

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

### Chapter XIX. HER MAJESTY.

I Had asked an audience of the Queen for Miss Boyle O'Reilly, who had a message of sympathy from America, and that Sunday afternoon word came that the Queen would grant the audience at 4.30. We drove to the Palace, not that day to the *grille d'honneur* but to the entrance in the quiet, shady little Rue Brialmont, there where the high wall shuts in the Palace grounds. The military guard was on the *qui vive*, and, once admitted, we were met by an old major-domo with black mutton-chop whiskers and shown up to a little waiting-room, where we were received by one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting, the Countess d'Oultremont. We had to wait, and we talked for a long time — about the war, of course, the Countess very much moved, her eyes filling with tears every few minutes. But after a while, accompanied by the good Doctor Le Boeuf, who had done so much for the Red Cross, we were conducted clown the long, red-carpeted corridor to the Queen's private apartments and shown into the little blue drawing-room. And presently the Queen entered. She wore a simple blue gown with transparent sleeves and a white, low, girlish collar ; not a jewel, only her wedding-ring on her hand, and her hair dressed in delicate simplicity. She was calm with a certain gravity, and her blue eyes were wistful in the little smile that hovered about her lips. There was no ceremony at this rather unusual presentation. . .

We were walking down the long state apartments with their glittering chandeliers, ail vastly different then from their aspect when last I had seen them, thronged with men in brilliant uniforms at a Court ball. They were filled that day with long lines of hospital cots, the white coverlets already laid back — waiting for the wounded. At the foot of each cot a Little Belgian flag was fastened.

"*The children, put them there,*" said the Queen.

Up and down through these long apartments we paced, in that model hospital into which, all within eight days, the Queen had transformed her Palace. Gone the old stateliness and luxury ; nothing now but those white cots, operating-rooms, tables with glass tops, white porcelain utensils, even an X-ray apparatus — with all its sinister implications. Now and then a nurse would appear, dropping a curtsy as the Queen passed.

In our tour we found ourselves in one of the entrances facing the Park.

"*The diplomatic entrance*", said the Queen with a sad smile ; "*all closed now !*"

Back up the grand staircase then, and at the door of the Queen's apartments she withdrew, pausing as the door closed behind her to turn and make a little gesture of farewell. It was to be nearly three years before I saw Her Majesty again.

It must have been that same day that I had the telegram from London announcing that two hundred American newspaper correspondents were about to descend capon us in force ! I went at once to the Foreign Office to deliver the ultimatum announcing this latest invasion, and to ask the Count d'Ursel to prepare a *douche chaude*, and not a *douche froide*, for them. The correspondents arrived on Monday morning, not two hundred but two-Richard Harding Davis and Gerald Morgan. I went with them to the Foreign Office and presented them to the Baron van der Elst, and then we drove to the old Gendarmerie Nationale in the Boulevard de Waterloo for their *laissez-passer* and brassards. The scene was one that might have marked the French Revolution. The Gendarmerie is a great white block of a

building, simple and severe, and French in aspect.\_ The great courtyard was crowded with wagons and horses and anxious people, and around a deal table sat soldiers, wearing the little *bonnet de police* with its gay tassel dangling clown on the forehead. There were bottles of ink and bottles of paste — and there should have been bottles of wine to make the scene wholly and satisfyingly revolutionary. We sat there for a long time in the sunlight while Davis and Morgan were given their passports and brassards, and then, in a great yellow motor-car, they went away out past the Porte de Hal on the road to Louvain. Gibson had gone on a similar expedition with Frederick Palmer, already on the ground, to see the sights of war.

I was very tired, and after luncheon I went up to my chamber and stretched myself out on a *chaise longue* to rest, but no sooner had I settled myself than Joseph knocked and, coming in, handed me a message. It was from the Foreign Office, informing me that the Government was going to Antwerp that night and that trains had been provided for the diplomatic corps. No more *chaise longue* alter that ! I went downstairs and telephoned to Villalobar ; he came over and again we discussed the situation, deciding to stay at all events, and to act in harmony and concert.

Davis came back to town that night, having got as far as Wavre, there to be turned back by the Belgians : He had seen no Germans but had his first sight of the smart Belgian cavalry ; it was only a glimpse — the curtains had parted for an instant and then were drawn again across the stage that was being set for the mighty tragedy. And that night came John McCutcheon, Irvin Cobb, and Arno Dorch. We could talk of other days and for a while forget the stealthy approach of the Germans and the departure for Antwerp, until a note came from Count Clary asking me to take over the Austrian Legation immediately.

Thus, one by one, events moved in their fatal procession there in Brussels, and we waited ; and just as I was going to bed, at 11.30, Villalobar called up on the telephone to say that the Queen and Government had left for Antwerp.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.