

**BOTTLED UP IN BELGIUM:
THE LAST DELEGATE'S
INFORMAL STORY**

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Bottled Up in Belgium: The Last Delegate's Informal Story by Arthur Bartlett Maurice

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ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

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PART I

GETTING INTO THE BOTTLE

1

BOTTLED UP IN BELGIUM

I

BOTTLE VISIONS

THERE have been times when I thought that the people who have been at home have been the ones who have seen things and experienced emotions. There were days in February and March, 1917, when the men in Belgium had a sense of being far away from the real march of events. For the thrills they had to depend upon the meager bits of news that leaked in. They brought blazing visions. Across the Atlantic, in the streets, the newsboys were

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crying the extras. The flag was being unrolled at every window. In the theaters the audiences were rising to the first bars of the National Anthem. Platform orators were hailing a land united, "From the rockbound coast of Maine to the Everglades of Florida." We could not sing The Star Spangled Banner or cheer for the flag. We were only shut up in the Bottle, a highly charged electric wire to the North, the battling armies to the South, the forbidden land of military operations to the West, and to the East—Germany! We wondered just what day the crash was coming and what it was going to bring. "We may all be hanged yet—or shot," said the Director, in a moment of smiling geniality. Brand Whitlock said that the situation reminded him of the old farmer in the Middle West whose wife had been long bedridden. "I do hope," he said, "that she gets well—or some-

GETTING INTO THE BOTTLE

thing!" We speculated about our chances of eventual refuge in friendlier surroundings. We compared notes of what we had heard of the comforts and discomforts of the various prison camps. Sometimes, in moments of American flippancy, we made bets about our destination. Promises of safe conduct were in the bond, they were even in writing, but somehow we had lost confidence in scraps of paper.

It was understood that in entering the American Service for Relief in Belgium, a delegate was to write nothing about the conditions of that country resulting from the actions of the occupying military authorities until six months after the expiration of the war. I do not know whether that condition still holds, but I am assuming that it does. So I am leaving for others, of longer service and far wider experience, to tell, when they see fit, of the friction and strife,