

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XXXVII. "*Nach Paris !*"

BUT all man's heart, alas, was not at rest, and there was no escape from the sights and scenes and incidents that so constantly reminded us of war. There were soldiers everywhere, and it was not long before there were sailors too, or at least marines, marching along the boulevard on their way, as everybody supposed, to Antwerp, to manoeuvre the heavy Austrian siege-guns that were being moved up. Then the ambulances began to bear wounded into the city, and after three weeks of idleness the railways were again in operation, manned now by Germans in blue uniforms, and when the trains that jolted over the crossing at the Rue Belliard were not bearing wounded in our direction they were puffing and straining in the other direction, loaded with cannon to wound other men to be brought back on the return trip. Commander Gherardi of our Navy, who was just then Naval Attaché at Berlin, was in Brussels on September 6 with other attachés on his way to Maubeuge, which was scheduled to fall on the following day, and their trip had been planned so that they would arrive there at the exact moment when the catastrophe occurred — the event having been arranged, apparently, with a scientific accuracy that was to us in those days quite uncanny. We were still under the excitement produced by the sudden apparition of the *Gloriosen Canonen*, the "Big Berthas", the *Quarante-deux*.

"*And they have an invention by sea that will create the same staggering sensation in the world that the Forty-twos have*", he remarked.

They had not told Commander Gherardi what this was, or if they had he did not tell me ; we did not know then so much as we do now about the submarine.

With the resumption of an intermittent train service, which by way of Maestricht could take one into Holland, those who could obtain *Passierscheins* began to leave the city. The American colony dwindled ... The few diplomate remaining began to go. Count Clary und Aldringen, the Austrian Minister, acting dean of the diplomatic corps, had turned the Austrian Legation over to me, and now the Clarys were gone. They were sad to leave Brussels ; they had lived there for eleven years and were very popular. Barros-Moreira was only waiting for a special train to take out his Brazilian colony.

The Bottaro-Costas were going back to Italy ; Gravenskop-Castenskjold, the Danish Minister, was leaving and had turned his Legation over to me. We bade them good-bye there in the Gare du Nord, littered with straw, filled with cannon, and crowded with soldiers, Long trains of wounded were going back to Germany ; the trains were scribbled over in chalk with German phrases expressing childish hatred of England. On our little party — Villalobar, Burgomaster Max, and a few others — there was the sadness that is in all partings, which are like so many little deaths. There were the prolonged banalities, finally "*All aboard !*" in German. Two officers in monocles step on the train as it moves off — the Countess in tears, waving her handkerchief, and so good-bye ; Gravenskop-Castenskjold thrusting his hand out of the wagon to shout :

" Pas un Danois à Bruxelles ! mais mettez votre drapeau sur ma Légation ! "
He died soon after at The Hague,

It was a relief to know that there was "*pas un Danois à Bruxelles* " — though there proved to be several — as it was to see several Americans leave on the train ; it was that many less to be responsible for, though whenever one went two seemed to arrive. I had been concerned about the fate of an American artist, Stevens, who had left when McCutcheon and Cobb and the rest disappeared that afternoon toward the south ; he had gone with them, as we supposed, accompanied by a Frenchman named Gerbault, a newspaper correspondent ; they had gone away light-heartedly, armed with cameras — of itself enough to have them shot. And now Mowrer, the Paris correspondent of the *Chicago News*, arrived to hunt up Stevens. I had had a search made, and had traced him to Seneffe, then to Manage, then to Fayt ; he had been last seen at the French frontier crouching in the bottom of a motor-car, German soldiers holding revolvers at his head.

There was always the care of these adventurous ones, and of those who came to seek them or came themselves in search of adventure. They had not the slightest notion of conditions in Belgium, nor seemingly any power of imagining them. After a few days they were glad to be allowed to leave the country in the automobile they had once fancied would facilitate a tour of the devastated regions.

I had not then toured the devastated regions myself but had had numerous reports on what the Germans had wrought in producing that devastation, brought in by the refugees who had fled from the fear of like calamities ; they came every day to the Legation in the fond hope that America could do something for them, and when our poor impotence was revealed they told their stories anyhow, for the mere relief the recital gave them. Perhaps it did them good as well to know that there was sympathy for them, though, as we were more and more to learn, we had to be careful in expressing our sympathies ; one could never be sure one was not talking to a spy. Much of the time, indeed, one was.

