BELGIUM UNDER THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE **1**

Chapter **LXXV**. The "***Lusitania***".

ON Saturday, May 8, the loveliest of spring days, I had gone to Ravenstein. There was something like a *détente* in the atmosphere ; there seemed to be a new hope, a possibility of new life — that vague reassurance of the spring that one's projects, after all, will come to fruition. The château had been reopened, and the little flags fluttered again over the greens that rolled away toward the red roofs of Tervueren ; a few of us had mustered up courage to brave the fates and play golf again. I was coming in, toward tea-time, from the eighteenth hole, and I met Paul Hamoir, who said :

"*Is it true that the* ***Lusitania*** *has been torpedoed and sunk* ?"

I had heard nothing of the kind and did not, could not, believe it. I had been reading in the ***Times***, it is true, only the night before, of Count von Bernstorff's warning and of how the newspapers at home were resenting it, but such a thing simply could not be. It is implicit in the egoism of our nature, this to imagine calamity befalling *us.* No one can conceive of his own city without himself in it ; no one can conceive of the world, or of life going on in the world, without him. It is a part of that will to live which preserves life ; it is a proof, if philosophers and economists would only study it, of the validity of individualism, in opposition to two theories of the State, both authoritarian and both German, different and yet essentially alike in conception and application — the doctrinaire socialist and the militarist. There is a persistent and ineradicable instinct in man that refuses to admit the authority of the general staff, of the central committee, of the soviet ; he revolts at the thought of becoming a mere cog in the intricate wheels of some gigantic and grotesque dock that marks the flight of hours that can have no meaning, no purpose, no beauty, unless man is free . . .

The ***Lusitania*** ? Sunk ? Impossible ! Why, I could *see* her, feel her under my feet. I could hear my old friend O'Farrell say, as we walked the promenade deck one bright morning :

"*I smell the west coast of Ireland !*"

Then we sighted the Bull, Cow, and Calf, and the Fastnet, and late in the afternoon, there, under the green-brown shores of Ireland, was Kinsale light ...

But de Sinçay was coming out of the château as I went on to the terrace. Yes, it was true ; he had seen it in the German newspapers that afternoon. She had been torpedoed and sunk off the entrante to Queenstown . . .

The green-brown shores and Kinsale — just as those poor souls, happy in that exhilarating moment when the voyage is almost over, had seen it that afternoon. One moment all was light and life and joy, the next horror and blackness — and the cowardly thing scuttling off there far in the depths of the green waters, after a hideous deed that one would have thought so short a time before no living being could be found low and dastard enough to commit. It made one almost physically ill . . .

I went home at once, and there were none but grim faces at the Legation ; rage, indignation, that could find no expression . . . There it was, just as de Sinçay had said, a great ugly headline.

*"Ozeandampfer '**Lusitania**' torpediert."*

With the punctiliousness in such matters that had always characterized the Bruxellois, many came to the Legation to leave condolences because of the Americans who had lost their lives. The Prince de Ligne was announced late that same afternoon ; I see him now, his distinguished face, his white hair, his black garb, his perfect bearing, bowing and saying :

" Excellence, je ne veux pas vous déranger. Je viens simplement pour vous exprimer mes condoléances à propos de la perte de vos concitoyens ; les Américains ont été si bons pour nous Belges que tout ce qui vous touche, nous touche ! . . ."

We lived thenceforth for days in uncertainty, which no other agony is quite like. We had no news ; the German authorities, as always in times of crisis, forbade the entrance of the Dutch newspapers, the one neutral source of information that we had. The only newspapers published in Brussels were under German censorship and control — *journaux embochés,* intellectually immoral sheets in which one could place no confidence and for which one could have nothing but contempt. The German newspapers, even with their censorship, were not nearly so bad, for they made no pretence of being anything but German ; we had them from Cologne and Düsseldorf every day, and just then they were filled with an almost maniacal gloating over the deed of the submarine, and that was intolerable.

