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THE MARTYRDOM OF BELGIUM

OFFICIAL REPORT OF

Massacres of Peaceable Citizens, Women and Children

BY THE

German Army

TESTIMONY OF EYE-WITNESSES

"It is by a deep study of the history of wars that one may protect oneself against exaggerated humanitarian ideas."

—"KRIEGSGEBRAUCH IM LANDKRIEGE"

Published by the German General Staff, 1902.

Pages 6 and 7.

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*Belgium, Commission d'enquête sur la violation des règles
" du droit des gens, des lois et des coutumes de la guerre.*

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PREFACE.

The Official Belgian Commission of Inquiry, which has been charged with the task of examining into the violation of the rules of International Law and of the Customs of War, is composed of Statesmen and Jurists of the highest standing. The Reports of the Commission have been published from time to time. Report XI will be found in the following pages.

These reports are given out by the Commission only after careful examination of the evidence. Consequently the findings of the Commission command the same respect as the findings of the highest Law Court.

Names of witnesses have, in certain cases, been withheld from publication. All the depositions are, however, in the possession of the Commission and the names of the witnesses will be given out at the proper time. The publication of these names at the present moment would, inevitably, cause the German troops to take revenge upon witnesses, or upon the relatives of witnesses, remaining within the German lines.

The authenticity of the depositions is guaranteed by the eminent Statesmen and Jurists who compose the Commission and who have signed the Reports.

No commentary can add anything to the tragic eloquence of these simple and well-authenticated depositions. Who can read the recital of these horrors without feeling his heart throb with righteous indignation, and without feeling an infinite sorrow at the thought that these abominations have been committed, after two thousand years of Christian civilization, by a nation which, only yesterday, claimed to be the foremost in modern Progress.

It should be remembered that Belgium had done nothing to bring on the war nor to involve her in it. She was a neutralized country. Every shot fired by a German soldier in Belgium is a violation of the solemn treaty whereby Germany pledged her faith to uphold the neutrality of Belgium.

At the end of this pamphlet (page 20) will be found extracts from the "Laws of War on Land," published by the German General Staff in 1902, and other documents, showing that the massacres, arson and pillage committed by the German army in Belgium are attributable, not to the innate brutality of the German soldier, but rather to an organized system of terrorism laid down and ordered by the superior German Military authorities.

The authenticity of the following text of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry is certified by the Belgian Legation, Washington, D. C.

OFFICIAL BELGIAN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

on the violation of the Rules of International Law, and of the Laws and Customs of War.
ELEVENTH REPORT SUBMITTED TO HIS EXCELLENCY, MR. CARTON DE WIART,
Belgian Minister of Justice.

(1.) INCIDENTS AT NAMUR.

On August 21st, 1914, the Germans bombarded the town of Namur, without any previous notice given. The bombardment began about 1 p. m. and continued for twenty minutes. The besieger was in possession of long-range guns, which enabled him to fire upon the town before the forts had been taken. Shells fell upon the prison, the hospital, the Burgomaster's house and the railway station, causing conflagrations and killing several persons.

On August 23rd, the German Army pierced the exterior line of defence, and the Belgian 4th Division retreated by the angle between the rivers Sambre and Meuse, while the greater number of the forts were still uninjured and continuing to resist. The German troops penetrated into the town of Namur on the same day about 4 p. m.

On this day order was preserved: officers and soldiers requisitioned food and drink, paying for them sometimes with coined money, more often with requisition-certificates. Most of the latter were bogus documents, but the townspeople were trustful and ignorant of the German language, and so accepted them without making difficulties.

Matters went on in the same way on August 24th till 9 o'clock in the evening. At that hour shooting suddenly began in several quarters of the town, and German infantry were seen advancing in skirmishing order down the principal streets. Almost at the same moment an immense column of smoke and fire was seen rising from the central quarter of the place: the Germans had fired houses in the Place d'Armes and four other spots, the Place Leopold, Rue Rogier, Rue St. Nicolas and the Avenue de la Plante.

All was now panic among the peaceable and defenseless townsfolk: the Germans began breaking open front doors with the butts of their rifles, and throwing incendiary matter into the vestibules. Six dwellers in the Rue Rogier, who were flying from their burning houses, were shot on their own doorsteps. The rest of the inhabitants of this street were forced to avoid a similar fate by escaping through their back gardens. Many of them were in their night clothes, for they had not the time to dress or to pick up their money.

In the Rue St. Nicolas several workmen's dwellings were set on fire, and a larger number, together with some wood-yards, were burned in the Avenue de la Plante.

