

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter XLIX. "*The English have arrived !*"

COLONEL SORELA — who according to some Spanish rule was a colonel even though he was in the navy — and Adrien came back from Antwerp the next morning at three o'clock. They had had a wild, adventurous time ; it was with difficulty that they had got out of Antwerp, and once out, they had even more difficulty in getting back into Brussels, for the bombardment had begun and shrapnel was bursting over the hood of the automobile. "*Mon brave Adrien*" said Colonel Sorela enthusiastically, laying a hand on the little chauffeur's shoulder as though he were giving him an accolade. Arrived at Antwerp, Colonel Sorela had gone to see General de Guise, who did not at first understand and refused to receive the Colonel and his message ; he would receive, indeed, no *parlementaire* — would not surrender, would fight to the death. But when Colonel Sorela explained that he had not come demanding a surrender, and that he was merely to inform the local population of the impending bombardment, the General thanked him for his services to the city of Antwerp.

Such was Colonel Sorela's official report, officially delivered with appropriate salutes. But it was his unofficial report that was the most interesting, and that I did not have from him until I had had it from Adrien. Arriving at three in the morning, Adrien had not been able to arouse the house, and had patiently sat in his motor before the door until half-past five in the morning, when Joseph awoke from the sound slumber with which he was nightly blessed and opened to him the great iron gates in the courtyard. And when I came down — not at half past five, by any means — Adrien came to me and with great blazing eyes told me an astonishing secret.

The English had arrived ! Antwerp was full of them ! Oh, there could be no mistake ; he knew the uniforms, and they were everywhere, thousands and thousands of them — in short, the British army ! It was, perhaps, the only bit of good news that we had had since the war began, and it was the last we were to hear for a long time. And all day we lived , in the pleasurable excitement of the news, not daring to mention it, wondering if the Germans knew, and almost every minute expecting some great event to be born of it.

And then that afternoon at five o'clock came Gibson, with as many adventures to relate, as Adrien, and great sacks of mail, and the news that the mothers had sailed the day before on the *Baltic* in the care of Richard Harding Davis. Gibson was accompanied by Harold Fowler, of the London Embassy, come to take out the English nurses. We could tell him that they were already out — but what of Antwerp and the British army ?

Ah, Antwerp ! The King and the Queen had gone, the army had gone, the Government had gone — out on the road in the night toward Ostend.

But the British army ? Gone too ; it had been only a little handful of troops, come too late — and Antwerp must fall.

We were up late that night hearing from Gibson and Fowler the news from London, reading a great mass of mail from America (the first in many weeks), and the newspapers, full of news indeed — long stories to the effect that I had sent protests to the Kaiser for having bombarded Antwerp from Zeppelins ; that I had appointed M. Max secretary of Legation in order to save his life ; that I had gone out to meet the German general and ordered him not to lay a hand on Brussels. Too bad that the cinema-man could not have been there !

Gibson, within ten minutes after his arrival, had taken to the Germans the list of monuments in Antwerp, which, in accordance with the agreement, were to be protected in the bombardment, and one of the German officers, with that peculiar sentimentality that seemed always to lie side by side with their ferocity, was particularly interested to know that the zoological garden was marked down as immune.

"Les pauvres bêtes !" he said.

I think that the list of buildings to be protected was not of much practical benefit and, as it proved, hardly necessary. The bombardment of the inner city had not lasted very long and was then, indeed, nearly over.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.