I did not go over to the Rue Lambermont the day after the catastrophe, nor for several days, but I heard that it had been said there that Germany was not responsible for the loss of American lives because every one had been warned not to go aboard the ***Lusitania***. When I did go there again, some days later, every one was affable ; the word ***Lusitania*** was not spoken, no reference at that time was made to the event. There had been, however, for a long time much feeling among the military against America, due partly to the old complaint about munitions and partly to the conviction that there was no longer any chance of winning American sentiment and sympathy. We had been its victims now and then. The young men of the Commission, especially those in Northern France, were often — I might almost say constantly — exposed to a resentment that the officers there were at no pains to conceal, but more often, indeed, quite frank to express to men who, as they were always reminding them, were there as their "*guests*".

The subject of munitions was mentioned to me only two or three times, I believe — once at that time and again later. It was a young German officer, a count, of a well-known family, who mentioned it the first time. He was in my office, and, noticing the photograph of President Wilson on the *cheminée,* said :

" Est-ce Monsieur Wilson ?"

"Oui", I replied ; "*regardez-le bien".*

He studied it a long time very attentively.

"Notez bien la mâchoire inférieure", I said.

" *Oui",* he said, "*mais il devrait défendre qu'on vende des munitions à nos ennemis."*

"Mais ils ne sont pas nos ennemis", I replied. And I tried to explain it to him, showing him that under the conventions it was not part of the duty of our Government to forbid its own citizens from selling munitions of war to any one they pleased, that this was recognized by The Hague Convention, and that when an effort to change it had been made some years ago it was the influence of Germany that defeated the project ; that Germany could buy goods on the same terms with others in America, that all she had to do was to get her ships across the Atlantic. He seemed not to understand. They seemed always incapable of understanding. As I have said, that which is known to Englishmen and to Americans as the sporting sense seemed to be unknown to them ; their one sport is war, and they do not play at that as sportsmen. The higher officers at Antwerp were generally offensive in their attitude toward America, and in their comments at and after the time of the crime of the ***Lusitania*** the military men at Brussels were in the same mood. One of them, speaking on the subject one day, after advancing the usual excuse that it was all England's fault, said that they had done all they could to enlist American sympathy and had failed : *" Et nous en avons fait notre deuil."* He spread out his arms wide, grew red in the sudden gust of passion that swept him, and cried :

"*If we have to fight the whole world we will do it !*"

It was nearly a week before any public official reference to the ***Lusitania*** was permitted in Brussels, and then there was posted on the walls an *affiche.* Nothing, perhaps, could better have set forth the immaturity of the mind it expressed than this piece of special pleading, with its illogic, its disregard of the most rudimentary understanding of the laws of evidence and of the ruses by which enlightened men fix responsibility. It ended, as the officer's statement had ended — as most all of their contentions, indeed, ended — with the statement that they "*now had proved that it was all England's fault*." *

Meantime, while the President was bearing the greatest burden that any American had borne since Lincoln, and bearing it, as we were so proud to feel, as Lincoln would have borne it, we could only live on in uncertainty from day to day, and try to appear in public unconcerned and to discourage the rumours that our trunks were all packed and that we were ready to leave. The opinion in Brussels was that if the incident did not bring our countries to war it would, at least, result in a rupture of diplomatic relations. Brussels was torn between a great desire and a great fear ; the one to have a new and powerful ally ranged at her side, the other lest the *ravitaillement* cease. It was pathetic to note the people, especially the poor, who passed the Legation many times a day and looked up at the balcony to see if the flag was still there ; they would glance up half fearfully and then, beholding it on its staff, turn away satisfied.

