

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XII. The *naïvetés* of History.

AT the Foreign Office I talked with Count Léo d'Ursel a few moments, and as we came out and were crossing the courtyard, Count van der Straaten-Ponthos, in shirt-sleeves, thrust his head out of the window of the little bureau ami asked *mé* to come in. I went, and he shut the door, leaving Maître de Leval outside. Count van der Straaten-Ponthos had heard that I had taken over the German Legation, and asked me about the terrils ; while de Leval, outside, was talking with M. van den Heuvel, one of the Belgian Ministers of State and former Minister of Justice. M. van den Heuvel had asked him :

" *Eh bien ... et vos amis les Anglais ?* "

" *Mais, ne marchent-ils pas avec nous ?* " said de Leval.

" *Nous sommes sans nouvelles.* "

" *La protection de l'Angleterre a toujours été mon évangile, et j'y croirai toujours.* "

Van den Heuvel went away saying :

" *Espérons que votre évangile sera le vrai . . .* "

On our way back to the Legation we stopped at the British Legation. Sir Francis was at his big desk, rather depressed, I thought.

" I have no news," he said ; " I know nothing."

Sir Francis asked me if I would take over his Legation, and I told him that I should consider it an honour.

It was the fourth invitation of the sort that I had received.

I went home, but dinner was no sooner over than I had to turn out again. The telegraph office had refused our cipher dispatches. I drove over to the Foreign Office, and on the sidewalk, coming out, were M. Blancas, my Argentine, and M. Barros-Moreira, my Brazilian, colleague.

" *Vos dépêches ont été refusées ?* " they asked in unison.

" *Oui ... et les vôtres ?* "

" *Oui . . . , Oui . . .* "

We went together and made protests, but poor Davignon was helpless. He spread his hands wide, shrugged his shoulders.

" *Ce n'est pas de ma faute. je le regrette beaucoup mais . . . c'est la guerre ... vous savez.* "

" *C'est la guerre !* " How often was I to hear that phrase as an excuse for everything that went wrong in life !

I went over to the French Legation, ablaze with light and all excitement. Prince Koudacheff was there in dinner-jacket, pacing the floor, his grey pompadour bristling, his sharp eyes sparkling behind his steel-rimmed, insecure pince-nez. He was scowling and winking nervously, and smoking Russian cigarettes incessantly ; and intellectually he was very much alive, full of his Russian humour. I asked him if he too had had trouble with his ciphers, and I was relieved when he said " Yes".

M. Klobukowski was called back to his desk by the jingle of the telephone, and we were still. M. Klobukowski began talking about a battle — called for a block of paper and pencil, took notes — and we listened. He finished and told us that the French had won a victory, but where I did not know, nor do I know now. It was one of those little incidents so big at the moment, so insignificant afterwards — the little *naïvetés* of history. Prince Koudacheff talked about my taking over all the Legations ; he was very droll.

"Why," he said "you'll be the greatest Minister in the world ; you'll be

representing America and all Europe ! "

Just then Count Léo d'Ursel, of the Foreign Office, happened to come in, and Koudacheff, Klobukowski, and I attacked him about the cipher messages. He promised that there should be no more trouble on that score.

And then I strolled home at midnight — after what a day ! — in the wonderful moonlight . . .

I stood for a moment, before going to bed, at the window that overlooks the courtyard and my neighbour's formal garden, peaceful, with deep purple shadows and the moonlight. Is that moon also looking down on the faces of wounded soldiers ?

On such a night Troilus climbed the Trojan walls

And looked away toward the Grecian tents.

How many ages that moon had looked down on tents and soldiers ! And if, as Prince Koudacheff could jokingly say, I really represented America and all Europe, how soon and how simply I should see to it that it looked down on tents and soldiers and wars no more, as it was looking down that night on the upturned faces of the wounded in that battle off there of which Klobukowski had been hearing over the telephone !

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