But not always ; the look of horror that lingered in eyes that had gazed on horror was too real for any mistake. Somehow they came at twilight, and the day's trouble was rounded off with some awful tale like that of Louvain.

It was on September 11 that *Les Nouvelles publiées par le Gouvernement allemand* posted on the walls of Brussels the telegram in which the German Emperor told the President that "*the Belgian Government had encouraged the civil population to take part in the war which it had carefully prepared for so long a time.*" The Emperor spoke of Louvain, and told how his heart bled when he saw that such measures "*had been inevitable.*" * "*Mon coeur saigne*" thereafter was added to the current phrases of irony with which the people of Brussels expressed themselves in all the cruel events of the war. It became the same sort of bitter joke that "*Gott mit uns*" had been since the people had been accustomed to see that device on the round buckles that glistened on the German belts, until some one thought of "*Von Gott*", then that was the common pleasantry, The changes were rung in ail the keys, and many a tale was invented in which they played their part.

It was this sense of humour, indeed, that kept up the hearts of the Belgian people — that peculiar *esprit* that early won a moral victory over the Germans. This sense of humour is a part of that indomitable courage which has kept the Belgian nation alive along the calvary of its tragic history. Even Baudelaire, the French poet, who in his cruel and acidulous spite wrote as

many nasty things about the Belgians as he did about the Americans, whom he so detested, has reluctantly rendered them this justice : "*Always oppressed*", he said, "*but never conquered*". This peculiar savoury wit, this *esprit frondeur*, *la zwanze bruxelloise*, was everywhere in play, and it was not long before even the children of the Marolliens, as they played at war, marching and counter-marching there under the shadow of the Palais de Justice, had a 'new game.

"*Achtung !*" the little captain of the band would shout, brandishing his wooden sword. "*Nach Paris !*"

And then the little command, doing the goose-step, the absurdity of which did not escape even the children, would begin to march — backwards.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

* NOUVELLES PUBLIÉES PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT ALLEMAND

Paris, 9 septembre. — Au conseil des ministres tenu le 3 septembre à Bordeaux le ministre de la guerre, M. Millerand, a fait rapport sur la situation militaire. Ensuite on a traité une série de questions, notamment celle de l'alimentation. La session parlementaire a été close.

M. Viviani, président du conseil, fait ressortir dans sa lettre au président de la Chambre que de nombreux députés se trouvent comme soldats parmi les troupes, et que les calamités qui pèsent sur la France augmentent de jour en jour et empêchent la Chambre de se réunir.

Berlin, 10 septembre. — La *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* publie le télégramme suivant adressé par l'empereur au président des États-Unis Wilson :

"Je considère comme mon devoir, Monsieur le Président, de vous informer, en votre qualité de représentant le plus distingué des principes humanitaires, de ce fait que mes troupes ont trouvé, après la prise de la forteresse française de Longwy, dans cette place, des milliers de balles dum-dum travaillées par des ateliers spéciaux du gouvernement. Des balles de la même espèce ont été trouvées sur des soldats morts, ou blessés, ou prisonniers, de nationalité anglaise. Vous savez quelles horribles blessures et souffrances sont causées par ces balles et que l'emploi en est interdit par les principes reconnus du droit international. J'élève donc une protestation solennelle contre pareil mode de faire la guerre qui est devenue, grâce aux méthodes de nos adversaires, une des plus barbares de l'histoire.

"Non seulement ils ont employé eux-mêmes cette arme cruelle, mais le gouvernement belge a encouragé ouvertement la population civile à prendre part à cette guerre qu'il avait préparée soigneusement depuis longtemps. Les cruautés commises au cours de cette guérilla par des femmes et même par des prêtres contre des soldats blessés, des médecins et des infirmières (des médecins ont été tués et des lazarets attaqués à coups de feu), ont été telles que mes généraux se sont finalement vus obligés de recourir aux moyens les plus vigoureux pour châtier les coupables et pour empêcher la population sanguinaire de continuer ces abominables actes criminels et odieux. Plusieurs villages et même la ville de Louvain ont dû être démolis (sauf le très bel hôtel de ville) dans l'intérêt de notre défense et de la protection de mes troupes. Mon cœur saigne quand je vois que pareilles mesures ont été rendues inévitables, et quand je songe aux innombrables innocents qui ont perdu leur toit et leurs biens par suite des faits des criminels en question. — WILHELM II, K."

LE GOUVERNEMENT MILITAIRE ALLEMAND.