We had, indeed, packed our trunks and were ready to leave. We had sent all our important documents to The Hague. Mr. Hoover had given orders that as much food as possible be shipped to Rotterdam and into Brussels. And we waited. Then one morning de Leval came up to my room, quite early, with a copy of the *Kölnische Zeitung* and read to me a dispatch saying that Count Bernstorff and Mr. Bryan had opened *pourparlers* in the hope of settling the whole matter, and that meanwhile the submarines would abstain from torpedoing Americans. There was a visible *détente.* The German newspapers suddenly sang small, lowered their tone, ceased to *straffen* America. Brussels breathed more easily, and admired, with us, the President's note, when it finally made its way into

Belgium ; ***La Belgique*** had published it, but with certain passages deleted, and others so distorted that the Belgians thought for a day that the President had intended to pay compliments to Germany.

The suspense was lessened, though it never quite wore itself away, but lurked there always in our subconsciousness, just as the submarines lurked in the nether seas. It was a suspense to which we were to grow accustomed, so far as we can grow accustomed to suspense, for we were to live thereafter for nearly two years literally from day to day, expecting each morning to usher in the event we were certain was inevitable. The Germans, of course, must have their final fling, the last word, and it was a last word characteristic of those who put their faith in the puerile principle of the last word. They blazoned on all the walls of Brussels an *affiche* announcing that the passengers on board the ***Lusitania*** were warned in time ; that the ship carried not only munitions but soldiers as well ; and that just before sailing the passengers in fear had all decided to go ashore, but that when Captain Turner announced that he would accord a reduction of ten dollars in the passage money all of the timid passengers save twelve, finding this lure irresistible, had remained on board.**

While all Brussels with upturned eyes was watching the staff on the American Legation in the hope of seeing that the red, white, and blue flag was still there, it was also watching the Italian Legation, over in the Boulevard Bischoffsheim, in the hope of seeing that the red, white, and green flag had come down. The interest in Italy had been for weeks exceedingly keen. Crowds stood all day long before the Italian Legation and before the residence of Baron Reseis, the Italian *Chargé d'Affaires*, waiting for the moment when the absence of the flag would indicate that Italy had joined forces with the Allies.

"L'Italie entrera-t-elle dans la danse ?" was the question that men put to each other when they met. The gossips would tell you of Reseis's every movement — how often he went to see Von der Lancken, how he looked when he came away, whether pleased or ill-pleased, whether his monocle was coolly in his eye or dangling nervously by its cord, how Von der Lancken had treated him, and all that ; and they watched with eager interest the movement of the drama toward its climax. Now the signs were growing more and more decisive, and with Italy in the line they felt the war to be all but over, the victorious end in sight, the King coming home. There was something pathetic in their constant hopes and reassurance, as in the retrospect there is something tragic of their repeated deceptions and cruel disappointments.

But at last the day came : the flag was down. Italy had broken off diplomatic relations. Reseis had packed up and was ready to go ; he had applied for his passports.

There was an Italian gentleman in Brussels, Count Chicogni, who had rendered valuable services in connexion with the relief work. He was in Holland when the rupture came, having gone there on a *laissez-passer* that had been issued to him at my request, and on my assurance that he would return. He might have remained, of course, in Holland, but he came back at once, surrendered his *laissez-passer* because he had given his word to me to return, and then in his own name asked for another permitting him to leave. I hastened to salute him, to tell him of my admiration for his conduct. He blushed red :

"On ne peut pas faire autrement", he said.

He paid for his chivalry, however. Instead of beholding something admirable in the conduct that proved him so fine a gentleman, the German authorities regarded it as highly suspicious, and were perplexed. " *Il y a quelque chose de louche là dedans,"* one of them said. Count Chicogni's passport was thereupon refused ; it was even rumoured that he would be imprisoned as an officer in the Italian Reserve. The town talked of nothing else for days. Baron Reseis's movements were noted more closely than ever, and one day when he and Count Chicogni had gone to demand their passports and had come away from the *ministère* empty-handed, Reseis in indignation, there were stories of terrible scenes in the yellow *salon.* We all participated more or less in the excitement and suspense that were so wearing on the nerves of Reseis and Chicogni.

