. I did my best. Luckily she hadn't my address if I am wrong.

Then we talked about the war. I asked the B. B. lady if she had been in Belgium under the occupation.

"Yes," she said.

"How was it? Pretty bad?" I asked.

The B. B. lady snorted, her most powerful Belgian snort, "I did not suffer at all."

I believe her. In fact, having traveled with the brave Belgian lady, I am greatly surprised and unable to understand how the Germans ever got into Belgium at all.

The End