

## BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

### A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

#### Chapter XV. REPATRIATING GERMANS.

**GIBSON** had driven away from the Legation that evening with the little German-American family to the Cirque Royal, the woman cowering all the way in terror in the bottom of the car, and he and Nasmith were up all that night sending off the Germans.

The woman's fears, of course, were groundless. When the motor drew up to the Cirque Royal and the crowds pressed around it, Gibson took the child and held it aloft and said :

" The Belgians don't eat babies ! "

A big gendarme put forth his hands, took the boy, and said : " No, nor their fathers or mothers either ! "

And so he and the child led the way into the great Circus. There nearly five thousand Germans were gathered, twice the number expected. They were all in excitement and terror, and Gibson had to go about reassuring them. The officers of the gendarmes and the Garde Civique with their own money bought chocolate to give to the children, and later Madame Carton de Wiart, wife of the Belgian Minister of Justice, came with hot milk and other comforts for the women and children.

The Belgian authorities promptly provided additional coaches, and after midnight the transfer of the refugees to the station began. It was carried on without incident, and that morning at daylight the last of the four long trains drew out of the Gare du Nord bearing the Germans toward Esschen on the Dutch frontier.

But the Germans continued to gather ; we had to procure other trains that night and for several nights thereafter. Mr. Ethelbert Watts, our Consul-General, had been in France on his vacation when the war came on, and succeeded only after many adventures by sea and land in returning to Brussels, coming around by way of the coast, Knokke, and Ostend. He took the matter then in charge, and with the aid of Gibson, Nasmith, and de Leval, finally sent off most of the Germans to Holland. There had been 5000 that first night and there were 2,500 the next night, 1,200 the night thereafter, 400 the next, and so on in a diminishing ratio until all of those who wished to go had left.

The action of the Belgian Government in this emergency was superb in spirit and in execution, and the population nobly generous, and I could not resist the temptation to write a note to M. Carton de Wiart expressing my appreciation and admiration. Not a German was injured during those days, and no more serious harm was done than that resulting from the breaking of windows in the first ebullition of excitement. The German proprietor of the great department store known as Tietz did indeed consider that an auspicious moment to adorn his place of business in the crowded Rue Neuve with German flags, and they were promptly tore down; but nothing more serious occurred. The Burgomaster of Brussels, M. Adolphe Max, issued a proclamation appealing to the population to remain calm \*, while the Minister of the Interior published a statement explaining the laws and customs of war. And that day, Friday, a state of siege was proclaimed.

I had a call from Ouang Yong Pao, who with one of his secretaries, Shu-Tze, came to me to ask what the colleagues had decided to do at the meeting the night before. I explained, and told him that I should remain in Brussels. He said he would do as I did. Shu-Tze, the little secretary, spoke of the dangers one might incur at Antwerp, but I reminded him of his

diplomatic extra-territoriality and privileges. He leaned forward, and his face wore a curious smile as he said :

*" Mais les canons n'ont pas les yeux ! "*

**Brand WITHLOCK**

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

\* « Nous adressons un nouvel appel au calme et au sang-froid de la population. Toute atteinte portée à la propriété de sujets allemands, toute violence contre ceux-ci, pourrait être le prétexte de graves représailles. Les citoyens belges qui commettraient de pareils actes, se rendraient donc coupables d'un véritable crime contre la patrie.

Il convient de s'abstenir de tout sévices à l'égard des sujets allemands qui seraient soupçonnés ou convaincus d'espionnage et qui devraient être arrêtés de ce chef. Il est du plus haut intérêt de laisser à l'autorité militaire seule le pouvoir d'exercer les châtiments que comportent de semblables faits. »