Then Italy declared war. The news came on Pentecost, when every one was out of doors Along the boulevards, in the Bois, in the Forêt de Soignes, great crowds in summer clothes — of a former summer, to be sure, but summer clothes nevertheless, and their wearers all happy in the assurance of early victory and peace. There were those who were dreaming of new summer clothes, and St.-Moritz for August, for it was said that the Germans would now fall back along the line of the Meuse and abandon Brussels. The people were not allowed to celebrate the new alliance, of course ; they were not allowed to express their gratitude and their sympathy with the Italians by displaying the Italian colours, as they would have liked to do ; so, as the latest expression of *la zwanze bruxelloise,* in all the shop windows there were exposed quantities of macaroni.

The Germans posted a great blue *affiche* complaining that Italy had broken her treaties ; they were shocked by such immorality, and enumerated all the advantages, in the way of Austrian territory, that Germany had generously offered Italy not to break them. But they showed no signs of falling back along the Meuse. Over at the *Politische Abteilung* one of the officers told Villalobar that they had not decided yet where to have their Kommandantur in Italy, whether at Florence or at Venice.

"*Si j'étais à votre place",* said the Marquis, who saw the humour in every situation, *"je la mettrais plutôt à Naples."*

Then Brussels began to talk about Rumania.

"La Roumanie", they would say, "*va-t-elle entrer dans la danse ?"*

And it was in the high hope which the joining of the new ally inspired in them, and the prospect of still another new ally in Rumania, that Brussels entered upon the summer.

The lovely chestnut-tree which we could see from our window across the green of the garden and over the tiles of the roofs had shed its pink bloom. The white façades of the closed houses were blinding in the unaccustomed glare of the sun. At the Palais des Académies there were German convalescents basking in the Park, looking like zanies in their costumes of blue-and-white ticking. At a certain maternity home extensive preparations were being made to receive the nuns from the convents in the eastern provinces of Belgium — victims of German soldiers ; their hour was approaching. When I met my melancholy young German doctor of philosophy, who was so unappreciated at German headquarters, walking moodily along the Rue Ducale, and stopped and asked him how he was, he shook his head sadly and said :

" *Ça ne fa pas pien . . . on se tue bartout — le monde est defenu fou.*"

The Governor-General, who all the spring had been seeking a château, had found one at last — the château of the Orbans, Trois-Fontaines, near Vilvorde — and when the owner refused to rent it, had requisitioned it.

The story ran in Brussels that-when the Governor-General offered the owner of the château one thousand francs a month as rental the owner replied :

"*I can accept no money from you. If you want it you can, of course, take it by force*."

"*Then*" said the Governor-General "*I shall turn that amount over to the village of Vilvorde for the poor*."

"*But they will not accept it either*."

Von Bissing then asked that he be assured that there would be no interference with the water or with the electric lights.

"*I can give no such assurance*", said the gentleman. "*You must take your chances. I am Belgian ; I am your enemy. If you don't like it, send me to Germany*."

And so the Governor-General turned over the amount of the rental to the poor of Vilvorde — I do not know whether it was accepted or not — and retired to Trois-Fontaines for the summer.

Brand WITHLOCK

London ; William HEINEMANN ; 1919.

* NOUVELLES PUBLIÉES PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL ALLEMAND

BERLIN, 11 *mai*. — Le gouvernement des États-Unis d'Amérique et les gouvernements des puissances neutres ont reçu la note suivante par l'entremise du représentant impérial accrédité dans leurs pays :

