(1961) Incidents in connection with the visit of Lord Lester to Berlin in connection with the Christian Science Church

(25)

The years that I spent in Germany after Hitler came into power were not easy. I had very real responsibilities aside from those in the Consulate General. The Consulate General was a big establishment. It really fell to us in the Consulate General to do most of the reporting, not only on the economic and business developments in Germany but also on the political developments as well carrying on the tremendous responsibilities of the Visa Section, which was under such pressure on account of the many distressed persons wishing to leave the country. We had all these incidents involving American citizens, many of them were heart breaking. I was usually at my office at 8:30 in the morning and very often did not leave until 10 or 11 in the evening.

The life had its compensations. One of them was the association which I had with the American newspaper men in Berlin. They were not only a responsible group but for the most part a highly intelligent group. I shall always remember the conversations with Knickerbocker, Edgar Maurer, Markham, Kuhn and many others. In those days Lochner, who represented I believe the Associated Press or the United Press, I do not recall which, was really a very faithful and correct correspondent and had access into high places. He afterwards turned sour and his reporting lost its value. I saw these American correspondents constantly in my office, in their homes and in all kinds of places. They had an extraordinary appreciation of the developing events in Germany and they did a wonderful reporting job to their newspapers. I could talk with them with the most complete frankness. Not one of them ever violated any confidence which I placed in them. It was very useful because it was so important that our public opinion in the United States be adequately and accurately informed concerning what was really happening in Germany, and this our American correspondents did almost without exception.

In a separate memorandum I shall have to cover the activities of some of these correspondents, who were really brilliant, and also give some incidents, such as incidents connected with Edgar ~~Maurer,~~ Mowrer which showed the difficulties

under which they worked and the dangers under which they were, including definite physical danger.

The purpose of this memorandum is to set forth incidents in connection with the visit of Lord Astor to Berlin in connection with the Christian Science churches. I saw one day in the newspapers that the Christian Science churches in Germany had been closed. We all took this as a matter of course as it was merely one of the many steps which the government was taking against churches, Lutheran and Catholic as well. That they should close the few Christian Science churches in the country and take over their property seemed to be quite a normal procedure in this disordered and abnormal country. I made the usual report to the Department by despatch.

A few days after I had forwarded the despatch on the subject, Markham, the correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor in Germany and who was stationed in Berlin, came to see me. I saw him rather less than I did men like ~~Maurer~~ Mower and Knickerbocker and Lochner and others. He was a very quiet, reserved and soft-spoken man. He said that he had come to see me with regard to the closing of the Christian Science churches. He asked me if I had taken note of it and I said I had already forwarded a despatch to the Department of State. He said that the reason he had come in to see me was that he had word from Lord Astor in London that he was coming to Berlin with Mr. Braithwaite, a member of Parliament, and another member of Parliament whose name I do not recall at the moment but which I can get from despatches I wrote at the time from Berlin. He said that they were coming over to see the British Ambassador and through the British Ambassador they were going to get in touch with the appropriate officers of the German government in order to secure the opening of the churches and the return of the property. I told Markham that I doubted very much if they would be able to accomplish anything, but that perhaps after all it wouldn't be too difficult to get the churches reopened if Astor and these two members of Parliament came. I said that the chances were that as the Germans

knew that Astor was the principal owner of the London Times and as they were endeavoring to lull Britain asleep, that it was just the sort of a gesture which they would make to reopen the churches. Markham said that that hadn't occurred to him but it was quite a possibility. He asked me if he could keep in touch with me during the visit of Astor. I told him that I would be very glad to have him keep in touch with me.

Four or five days afterwards Markham came in to see me and said that he was coming at the request of Lord Astor. He said that on their arrival in Berlin, Astor and Braithwaite and this other member of Parliament had called on the British Ambassador and had asked him to secure for them an interview with Frank or Franck, who was I believe Minister of the Interior. In any event, he was the one who had charge of these matters affecting the churches and schools. The British Embassy had been endeavoring to get an appointment with Franck for Astor for more than four days and had not been able to get an appointment. He had suggested to Astor that I might be able to get an appointment for them. Astor did not like the idea very much, he said, of going to see an American about this, but as he was becoming frustrated at not being able to see anybody in the government he was quite willing to come to see me. I told Markham that I was not anxious to get mixed up in the matter, and after all Astor and Braithwaite and this other man were British subjects and it was not altogether according to the book for me to make an arrangement, but these were strange and difficult times and one had to do the things which one thought might be useful. I repeated to Markham what I had said, that I was really not very anxious to do anything about it because I felt now pretty sure that if Astor did go to see Franck that Franck would reopen the churches and that it would make Astor believe and Braithwaite and this other man, that the Germans were really reasonable. Markham agreed that that might be the result, but nevertheless he wished me to see Astor. Lord Astor, Mr. Braithwaite and this other member of Parliament came into see me. They were alone. Markham was not with them. We had a few

