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*Viscount Halifax to Sir L. Oliphant (Brussels).*

(No. 13.)

Sir,

*Foreign Office, January 8, 1940.*

I ASKED the Belgian Ambassador to come and see me to-day, and told him that about a week ago His Majesty's Government had obtained the impression from certain quarters in Italy that, while in November last they had felt fairly sure that there would be no attack on Belgium and Holland by Germany, they now felt less sure. I added that this information was supported by other information which had come to us from two secret sources, and that the estimated date for the attack was some time in February. I told the Ambassador that we had all lived on dates for some time past, and that His Majesty's Government had no desire to be perpetually crying "wolf." I understood that the French Government for their part considered these rumours as possibly connected with some further peace offensive.

2. None the less I thought it well to pass on this information and to suggest that, as we saw it, the strongest insurance against such a danger would be for the Belgian Government to declare now that if the Netherlands were attacked Belgium would be drawn in. I said that I hoped it was not presumptuous of me to say so much, but it seemed to me that some such statement by the Belgian Government might strengthen the hand of the German generals who, I understood, were on the whole opposed to an invasion of the Low Countries, and whose opponents habitually declared that the Dutch were divided and that the Belgians would not mind if Holland were invaded.

3. Baron Cartier thanked me for giving him this information and reminded me that the Belgian Counsellor had recently passed on to Mr. Strang somewhat similar information which the Belgian Government had received. Speaking personally, he said that he quite took my point and that he thoroughly agreed that some such declaration as I had suggested would be the most effective deterrent to the German Government. In his view it would be highly dangerous for the Belgian Government to say nothing, and the sooner they said something the better. He promised to find some way of passing on what I had said to the appropriate quarter in Belgium. He himself was shortly going to Brussels, but he did not think that this was a matter which could wait. He said that he thought that it was perhaps a good thing that the Netherlands Government had recently declared that Holland would fight if she were invaded, since the Belgian Government, in making a statement on the lines proposed, might be regarded as simply keeping in step with the Netherlands Government.

4. The Ambassador then remarked that the Finns had rendered humanity a great service by destroying the bog of Russian strength. He supposed, however, that, since His Majesty's Government were sending so much help to Finland, they were unable to help Belgium by sending material. He wished to point out, however, that German aircraft repeatedly flew over Belgian territory and, for lack of anti-aircraft guns, the Belgians could do nothing. If only we would sell them a few anti-aircraft guns, they would be well utilised, and he thought he need hardly assure me that it would be, incidentally, to our own advantage to do so. I said that I would do what I could, by mentioning this matter in the right quarter, and that I certainly appreciated the importance of what he said.

5. Before he left, I asked Baron Cartier his opinion of the new Belgian Cabinet. He told me that, besides M. Spaak, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice were both excellent men. It was his country's misfortune,

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