

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XXV. « *We have to destroy the city* ».

ON Wednesday morning, August 26, when Villalobar and I drove over to see General the Baron Arthur von Lüttwitz, we found him at the Foreign Office. The Germans had established themselves in the Belgian *ministères* and shut off the Park and the Rue de la Loi ; there were sentries everywhere and much explaining about *der Spanischer Gesandter* and *der Gesandter der Vereinigten Staaten*, and we sat a long while in the ante-room where we had sat so often before waiting to see M. Davignon. German officers were coming and going, very much at home. Finally we were shown into the presence of General von Lüttwitz, who was most affable and courteous, and evidently a man of strength and will. We began; Villalobar and I, to talk about the question of communication and to make suggestions about Brussels — the question of food, for instance, but the General said :

"Please grant me a truce for two days until I can install a civil administration. After that has been done all will go beautifully."

As we were about to go General von Lüttwitz said :

"A dreadful thing has occurred at Louvain. The general in command there was talking with the Burgomaster when the son of the Burgomaster shot the general, and the population began firing on the German troops."

We did not at once grasp the whole significance of the remark.

"*And now, of course*", he went on, "*we have to destroy the city. The orders are given and not one stone will be left on another. I'm afraid that that beautiful Hôtel de Ville, which we saw as we came through there the other day, is now no more*".

When he said this he lifted up his hands in a gesture of regret.

That evening Gibson and Blount returned from Antwerp, full of news: first, and best of all, a dispatch from Washington approving my course and leaving the question of the removal of the Legation entirely to my judgment. Only those who have been at the end of a telegraph-wire three thousand miles away from home, and in the midst of difficulties, can know the consolation that such words would afford.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.