

BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE 1

Chapter LVI. Hatred of the English.

THE hatred the Germans bore the English made the task of representing British interests all the more difficult ; the Germans seemed to have no such bitter feeling toward the French, and not so much toward the Belgians, though the more they wronged the Belgians, according to the well-known law of moral reaction, the more bitter they became in their feeling toward them. But the hatred of the English was a wild, implacable thing, not to be overcome. It had a quality almost personal in its intensity.

"*We are going to continue this war*", said a German official to me, "*until one can travel around the earth without seeing Englishmen who act as if they owned it.*"

"*We shall destroy England if it takes twenty years*", said a general to me one evening ; his eyes blazed wrath, and he clenched his fists spasmodically.

"*When our men take English prisoners,*" he went on to say, "*the officers dare not turn their backs an instant, lest the men kill them.*"

This hatred was shown even in the smallest things. There was scarcely a German officer, for instance, who, as a part of that marvellous preparation of the German nation for this very enterprise in which they were engaged, had not mastered the English language ; they could speak it almost as well as they could speak French ; some of them had been to Oxford or Cambridge and spoke with the accent of those schools, but now that the moment had come to use it they made it almost a point of honour not to speak it at all.

When the prisoners at the École Militaire had all been sent to Ruhleben, the agents of the Kommandantur began to interfere with the administration of the British Charitable Fund, an organization that for long years had aided destitute British folk in Belgium. The *Polizei* hunted the trustees of the fund from one place to another, and the poor could not get the little charity that was being doled out to them.

And then another complication arose which for a time threatened to be more serious. Down at Mons there was an English ambulance in charge of the Honourable Angelina Manners and of Miss Nellie Hozier, and after the retreat of the English from Mons they and their corps of eight nurses had remained on there, Late in November I arranged to secure *laissez-passer* for them to return to England, and the necessary authorization having been obtained, I asked Mr. Jack Scranton, a young American then in Brussels as a guest of Gibson, to go down to Mons to escort the nurses back to Brussels.

He went, armed with all the documents, and, arrived at Mons, he showed his papers and explained his mission to the German commandant, who snatched his papers from him, and not only arrested him, but arrested all the young women in the ambulance, and threw them into a common prison. The German officer shook his fist at the poor girls, threatened them with all kinds of terror in retaliation for what the Germans were said to be suffering in England, and refused to listen to Scranton.

"As for the American Minister at Brussels", said the officer, "je m'en f— !"

Thus Scranton reported when, the following day, the officer's ridiculous rage — Jähzorn — having cooled, he was permitted to return to Brussels. I went to see Baron von der Lancken and asked him to send an intelligent officer, if one could be found, with Scranton to bring the girls back. He said he would telephone. The next morning we heard that the girls were to have a "hearing" — as though they were criminals. Then I had word from Mons that the English nurses were in very real danger I went over to the Germans ; Baron von der Lancken had gone to Bruges, but I saw Baron Freys, and told him that I had had enough of the Mons affair, that the Kommandantur there had torn up the passports which he, Baron Freys, had given, had spoken insultingly of me, and that I could endure it no longer. I showed him the Geneva Convention, which plainly set forth the duty of the Germans to let these nurses go home, and I insisted upon their being brought to Brussels at once. Baron Freys was always and invariably polite, obliging and correct ; he got into telephonic communication with Mons, and in five minutes had arranged it ; the nurses were to be released. The Baron gave me a note to the adjutant down there, and the next morning I sent de Leval to bring the young ladies back. It was a moment of exquisite relief when, the next afternoon, my chauffeur arrived in the car we had sent to Mons bringing one of the nurses, Miss Beatrice Waters, and assured me that the others were coming with de Leval on the train. Miss Manners and Miss Hozier, with all the nurses, arrived at tea-time, all glowing with the joy of the very dangerous experience which they would view only as a lark. Three days later, with passports for Holland, via Aix-la-Chapelle, they bade us good-bye and went away, excited with the thought of being home for an English Christmas. They reached London for the festival — though after a voyage longer than they had expected, for at Aix-la-Chapelle the German authorities had changed their route and sent them round by Hamburg into Denmark, and they succeeded at last in reaching home from Copenhagen.

