

# BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

## A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

### Chapter XLII. Bricks without straw.

We had been dining out one evening, for life went on somehow, even if it did have a curious effect of having been suspended, though dining out was not without its adventures ; people were occasionally arrested on their way home and taken to the Kommandantur. The very word came to have terrible connotations in Brussels, and indeed all over Belgium and the north of France, like so many typical words that begin with that ugly letter K : *Krieg, Kaiser, Krupp, Kultur, Kolossal, Kommandantur*. Sometimes one's cook or the cook of one's host would be arrested at the last minute, and that was even worse than if one of the guests had been arrested. On the evening of which I specifically write, however, we had not been subject to such accidents, and had returned home with somewhat more normal sensations, when I found awaiting me in my *cabinet* a gentleman who was so drenched with rain, so evidently weary, that he presented a pitiable sight. He was the Baron de Roest d'Alkemaede, and he came with a sad story of the requisitioning of all the horses in the neighbourhood of Hal. The farmers there — those who farmed on a large scale and those who raised on little patches the produce that was used on Brussels tables — had already so suffered from the seizure of their horses that many of them had only one left; if these were to be taken agriculture there would cease. In addition to all this, and what was even more important, they raised there those magnificent Brabançon horses, and if all the stallions and brood-mares were to be requisitioned the noble race would be annihilated. The Baron in sorrow told me of this great fear of his neighbours ; he had come to implore American aid. And he spoke, too, of other calamities that had befallen his beautiful land, somehow summed up in the phrase current among the German soldiers : "*Paris, champagne, and the women of France*". What could I do ?

I went to bed depressed ; it was the old tank of which so much of life is made — that of making bricks without straw. In the morning, going to Von der Lancken with an accumulation of other troubles to discuss, among them the ever-present subject of Gibson's testimony as to the Louvain incident, I touched unofficially the question of the requisitioning of the horses at Hal, and he was reasonable and agreed to do what he could. I took him in my car and we drove to the old Foreign Office, and found an officer of the Death's-Head Hussars who seemed to be the chief of the horse-stealing department ; and there, standing in the middle of the street, with soldiers saluting on every band, we explained the matter to him, reminding him that those heavy Brabançon draught-stallions could not walk ten kilometers in a whole day and would be utterly useless to an army — so that he promised to leave the poor folk down at Hal as many of their horses as he could. Then with many salutes we parted, and I came back happy to be able to inform the Baron de Roest d'Alkemaede, who was waiting for me with a delegation of breeders who had come to Brussels that day on the same errand, of the success of my efforts.\*

Von der Lancken had told me that as a result of my two *démarches* and my letter of protest, the decision to send the British Red Cross to Liège had been reversed and that it had been decided to send the nurses — more than one hundred including the doctors, to England.

Then Japanese interests were confided to me, Japan having gone to war with Germany, and I hoisted my flag over the Japanese Legation in the Rue de la Loi. There were very few Japanese residents in Brussels and only three in the Legation, and those could not leave by Antwerp for all the country between Antwerp and Brussels was then one vast battlefield, and it was agreed with the Germans that the *Chargé* and his little colony should remain quietly in the city.

**Brand WITHLOCK**

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. However, the horses, ultimately, were all taken