

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

### Chapter X. THE INVASION.

ON a peace footing the staff of the Legation consisted of a secretary, who at the time was Mr. Hugh S. Gibson, and a clerk, or, as they say in diplomatic circles in Europe, a *chancelier*, Mr. Alexander P. Gruger. That Monday morning, however, I secured the services of Maître Gaston de Leval, a distinguished international lawyer of Brussels, who for many years had been legal adviser to the American Ministers, and by a fortunate chance, Miss Caroline Lamer, of the State Department at Washington, happened just then to be in Brussels on her holiday, and I had her assigned to duty at the Legation.

Crowded as they were with their imperative exactions, the hours were so heavy with tragedy that they moved slowly by ; in each of them one lived a lifetime or an age.

Behind the *persiennes* of the Ministries over in the Rue de la Loi the lights had burned ail night, and alter long conferences with the King at the Palace the Ministers, Baron de Broqueville at their head, had drawn up their calm and stately reply to Germany's ultimatum ; it was delivered promptly to Herr von Bülow. But Germany had not even awaited Belgium's response to her ultimatum and had invaded Belgian soil that morning at Visé.

I was routed out early by a telephone message from the French Legation asking if I would receive Monsieur Klobukowski, the French Minister. I was clown by eight, but M. Klobukowski sent M. Fontarce, the secretary of the French Legation, in his stead. Poor Fontarce ! He was very haggard and pale, with heavy dark circles under his eyes ; he had not been to bed at all. Indeed there had been no sleep over at the French Legation ; it was crowded day and night by excited members of the French colony, as ours was by Americans, yet how much more crowded — there were thirty thousand French in Brussels. It was, somehow, terrible to see the agitation, the tragic expression, in M. Fontarce's mobile face ; even his beard seemed to have grown more grey, and his brow was moist with perspiration, matting clown the locks of his banged hair.

He remains for me somehow, in the memory I have of him as he sat there, leaning anxiously forward over the edge of the desk, the incarnation of the demoralization and intensity of those terrible times ; he was in agony, as was his country.

He nodded sadly in affirmation, even before I could put the question he must have read in my eyes — we were, somehow, still hoping selfishly that we might escape the horror — and : " *Oui*," he said, "*c'est la guerre !* "

He presented his chief's compliments and excuses and wished to know if I would take over the French Legation. I was pleased, and told him so. To one to whom the word France meant what it did to me, sine that youthful phase, common, I suspect, to most boys, when I had pored over every book I could find that relates to Napoleon — and then the French language, French literature, French art — it was like an accolade.

When he had gone I went upstairs and told my wife that we were in for it, that war was certain, but I was too busy all that morning to notice how the family were affected — until at noon my wife told me that Aunt Sarah had decided to go home ; she was sadly shaker. Great bustling about then, rushing up and down stairs, servants flying everywhere and clamouring Americans in the corridors below ! We got Aunt Sarah off at one o'clock, bundling her and her bags into the motor, her

steamertrunks on top, and Alice, her English maid, weeping, bidding the servants good-bye and clambering into the motor after her mistress, her black gown all unbuttoned clown the back, revealing her white undergarments. . .

Monsieur Klobukowski called during the afternoon to thank me for having agreed to take over his Legation in case of eventualities. He was smiling, as he usually was, and showed none of the signs of the strain exhibited by M. Fontarce that morning.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

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