

WHY MAIL CENSORSHIP IS VITAL TO BRITAIN

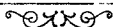
AN INTERVIEW WITH

The Rt. Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL

Minister of Blockade

Together with a brief Memorandum
on the American Note dealing with the Censorship
of Mails, by

The Rt. Hon. Sir MAURICE DE BUNSEN,
G.C.M.G., &c.



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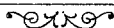
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As Published with a Preface by Arthur S. Draper of the *New York Tribune*.

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THE British Government thoroughly realises the impatience of Americans over inconveniences due to the delay of their letters to and from Europe, especially those passing between the United States and European neutrals. For months the British Government has been bending its efforts toward perfecting the system of handling mails, and the very fact that so few individual complaints have been received recently satisfies it that though the system is still imperfect it has been immensely improved.

The censorship of the mails is vital to Britain's conduct of the war, as it is necessary to check espionage, prevent merchandise entering or leaving Germany and forestall efforts to promote uprisings by the circulation of seditious

and inflammatory literature. As no country more strongly resents any curtailment of its rights and privileges than Britain, she can understand the complaints of neutrals over mail delays. No effort is being spared to improve conditions and facilitate the handling of mail until the margin of delay is reduced to a minimum.

Lord Robert Cecil at the Foreign Office to-day gave me more facts showing the magnitude of the work and further reasons why the British consider the censorship so essential.

“The mails between neutrals,” he says, “continue to be filled with merchandise. Only six weeks ago in the mails on the steamer “United States” from New York to Scandinavian ports, we found 168 packets of rubber goods, 17 of fur, two of graphite and 83 of clothing, boots and other miscellaneous articles.

MANY FILLED WITH PROPAGANDA.

“All these neutral mails also were filled with securities, transfers of money and all the machinery used by Germany in maintaining her credit. They further were filled with German

propaganda, designed for the promotion of sedition and rebellion, not only in countries governed by Germany's enemies, but in neutrals as well.

“ So much has this been so that the Press in the Dutch East Indies has stated that the people there could not well regret Britain's action, since the mails were used as a channel for inflammatory literature calculated to stir up the natives of Java and Sumatra, no less than those of Singapore, India.

“ But even of more vital importance is the fact that through these mails, by which the whole system of German espionage is conducted, again and again its centres established in neutral countries have gravely endangered the safety of the Empire. I don't believe any of the neutrals wish to deny our right to unload and examine the mails unless it be those persons who base their protest not on the interests of their own country, but on those of Germany, such people, for instance, as the German-American Chamber of Commerce at New York, who recently petitioned the German Government to exact a penal war contribution from the

Belgians as a retaliation for each seizure of mails by Britain.

CENSORSHIP WORK IMPROVED.

“Naturally, when we first adopted the present policy, our organisation was not as efficient as it might have been, but I am sure that the criticisms levelled against us now are wholly inaccurate. The organisation of this censorship under the War Office is quite a distinct censorship from that of mails passing through this country or designed for this country. An enormous staff is employed, so that now mails amounting to a thousand bags, taken off ships in southern ports, are in the hands of the censors within twenty-four hours from the time of unloading. Mails taken off ships at Kirkwall or Lerwick are being received by the censor within forty-eight hours.

“We can guarantee that within forty-eight hours after deliveries to the censors all mails will be handed to our post office to be re-forwarded. Consequently, if undue delay appears to have occurred in forwarding any letter, this must be attributed not to delay by the censors

but by infrequent and uncertain sailings of the mail boats. We have given pledges to this fact again and again, as the neutral governments now know, for in several cases we have re-forwarded without examination mails which, owing to the pressure of work, the censors could not examine within the three days which we hitherto allowed for operation.

“The postal censors are as keenly desirous of preventing any inconvenience to neutrals as the Foreign Office, and the military authorities have taken energetic steps to that end.

“We are adopting special methods to safeguard special classes of mail. For instance, we have informed all neutral governments that we hold ready at every port of call special censors to pass through immediately special mail bags containing shipping documents without taking them off the ship.”

FEW SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS RECEIVED.

“Have you received many complaints of delay?” I asked.

“Yes, but almost always of a very vague, general nature. Both the Foreign Office and

postal censors have received only a very few specific inquiries as to particular missing or delayed mails. This is remarkable because in the case of mails passing through this country in transit and mails destined to this country, as to which our right of censorship is unquestioned, inquiries have been frequent.

“ I think I can say that in every case we have been able to return a satisfactory reply, confessing inadvertent delays where they have occurred, but in a vast majority of the cases we have been able to prove that no such delay occurred.

“ Take two instances. We had a strong protest about three letters which had taken thirty-three days from New York to Holland. We were able to show that all except five days of the thirty-three were accounted for by the fact that these letters had missed the mail in New York for which they had been intended.

“ Recently we had inquiries from a New York banking firm as to a large number of registered letters for Holland which were missing. We are still checking the fate of these letters in detail, but up to the present our inquiry shows

that the letters, although addressed to Holland, were in fact occupied with the transfer to enemy countries by European money orders of what amounts in the aggregate to a large sum, and we are entitled to regard such transactions as contraband.

“ We feel sure we can satisfy those who now suffer under a sense of injury to themselves, personally, or to their business. It is our desire by investigation to drag into the light any defect in our organisation and to show neutrals who have the right to ask, that our organisation is in fact a considerate and efficient one.”

Memorandum on the American Note
dealing with the Censorship of Mails,

BY

**The Rt. Hon. Sir MAURICE DE BUNSEN,
G.C.M.G., &c.**

The following is a Note given by the Right Hon. SIR MAURICE DE BUNSEN, of the Foreign Office, on the 15th June, 1916, on the American Note dealing with the Censorship of Mails:—

The Note is being examined by the British and French Governments in consultation. The views of the French Government have not yet been received in London and it is therefore impossible to make any public pronouncement upon the contents of the Note. Meanwhile, it may be pointed out that the United States lay special stress upon the necessity for expedition in dealing with the neutral mails, so as to occasion the minimum of delay and to avoid inconvenience to American interests. On this point, a memorandum was communicated to the United

States Ambassador here on April 14th, explaining that the postal censors had perfected the organisation of a separate Department to deal with such mails, and that, in view of this improved organisation, it was possible to assure the Government of the United States that, in the absence of wholly exceptional circumstances, the total delay caused to the ordinary correspondence of neutrals from the time that the mails are unloaded from the ships carrying them to the time when they are delivered by the censors to the British Post Office for transmission to their destination would not in future be more than from three to five days. The British Government have not been content with this mere assurance, but are every day attempting still further to perfect the organisation of the censorship, and they believe that in the future American citizens will have less and less cause to complain of delays in the passage of their correspondence with neutral European countries.

The British Government wish particularly to emphasize their readiness to receive from American citizens enquiries with regard to particular delayed or missing letters together with

particulars such as the date of mailing, the ship on which the mails were carried, and, in the case of registered letters, the registered number of the package, in order that they may enquire into each case thoroughly and at once avert misunderstandings and detect lapses in the organisation where such have occurred. They wish it to be realised in the United States what an enormous organisation is needed to deal with thousands of mail bags in a few hours, and the extent of the success which has already been achieved in dealing expeditiously with all this mass of correspondence.

The American Note embodies various difficult legal arguments, and the fact that it takes the Allied Governments some time to examine, consult together, and answer, does not in the least affect the energy with which the British Government is attempting to meet the practical needs of the situation in a business-like spirit by perfecting their organisation, and thus preventing hardships to neutrals resulting from the application of principles as to which the United States Note admits that they are in substantial agreement with the British and French Governments.

