

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

### Chapter XVIII. ENGLISH AND AMERICAN.

WE saw no English, however, other than those in the swift motors that dashed eastward through the Bois ; no other French than those tired cavalymen de Leval had seen going along the boulevard, drooping with fatigue over their horses' necks. The newspapers might announce that no official acknowledgment of the surrender of the forts of Liège had been made, that the "*situation reste favorable,*" "*les forts tiennent toujours* " ; the rumours that flew from mouth to mouth were otherwise, and people knew ; the slow, persistent truth percolated silently.

Then one day for the first time there were symptoms in the Press of the seriousness of the situation ; the three o'clock edition of *Le Soir* had an allusion to grave events, and instantly, all over town, there were rumours of a German advance — the invaders were drawing near, the Uhlans were seen at this place and that !

The hours wore away. One got somehow through the day, the spirits declining toward evening with the sun, for then the rumours began to pour into the Legation brought by the fugitive who came for consolation, or by the timorous who came for encouragement or information. They whispered more and more of awful atrocities, hideous deeds, committed near Tirlemont ; the Germans were said to have sacked the peasants' houses, killed the men, thrust bayonets through the breasts of girls, hung a Belgian soldier up by the thumbs. I went to bed that night feeling like the sad Pestalozzi.

At the English church that last Sunday morning the organ was not in commission. The organist played on a little harmonium and the choir broke down every few minutes, but services were never held under circumstances more impressive. The atmosphere was heavy with the emotions of the hour. " Give peace in our time, O Lord ! " read the little curate, and there was a unisonant sigh. At the prayer for King George V there was a pregnant silence ; when the curate added, " and for Albert, King of the Belgians," he paused, the silence deepened ; and then, as he went on, " and for Thy servant, the President of the United States of America," one felt — why not avow it even if one is Anglo-Saxon ? — one felt close to tears. The citrate, instead of a sermon of his own, read — rather wisely, I thought — a published sermon by the Bishop. It may have suffered an attenuating process in the transmission, but there was one good sentence in it, not by the curate, nor even by the Bishop, but by Lord Kitchener, who had said to his men after the South African campaign : "*You have tasted the salt of life, and you will not forget its flavour.*"

There are times, there are certain moments in life, when the old prayers, the old hymns, suddenly acquire a new meaning and afford a consolation that no other words can give. What floods of memory out of far-off youth, out of that far-off land ! The mentality of our race is formed, our very being is saturated, with the literature of the King James version of the English Bible, of the Prayer Book, and of Shakespeare. The intellectual processes and the mode of instinctive thought and impressions of thousands, who could not cite you a line out of any one of them, are all due to those three collections out of the golden age of English literature. It is that which singles out our race from all others and makes us different ; the French have Molière and Racine in place of Shakespeare, but in its effect on their mentality they have, instead of a King James version, the fables of La Fontaine. And

that morning when the world was falling asunder all about them, it was this great common heritage that drew the English and the Americans in that congregation, somehow, together, so that as we came out of the church into the narrow little Rue de Stassart and Sir Francis's motor rolled up flying a little British flag, and Sir Francis entered his limousine, the men of the congregation uncovered as he drove away, and as the car came up flying the American flag the Englishmen uncovered again.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

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