minutes of pleasant conversation, as Astor knew that I knew William Phillips very well, who was then Under Secretary of State. The mother of Mrs. Phillips had been an Astor. Her maiden name was Drayton and Drayton had married an Astor. I could see that it was very difficult for Astor, as a British subject, to ask the American Consul General to arrange for an interview with Franck. Like all Britishers, Astor did not have very much use for the Consular Service, It was a sort of inferior service and Consuls were sort of inferior human beings. Besides that, it was difficult for him to say that he had had this difficulty in getting an appointment through the British Ambassador and had to come to the American Consul General to ask him to help him. Realizing all this and to save him any embarrassment, I told him that Markham had told me that they were having difficulties in presenting their problem about the reopening of churches to the government authorities. I said that I knew Franck, who was the minister in charge of matters of this kind, and that if he, Lord, Astor, so wished, I would be very glad to ~~XXXXXX~~ arrange for him to be received. Astor said that that was very kind but that it might take a good deal of time. I said that I thought it would be rather simple. I told Astor very frankly that I was not very eager to do it because I felt pretty sure that if they went to see Frank that Frank would reopen the churches. Astor looked at me with a gooddeal of surprise. I said, "Yes, he will reopen the churches because he knows that you are the principal owner of the London Times and that Mr. Braithwaite are important members of the Parliament. They are trying to court you and they are trying to make friends, and especially do they want friends in the British Parliament and in the British press. I am afraid it won't be just the best thing to do, but at the same time I think I must do it. I could see a look of astonishment on Astor's face and those of his associates.

I asked them if they wished me to arrange for an appointment with Franck and they said that they would appreciate it very much. I could see a look of skepticism on their faces as to whether I would be able to do anything about it.

I picked up the receiver of my telephone and asked for the Ministry of Interior. When I had the Ministry I asked to be put in touch with the Minister, Dr. Franck, and said that it was Messersmith, the American Consul General, calling. Within one minute I had Dr. Franck on the telephone. I said to him that I had in my office Lord Astor, who he knew was a member of the House of Lords, and a very distinguished British subject. I also had with him in my office Mr. Braithwaite and this other member of Parliament, who were distinguished members of the House of Commons. They were all three members of the Christian Science Church. They had come to Berlin for the purpose of talking to him about the reopening of the churches and the return of their property. I said to him that he might recall that Lord Astor was one of the owners of the London Times. They would like very much to see him as soon as possible, as they had already been in Berlin a number of days. I could hardly finish what I was saying on the telephone about Astor and his associates before Dr. Franck started to tell me that he would be very glad to see them, and I asked him when he could see them and he said, "Let them come right over." I told him that they would be right over.

I turned to Astor and I said, "Dr. Franck will be very glad to see you and if you and Mr. Braithwaite and Mr. X will go over to the Ministry of Interior now, and I will send somebody with you so you will get to Dr. Franck's office without any trouble, he will receive you immediately." I said, "I am very confident that he will tell you that they will reopen the churches immediately and return the property, and you will go back to England, and I must repeat again that I am afraid that this is not a good day's work for me, because I feel sure that this action of the German authorities which will be taken by them for very special reasons will be taken by you as an indication of reasonableness on their part and will lead to misunderstandings in the future, and it is very important that we not have misunderstandings as to what these people are like."

Astor thanked me in rather a dry way for having made the appointment. I could see that all three of them were utterly astonished that I could pick up the

telephone and talk with Franck in a minute, when the British Ambassador had been endeavoring to get in touch with Dr. Franck for days to make such an appointment and had not been able to do anything about it. It was not up to me to tell them that the British Ambassador probably did not know Dr. Franck and didn't have relationships of the character which made this approach possible. I couldn't say also that they had a lot of wholesome respect for the American Embassy and for the American Consulate General because of what we were doing to protect American citizens, and that they probably did not have the same respect for the British Embassy because the British Embassy was not taking the strong measures which could be expected when incidents of the same character happened to British subjects. I couldn't say to them that in dealing with these people one had to be tough and rough, just as they were, but that was the only kind of language and treatment that they understood.

Within an hour Markham called me from the hotel where Lord Astor was staying to say that Astor and Braithwaite and X were very happy. They had been to see Dr. Franck who had been perfectly charming with them, and had told them that orders would be given that day for the reopening of the churches and the return of the property. Lord Astor wished to thank me for what I had done. I repeated to Markham that I felt I had done a bad job.

That afternoon the newspapers carried an item to the effect that the Christian Science churches had been reopened and their property returned. I knew that it would not be long before they would be closed again, but I knew that lots of things would happen to the Catholic church and the Lutheran church before they would do anything about the Christian Science churches. I knew that they would let the Christian Science churches alone as long as they possibly felt that they could. They wanted to make Astor and these other people feel that they were keeping their word and to have their good will, and this is just the way it happened. I think it was about a year afterwards when the Nazi government, feeling itself so strong in its position and caring less and less about Britain, simply

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closed the churches again and took their property, and that was the end of it. Whether Astor took any further steps to help in the matter I do not know. I never heard of anything further. What I had done in this matter kept haunting me, because I always felt that as Lord Astor was the owner of the Times, that I had helped the Germans to give him a wrong impression of what they were really after and what their ways of working were. They had merely carried through what they did about the opening of the churches and returning the property to endeavor to make, for the time being at least, an instrument of Astor. Later events showed that my forebodings in this respect were not unjustified.

When rewriting this memorandum, I should take note that when I spoke to Dr. Franck on the telephone to arrange for Lord Astor and his associates to come and call on him, I explained to him that although the Christian Science churches were not well known in Germany and the membership was relatively small, that it had a considerable membership in the United States and in Great Britain and that many of the members of the Christian Science church both in my country and in Great Britain were quite important people. This was undoubtedly one of the things which Dr. Franck kept in mind in reaching his quick decision to reopen the churches and restore the property. I should also take note in rewriting the memorandum that the final action with regard to the taking over again of the Christian Science churches and their property was probably due to the pressure of individuals of the Nazi party who found some financial advantage in carrying through this action.

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