The conflagration in the Place d'Armes continued till Thursday. It destroyed the Town Hall, with its archives and pictures, the adjacent group of houses, and the whole quarter bounded by the Rue

du Pont, the Rue des Brasseurs, and the Rue Bailly, with the exception of the Hotel des Quatre Fils Aymon.

No serious attempt was made to prevent the fire from spreading. At its commencement some of the townspeople came out at the appeal of the Fire-Bell, but they were forbidden to stir from their houses. The Chief of the Fire Brigade, though the balls were whistling round him, got as far as the site of the disaster; but an officer arrested him in the Place d'Armes, and then, acting under the orders of his superior, sent him away under an escort.

The Germans, with the object of justifying their proceedings, alleged that shots had been fired against their troops on the Monday evening. Every circumstance demonstrates the absurdity of this statement. The juxtaposition of observed facts and the sequence of concordant evidence lead to the conclusion that the incidents at Namur were deliberately prepared, and merely formed part of the general system of terrorism which was habitually practised by the German Army in Belgium.

Fifteen days back the people of Namur had given over to the Belgian Authorities all the firearms that they possessed. They had been informed by Official Notices as to the tenor of the Laws of War, and had been invited by the Civil and Military Authorities, by the Clergy and the Press, to take no part with the belligerents. The Belgian troops had evacuated the town 36 hours before the conflagration. The people, even if they had possessed weapons, would not have been so insane as to rise and assail the masses of German troops who crowded the town and occupied all its approaches. And how can anyone account for the strange fact that, at all the five points at which the alleged rising was supposed to have broken out, the Germans were found in possession of the incendiary substances which were required for the prompt burning of the place?

The disorder which followed helped the pillage in which the German Army habitually engages. In the Place d'Armes houses were thoroughly sacked before they were set on fire. In the quarter by the Gate of St. Nicolas the inhabitants, when they returned to their homes, found that everything had been plundered; in one case a safe had been broken up and 17,000 francs worth of securities had disappeared.

On the subsequent days, though things were comparatively quiet, pillage continued. In several houses where German officers were quartered, the furniture was broken up, and wine and underclothing (even female underclothing) was stolen.

Our witnesses have detailed to us several outrages on women. In one case we have evidence concerning the rape of a girl by four soldiers. A Belgian quartermaster of Gendarmes saw the daughter of the proprietor of the hotel in which he was staying outraged by two German soldiers, without being able to intervene for her protection, at four o'clock in the morning.

Many inhabitants of Namur perished during the fire and the fusillade. Some aged people were left in the burning houses: others were killed in the streets, or shot in their own dwellings. In all, seventy-five civilians perished in one of these ways or another on the 23rd-24th-25th August.

We may mention, without detailing, the arrest of hostages, and the brutal treatment to which the most distinguished inhabitants of the town were exposed during the early days of German occupation.

Namur and the seventeen neighbouring communes were subjected to a war contribution of fifty million francs (£2,000,000), which was afterwards reduced to thirty-two millions, on condition that the first million should be paid within twenty-four hours. The deposits at a private bank (the *Banque Generale Belge*) were confiscated. On the petition of its directors the concession was made that the sum seized should count towards the war contribution.

The immediate neighborhood of the town was the scene of many similar acts of violence. In this part of the province many mansions and villas were systematically pillaged. One citizen of Namur saw his own furniture from his country house going to the rear on a German cart. The plunder was all sent off to Germany.

At Vedrin a boy was shot because he was found to have in his possession an empty German cartridge case. Twenty-six priests and members of religious orders were shot in the diocese of Namur.

(II.) MASSACRE AT TAMINES.

Tamines was a rich and populous village situated on the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur. It was occupied by detachments of French troops on the 17th, 18th and 19th of August last. On Thursday, the 20th August, a German patrol appeared in front of the suburb of Vilaines. It was greeted by shots fired by French soldiers, and by a party of the Civic Guards of Charleroi. Several Uhlans were killed and wounded, and the rest fled. The people of the village came out of their houses and cried: "Vive la Belgique!" "Vive la France!" In all probability it was this incident which caused the subsequent massacre of Tamines.

Some time afterwards the Germans arrived in force at the hamlet of Alloux. They there burnt two houses and made all the inhabitants prisoners. An artillery combat broke out between the German guns posted at Vilaines and at Alloux and the French guns placed in a battery at Arsimont and at Hame-sur-Heure.

