

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XLVI. Sunday.

I was startled out of sleep by the heavy booming of cannon, and then suddenly it was still, and the church bells were ringing in another Sunday. For days we had been waiting for the passes that would permit Gibson to go to Antwerp for the wheat and our two mothers to leave. Their trunks had been packed and were waiting, and now more than ever, since we did not know what might follow the arrest of the popular Burgomaster, we were anxious to have them gone and to know them safely out of Belgium. That morning the *Passierscheins* came, and at ten o'clock they, with Gibson, in the motor piled high with luggage, drove away under the American flag. A little knot of people gathered in the Rue de Trèves to see the departure, a little knot that quickly grew to the proportions of a crowd — a fact not without a disquieting suggestion. They went away bravely, and as they went we watched them, with hearts full but a great load lifted from our minds. They expected to reach Maestricht that night and The Hague on the morrow.

The crowd outside melted away and the town was still. Villalobar came in and we chatted for a long time — oddly enough, about the Spanish-American War and the King of Spain, who felt that the future of America and the future of Spain were mysteriously bound together, and so tried to do away with every trace of feeling and bitterness.

And then Van Vollenhoven, *Chargé d'Affaires* of the Dutch Legation, appeared to say that he had just been down to the Grand' Place and that a German lieutenant, with some want of tact, had selected that as a propitious moment to parade there some Belgian soldiers, prisoners of war. As the morning wore away the atmosphere of the city became surcharged with a nervous quality that was not reassuring ; the news of the arrest of the Burgomaster was spreading, and then by noon there were callers at the Legation anxiously inquiring if it were true that the American Minister had left. It was precisely what I had expected ; the crowd that had gathered to watch the motor laden with luggage drive away had already done its work. A number of citizens suggested that some means be devised to counteract the effect of the rumour, and in the afternoon, then, shortly after luncheon, I took an open motor and, with my wife, drove all over Brussels. The day was fine, clear, and cold, and in the sunlight crowds were gathered everywhere. Our motor carried the flag, and we drove along the Boulevard Bischoffsheim to the Gare du Nord, the Boulevard Anspach, the Rue Haute, the entire length of the Rue de l'Escalier, and all through the popular districts of the Marolles. Children were playing on the sidewalks and people were gossiping at the doors ; there were carts everywhere with fresh English walnuts for sale, the women before them gesticulating with their stained bands. We drove through , the Boulevard du Midi, the Rue Neuve, and on out to Laeken, and there just across the canal the only incident of the drive worth mentioning occurred. The German sentinel stopped us and a great crowd gathered, and when they saw the flag they raised excited cries of "*Vive l'Amérique ! Vive l'Amérique !*" The Belgian police rushed everywhere among the crowd crying : .

" *Allez ! Allez !* "

It took the thick-headed German sentinel as long to read the *Passierschein* as though it had been "*Chitty on Pleading*", but he finished finally and we got away ; and I can still see, among the red and excited faces, the Belgian with a pointed yellow beard shouting frantically as he swung his hat in the air :

" *Vive l'Amérique !* "

Brand WITHLOCK

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