

**THE GERMANS IN
BELGIUM: EXPERIENCES
OF A NEUTRAL**

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The Germans in Belgium: Experiences of a Neutral by L. H. Grondys

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EXPERIENCES OF A NEUTRAL

BY

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PREFACE

IN the following pages I have adopted the form of a little record of travel. Certain facts I witnessed justify the conclusions I have drawn. At the close of my sojourn in Belgium the wholesale shootings and destruction that had taken place still caused legitimate amazement, for the German theories had not as yet been revealed. Thus in my narrative I may seem to insist upon the almost accidental character of these misdeeds. At the beginning of the month of October I should have had no right to believe in a regular system of devastation and extermination.

But since this we have been enlightened by documents of great importance—first, General von Stenger's order of the day, directing that no prisoners should be made, and that of General von Bissing, which affects to justify the conduct of the Germans in Belgium; then numerous articles in German newspapers and reviews, which reduce these scandals to an organized system.

The thesis which inspires the Germans is that of the minimization of effort and suffering. According to this theory, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew was justified because, by one violent blow, it obviated a long-drawn-out religious war, and diminished the number

of victims. "Let us be ruthless," say the Germans, "that so we may minimize the sufferings of nations."

The German armies have accordingly carried on two simultaneous wars—one against the enemy's hosts, the other against the weak and helpless. Let us admit the force of cold reason, and confess that their position is strong and extremely logical. By their secondary war upon the homes of the poor, civilians, unarmed men, and the wounded on the battlefield, they have almost succeeded in disheartening citizens and discouraging combatants. In Belgium I saw citizens in the midst of ruins who had lost all hope in the future of their country.

But should not the Germans, who claim to be the educationalists of the world, know that threats and violence which do not intimidate, engender imperishable hatred? They have shown themselves very poor psychologists, for their methods have strengthened the resistance of the Belgians. Reinforcing clear conceptions of right and wrong by rage and indignation, they have rallied fainting souls and despairing hearts to the support of great and far-seeing leaders—King Albert, Cardinal Mercier, the Burgomaster Max, and many others.

By their coldly calculated methods they have made war, that splendid and terrible phenomenon, a thing of sickening horror. Will posterity be able always to distinguish between the lofty courage of their officers, the magnificent devotion of their soldiers, and the deliberately sinister misdeeds of which they have left traces on every hand?

The celebrated chemist Ostwald has lately declared that France has only attained to the "phase of indi-

vidualism." Germany, on the other hand, has arrived at the summit of "collectivism," which gives her an historic right to hegemony and suzerainty. This thesis, which has been acclaimed as original, is derived from the German philosophers of the classic period. Inaugurated by Fichte, it was made the basis of an imposing historical theory by the great patriot, Hegel. However, we must not take Herr Ostwald too literally. Collectivism—that is to say, military and intellectual discipline among a people—constitutes individualism—that is to say, arbitrary rule among the governing classes.

But this individualism, which they despise so much, and which sometimes, indeed, manifests itself in such repulsive forms among them, is the virtue of the Latin race. All the beauty of nobly tempered souls, the worship of deference to women and of kindness to the weak, generosity, chivalrous ideas—in short, the amenity of this race which they scorn, its purely individualist qualities—must of necessity be killed by their discipline.

Let us not forget that if they have attacked international law and deliberately infringed its rules, here, again, it is the Latin civilization against which they are fighting. For international law is but the codification of the instinctive virtues of France.