About 5 o'clock on 21st August, the Germans carried the bridge of Tamines, crossed the River Sambre, and began defiling in mass through the streets of the village. About 8 o'clock the movement of troops stopped, and the soldiers penetrated into the houses, drove out the inhabitants, set themselves to sack the place, and then burnt it. The unfortunate peasants who stopped in the village were shot; the rest fled from their houses. The greater part of them were arrested either on the night of the 21st of August or on the following morning. Pillage and burning continued all next day (22nd).

On the evening of the 22nd (Saturday) a group of between 400 and 450 men was collected in front of the Church, not far from the bank of the Sambre. A German detachment opened fire on them, but as the shooting was a slow business the officers ordered up a machine gun, which soon swept off all the unhappy peasants still left standing. Many of them were only wounded and, hoping to save their lives, got with difficulty on their feet again. They were immediately shot down. Many wounded still lay among the corpses. Groans of pain and cries for help were heard in the bleeding heap. On several occasions soldiers walked up to such unhappy individuals and stopped their groans with a bayonet thrust. At night some who still survived succeeded in crawling away. Others put an end to their own pain by rolling themselves into the neighboring river.

All these facts have been established by depositions made by wounded men who succeeded in escaping. About 100 bodies were found in the river.

Next day, Sunday, the 23rd, about 6 o'clock in the morning, another party consisting of prisoners made in the village and the neighborhood were brought into the Square. One of them makes the following deposition:—

“On reaching the Square the first thing that we saw was a mass of bodies of civilians extending over at least 40 yards in length by 6 yards in depth. They had evidently been drawn up in rank to be shot. We were placed before this range of corpses, and were convinced that we too were to be shot.

“An officer then came forward and asked for volunteers to dig trenches to bury these corpses. I and my brother-in-law and certain others offered ourselves. We were conducted to a neighbouring field at the side of the Square, where they made us dig a trench 15 yards long by 10 broad and 2 deep. Each received a spade. While we were digging the trenches soldiers with fixed bayonets gave us our orders. As I was much fatigued through not being accustomed to digging, and being faint from hunger, a soldier then brought me a lighter spade, and afterwards filled a bucket of water for us to drink. I asked him if he knew what they were going to

do with us. He said that he did not. By the time that the trenches were finished it was about noon. They then gave us some planks, on which we placed the corpses and so carried them to the trench. I recognized many of the persons whose bodies we were burying. Actually fathers buried the bodies of their sons and sons the bodies of their fathers. The women of the village had been marched out into the Square, and saw us at our work. All around were the burnt houses.

“There were in the Square both soldiers and officers. They were drinking champagne. The more the afternoon drew on the more they drank, and the more we were disposed to think that we were probably to be shot too. We buried from 350 to 400 bodies. A list of the names of the victims has been drawn up and will have been given to you (the Commissioner).

“While some of us were carrying the corpses along I saw a case where they had stopped and called to a German doctor. They had noticed that the man whom they were conveying was still alive. The doctor examined the wounded man and made a sign that he was to be buried with the rest. The plank on which he was lying was borne on again, and I saw the wounded man raise his arm elbow-high. They called to the doctor again, but he made a gesture that he was to go into the trench with the others.

“I saw M. X—— carrying off the body of his own son-in-law. He was able to take away his watch, but was not allowed to remove some papers which were on him.

“When a soldier, seized with an impulse of pity, came near us, an officer immediately scolded him away. When all the bodies had been interred, certain wounded were brought to the Church. Officers consulted about them for some time. Four mounted officers came into the Square, and, after a long conversation, we with our wives and children were made to fall into marching order. We were taken through Tamines, amid the debris which obstructed the streets, and led to Vilaines between two ranks of soldiers. Think of our mental sufferings during this march! We all thought that we were going to be shot in the presence of our wives and children. I saw German soldiers who could not refrain from bursting into tears, on seeing the despair of the women. One of our party was seized with an apoplectic fit from mere terror, and I saw many who fainted.”

When the cortege arrived at Vilaines, an officer told the unhappy people that they were free, but that anyone returning to Tamines would be shot. He obliged the women and children to cry: “Vive l’Allemagne.” The Germans burnt, after sacking them, 264 houses in Tamines. Many persons, including women and children, were burnt or stifled in their own homes. Many others were shot in the fields. The total number of victims was over 650. The

Commission of Enquiry devoted special attention to ascertaining whether the inhabitants of the village had fired on the German troops. Every surviving witness unanimously declared the contrary. They explained the massacre of their fellow-villagers by the fact that the Germans attributed to the inhabitants the shots which had been fired by the French skirmishers, or perhaps to the anger produced among the Germans by the success of an attack which had been made on them that night by the French troops.