It was not long afterward that the English prisoners were sent away to Berlin and confined in the camp at Ruhleben with their compatriots who had been in Germany when the war broke out. The British Consul, Mr. Jeffes, on account of his advanced years, had not been molested, but his son, the Vice-Consul, had been taken to the École Militaire, and there for a while he remained with Mr. Butcher, another Englishman, and with Mr. Grant-Watson and Mr. Kimura, until one Sunday morning I was asked to go to the *Zivilverwaltung* at an hour so early, even by German time, that despite their terrible capacity for early rising and hard work there was no one yet visible but a sleepy boy scout of the German variety. After a while the Baron von der Lancken appeared, and then Mr. Grant-Watson was shown in, and the Baron announced to him that he must leave at once for Berlin. The time for departure was at hand, and the Baron left us a moment in the *Sitzenstall* that we might talk, and there, after I had told Mr. Grant-Watson the gossip of Brussels and given him news of his family and friends in England, and taken his messages, and, I trust, given him some realization of the sympathy I felt for him and of my admiration for his calmness, a young German officer entered, bowed stiffly, shook hands with Mr. Grant-Watson, and then, standing with his hand at his vizor in salute, said "*J'aurai l'honneur de vous conduire à Berlin.*"

The motor was waiting there in the Rue de la Loi, and, like many another in those times, Mr. Grant-Watson was whirled away to an unknown fate.

I thought for a moment, a week later, that it was to be a serious fate when Von der Lancken confided to me that he greatly feared that Mr. Grant-Watson had seriously compromised himself ; most important secret documents had been discovered, he said ; there would have to be a court martial ; spying, and ail that sort of thing; most alarming ! At the École Militaire, I was told, Mr. Grant-Watson had been found destroying papers which on examination proved to be some sort of military plans. Then, great *affiches* on the walls of Brussels ; more *Nouvelles publiées par le Gouvernement allemand*, highly sensational ; no less, in fact, than that Mr. Grant-Watson had tried to destroy documents which he had clandestinely taken to prison with him from the British Legation, documents that gave the "*most intimate*" details about the mobilization of the Belgian army and the defence of Antwerp, a long story which, in the German view, proved that there had been foul play and a conspiracy on the part of Belgium and England to attack Germany.*

Whatever it may have been intended to be for others, the *affiche* to me was most assuring. We were beginning to learn that the buncombe county in the German Empire was very extensive, with an insatiable appetite for sensations that could produce the soft thrill of a purring satisfaction.

Of course had any such papers ever existed, Mr. Grant-Watson could not have had them at the Ecole Militaire, for it might be assumed that diplomats of such deep sagacity as the Germans charged the British with being would have destroyed any such documents with the other papers they were so busily engaged in burning over at the British Legation those last days before they departed for Antwerp. Truth is often exasperating in her deliberate movements and not to be hurried, but she always arrives calm and unflushed at her destination, and so the papers proved, in fact, to be nothing more than old hypothetical military problems studied by the Belgian youths who were being educated as officers. for the Belgian army in the École Militaire ; they had been found, so it was said, in a locker in the room assigned to Mr. Grant-Watson after the gentry were separated from the commonalty. But they served as well as those other hypothetical problems studied by Belgian military men — and, as the event proved, with prophetic wisdom — and left to be found by the corps of professors who bent their eager, purblind gaze through their thick spectacles on all the dusty archives and waste-paper baskets found in the Ministries. There were sensational stories about these, too, published on the walls of Brussels and blazed abroad throughout the world, in order to produce an impression that Belgium. had not been true to herself, but had entered into an intrigue with England and finally with France to invade peaceful, unsuspecting, unprepared Teutonia. It was but a part of that effort made by Germany to justify her wilful and cynical violation of the neutrality which the King of Prussia had imposed on and guaranteed to Belgium. All sorts of papers and documents found in the Ministries at Brussels were exhibited in the hope of showing that the English or the French had broken their engagements, or that there had been collusion between Belgium and England, or between Belgium and France, to attack Germany. **

Nothing came of it, of course ; after the story had been published, and the effect it was supposed to produce had been obtained, Mr. Grant-Watson, who had been "*treated like an officer*" in Berlin — and of course nothing more could be asked by any one — was allowed to go home to England, by way of Denmark, long after Kimura had been permitted to go out by way of Holland, and so return by America to his far-off Japan.