Le gouvernement impérial regrette sincèrement les pertes de vies humaines causées par la destruction du ***Lusitania***, mais il se voit cependant obligé de décliner toute responsabilité. L'Angleterre, en essayant d'affamer l'Allemagne, a contraint celle-ci à user de mesures de représailles. En réponse à la proposition de l'Allemagne de cesser la guerre sous-marine si l'Angleterre renonçait à vouloir affamer l'empire allemand, les Anglais ont appliqué un blocus plus sévère encore. Les navires de commerce anglais ne peuvent être considérés comme des navires marchands ordinaires, car ils sont d'habitude armés et ont tenté plusieurs fois de faire couler nos navires en entrant en collision avec eux. Pour cette raison, il nous est impossible de les visiter. Le secrétaire du Parlement anglais, répondant à une demande de Lord Beresford, a déclaré dernièrement que pour ainsi dire tous les navires marchands anglais sont à présent armés et pourvus de grenades à main. D'ailleurs les journaux du Royaume-Uni avouent franchement que le ***Lusitania*** était armé de canons. Le gouvernement impérial sait, en outre, que le ***Lusitania***, lors de *ses* dernières traversées, avait eu plusieurs fois une forte cargaison de matériel de guerre à bord ; les vapeurs de la Compagnie Cunard *Mauretania* et ***Lusitania*** étant plus ou moins à l'abri des attaques des sous-marins grâce à leur grande vitesse, ont servi de préférence aux transports de matériel de guerre. Il est prouvé que le ***Lusitania***, pendant son dernier voyage, avait 5.400 caisses de munitions à bord. Le reste de la cargaison était aussi en grande partie de la contrebande. Abstraction faite d'un avertissement général, le gouvernement allemand avait cette fois prévenu spécialement le public par l'intermédiaire de l'ambassadeur comte de Bernstorff. Les neutres n'ont cependant aucunement tenu compte de cet avertissement, qui a même été l'objet des railleries de la presse anglaise et de la Compagnie Cunard. Si l'Angleterre a répondu à cet avertissement en niant tout danger et en prétextant l'existence de mesures de protection suffisantes, c'est elle qui a amené les passagers à ignorer les conseils du gouvernement allemand et à s'embarquer sur le ***Lusitania***, condamné à la destruction par son armement et sa cargaison, et c'est l'Angleterre seule qui est responsable de la perte de vies humaines que le gouvernement allemand regrette très profondément.

LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL EN BELGIQUE.

Translation

NEWS PUBLISHED BY THE GERMAN GENERAL GOVERNMENT

BERLIN, *May* 11. — The Government of the United States of America and the Governments of the neutral Powers have received the following note by the imperial representative accredited to their countries :

The Imperial Government sincerely regrets the loss of human lives caused by the destruction of the ***Lusitania***, but it finds itself obliged to decline all responsibility. England in trying to starve Germany has forced her to take measures of reprisal. In response to the suggestion from Germany that the submarine warfare would be stopped if England would renounce her desire to starve the German Empire, the English applied a still more severe blockade. The English merchant ships cannot be considered as ordinary merchant ships because they carry arms, and have several times tried to sink our ships by ramming them. For this reason it is' impossible for us to visit them. The secretary of the english Parliament, replying to a question from Lord Beresford, declared recently that all the English merchant ships, so to speak, are at present armed and provided with hand-grenades. Besides, the newspapers of the United Kingdom avow frankly that the ***Lusitania*** was armed with cannons. The Imperial Government knows, furthermore, that the ***Lusitania,*** during its recent trips, had had several times a heavy cargo of war material on board ; the Cunard Company's steamships *Mauretania* and ***Lusitania***, being more or less immune from submarine attack on account of their great speed, have been given preference in the transport of war material. It is proved that the ***Lusitania*** during her last voyage had 5.400 cases of munitions on board. The rest of the cargo was for the most part contraband. Setting aside the general advertisement, the Imperial Government had specially warned the public, through the intermediary of Ambassador the Count Bernstorff. The neutrals, however, took absolutely no account of this advertisement, which was, indeed, the object of jeers from the English Press and from the Cunard Company. If England replied to this advertisement by denying all danger, and by pretending the existence of sufficient protective measures, it is she who has led the passengers to ignore the warnings of the German Government and to embark on the ***Lusitania,*** condemned to destruction by her armament and her cargo, and it is England alone who is responsible for the Ioss of human lives, which the German Government very profoundly regrets.

THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT IN BELGIUM.

** NOUVELLES PUBLIÉES PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL ALLEMAND

BERLIN, 15 *Mai. — Il* résulte du rapport du sous-marin qui a fait sombrer le ***Lusitania*** que ce vapeur, qui ne portait pas de pavillon, a été aperçu le 7 mai, à 2h20 m. de l'après-midi (heure centrale), près de la côte méridionale de l'Irlande, par un beau temps clair. A 3h10 m. le sous-marin a lancé une torpille qui a atteint le ***Lusitania*** *à* tribord, près de la passerelle de commandement. La détonation de la torpille a été suivie immédiatement d'une autre explosion d'une violence extraordinaire. Le navire s'est incliné à tribord et a commencé à s'enfoncer. La deuxième explosion ne peut s'expliquer que par la déflagration des fortes quantités de munitions qui se trouvaient à bord.

Translation

NEWS PUBLISHED BY THE GERMAN GENERAL GOVERNMENT

BERLIN, *May* 15.— It is shown from the report of the submarine which sank the ***Lusitania*** that this skip, which carried no flag, was sighted on May 7 at 2.20 p.m. (Central time) near the southern coast of Ireland, a fine, clear day. At 3.10 the submarine fired a torpedo which struck the ***Lusitania*** on the starboard side, near the commander's bridge. The detonation of the torpedo was followed immediately by another explosion of extraordinary violence. The skip listed to starboard and began to sink. The second explosion can be explained only by the deflagration of the great quantities of munitions that were on board.

*** NOUVELLES PUBLIÉES PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL ALLEMAND

Nouvelles allemandes quotidiennes

COLOGNE, 2 juin. *Le* ***Kölnische Zeitung*** mande de Stockholm : Un Suédois venant d'Amérique a fait une révélation intéressante au sujet de la catastrophe du ***Lusitania***. Ce Suédois, qui voulait aller directement d'Amérique en Norvège, a raconté ce qui suit au ***Svenska Dagblat*** *: "Le vapeur que je voulais prendre a levé l'ancre trois heures après le* ***Lusitania*** *et j'ai assisté au départ de ce navire. Tous les passagers furent avertis à temps que le* ***Lusitania*** *avait à bord non seulement des munitions, mais aussi des soldats, et ces avertissements, aussi clairs que possible, eurent pour conséquence d'inquiéter tous les passagers quant aux dangers du voyage et de les décider à redescendre à terre pour s'embarquer sur un autre vapeur. Lorsque le capitaine Turner, du* ***Lusitania***, *apprit cela, il annonça qu'il accordait aux passagers une réduction de dix dollars par personne. Sauf douze personnes qui persistèrent dans leur intention de quitter le navire, tous les passagers, séduits par l'offre du capitaine, restèrent à bord.*"

LE GOUVERNEMENT GÉNÉRAL EN BELGIQUE.

Translation

NEWS PUBLISHED Mt THE GERMAN GENERAL GOVERNMENT

German Daily Report

COLOGNE, June 2. — The ***Kölnische Zeitung*** reports from Stockholm : A Swede coming from America made an interesting revelation on the subject of the catastrophe of the ***Lusitania.*** This Swede, who wanted to go directly from America to Norway, gave the following account to the ***Svenska Dagblat*** : *"The ship that I wanted to take weighed anchor three hours after the* ***Lusitania****, and I was present at the sailing of this ship. All the passengers were warned in time that the* ***Lusitania*** *had on board not only munitions but also soldiers ; and these warnings, which were as clear as possible, had the effect of disturbing all the passengers concerning the dangers of the voyage and of making them decide to return to shore in order to take passage on another steamer. When Captain Turner, of the* ***Lusitania****, learned this he announced that he would grant to the passengers a reduction of ten dollars apiece. Excepting twelve persons, who persisted in their intention of leaving the ship, all the passengers, seduced by the offer of the Captain, remained on board."*

THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT IN BELGIUM.