Brand WITHLOCK (London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919).

* This is the *affiche* :

Berlin, 15 décembre. — La *Norddeutsche Allgemeine* écrit au sujet du jeu de l'Angleterre concernant la neutralité de la Belgique. De nouvelles preuves graves ont été trouvées démontrant la complicité anglo-belge. Récemment le Secrétaire de la Légation anglaise, Mr. Grant-Watson, a été arrêté, lequel était resté à l'hôtel de la Légation anglaise, où il essayait de faire disparaître des documents qu'il avait clandestinement emportés de la Légation. Il y avait parmi ces documents des pièces avec des données des plus intimes concernant la mobilisation belge et concernant la défense d'Anvers, des années 1913-1914, ainsi que des circulaires avec des ordres à l'adresse des hautes autorités militaires belges et portant la signature fac-simile du Ministre de la Guerre belge et du chef de l'Etat-major général, ainsi que des notes de compte-rendu d'une séance de la "*Commission de Ravitaillement d'Anvers*" du 27 mai 1913. Le fait que ces documents se trouvaient à la Légation d'Angleterre montre suffisamment que le gouvernement belge n'avait, en matière militaire, aucun secret pour le gouvernement britannique et que les deux étaient continuellement en étroite entente militaire. Particulièrement intéressant est cette note écrite à la main : "*Renseignement. Primo : Les officiers français ont reçu ordre rejoindre dès le vingt-sept juillet après-midi. Secundo : Le même jour le chef de gare de Feignies reçut ordre concentrer vers Maubeuge tous wagons fermés disponibles en vue de Frameries.*" Les deux localités sont situées sur la ligne de chemin de fer de Maubeuge-Mons-Feignies à environ trois kilomètres de la frontière belge en France. Frameries, en Belgique, est à environ dix kilomètres de la frontière.

Il en ressort que la France avait, dès le 27 juillet, pris les premières mesures de mobilisation et que la Légation britannique en fut aussitôt avertie par la Belgique. Parmi les preuves antérieures démontrant les relations entre l'Angleterre et la Belgique, les documents découverts constituent des compléments précieux. Ils démontrent à nouveau que la Belgique abandonna sa neutralité au profit de l'Entente, qu'elle devint un membre actif de la coalition formée en vue de combattre l'Empire allemand. Pour l'Angleterre la neutralité de la Belgique représentait en réalité seulement un "*scrap of paper*" (chiffon de papier) qu'elle n'invoquait que pour autant qu'elle correspondait à ses intérêts, mais qu'elle considérait existante dès que cela pouvait servir ses projets. Il est évident que le gouvernement anglais a simplement pris prétexte de la violation de la neutralité belge par l'Allemagne pour faire paraître aux yeux du monde et du peuple anglais la guerre avec nous comme équitable.

LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL EN Belgique

** The Germans, in their effort to justify their invasion of Belgium, made in violation of their own guarantee, published two letters found in the Belgian Ministry of War, as proof of an understanding between Belgium and Great Britain by which British troops could be landed in Belgium. In fact, these notes were but memoranda prepared years before by military *attachés* of the British Legation at Brussels as to the possible intervention of England in the event that Belgium were attacked. They were merely records of conversations between the military *attachés* and Belgian officers, and were purely hypothetical, as their context and the time of their occurrence showed. But they were so presented by the Germans as to create the impression of an agreement between Belgium and Great Britain to attack Germany. These insinuations have been effectually denied by M. **Émile Brunet** in his pamphlet entitled "*Les Conventions Anglo-Belges.*"

<http://uurl.kbr.be/1042619?bt=europeanaapi>