(III.) PILLAGE AND MASSACRE AT ANDENNE.

The town of Andenne is situated on the right bank of the Meuse between Namur and Huy. It is connected by a bridge with the village of Seilles, which is built along the river on the opposite, or left, bank. The German troops who were wishing to invade the territory on the left bank of the Meuse arrived at Andenne on Thursday, August 19th, in the morning. Their advance guard of Uhlans found that the bridge was not available. A regiment of Belgian Infantry had blown it up at 8 o'clock on the same morning. The Uhlans retired after having seized the Communal cash box at Andenne and brutally maltreated the Burgomaster, Dr. Camus, an old man of more than 70 years. The Burgomaster had several days before taken the most minute precautions to prevent the population from engaging in hostilities. He had posted up everywhere placards ordering non-resistance. All firearms had been collected in the Hotel de Ville, and the local authorities had personally visited certain of the inhabitants to explain their duty to them.

The main body of the German Troops arrived at Andenne in the afternoon. The Regiment halted in the Town and outside it, waiting for the completion of a pontoon bridge, which was not finished till the following morning. The first contact between the troops and the people was quite pacific. The Germans ordered requisitions, which were satisfied. The soldiers at first paid for their purchases and for the drink which they served to them in the Cafes. Towards the evening the situation began to grow more strained. Whether it was that discipline was getting relaxed, or that alcohol commenced to produce its effect, the soldiers ceased paying for what they were taking. The inhabitants were too scared to resist. No friction took place and the night was calm.

On Thursday, the 20th August, the bridge was finished and the troops defiled through the town in great numbers in the direction of the left bank. The inhabitants watched them passing from their houses. Suddenly, at 6 o'clock in the evening, a single rifle shot was heard in the street, followed immediately by a startling explosion.

The troops halted, their ranks fell into disorder, and nervous men fired haphazard. Presently a machine gun was set up at a corner and commenced to fire against the houses, and later a cannon dropped three shells into the town at three different points.

At the first rifle shot the inhabitants of the streets through which the troops were defiling, guessing what might happen, took refuge in their cellars or, climbing out over the walls of their gardens, sought refuge in the open country or in distant cellars. A certain number of people who would not or could not make their escape were killed in their houses by shots fired from the street, or in some cases by soldiers who burst into their dwellings.

Immediately afterwards commenced the pillage of the houses in the principal streets of the Town. Every window shutter and door was broken in. Furniture was smashed and thrown out. The soldiers ran down into the cellars, got drunk there, breaking the bottles of wine that they could not carry away. Finally, a certain number of houses were set on fire. During the night rifle shooting broke out several times. The terrified population lay low in their cellars.

Next day, Friday, the 21st August, at 4 o'clock in the morning, the soldiers spread themselves through the Town, driving all the population into the streets and forcing men, women and children to march before them with their hands in the air. Those who did not obey with sufficient promptitude, or did not understand the order given them in German, were promptly knocked down. Those who tried to run away were shot. It was at this moment that Dr. Camus, against whom the Germans seemed to have some special spite, was wounded by a rifle shot, and then finished off by a blow from an axe. His body was dragged along by the feet for some distance. A watchmaker, a Fleming by birth, who had lived for some time in the Town, was coming out of his house on the order of the soldiers, supporting on his arm his father-in-law, an old man of 80. Naturally, therefore, he could not hold up both his hands. A soldier stepped up to him and struck him with an axe on the neck. He fell mortally wounded before his own door. His wife tried to bring him assistance, was pushed back into the house, and had to assist helplessly at the last agony of her husband. A soldier threatened to shoot her with his revolver if she crossed the door-sill.

Meanwhile the whole population was being driven towards the Place des Tilleuls. Old men, the sick and the paralysed were all brought there. Some were drawn on wheel-chairs, others pushed on hand carts, others, again, borne up by their relations. The men were separated from the women and children, then all were searched, but no arms were found on them. One man had in his pocket some empty cartridge cases both German and Belgian. He was immediately apprehended and set aside. So was a cobbler who had a

wounded hand; the wound was a month old. An engineer was also put apart because he had in his pocket a spanner, which was considered as a weapon. Another man seems to have been arrested because his face showed his contempt and rage at what was going on. These people were shot in presence of the crowd and all died bravely.

Subsequently the soldiers, on the order of their officers, picked out of the mass some 40 or 50 men who were led off and all shot, some along the bank of the Meuse, and others in front of the Police Station.

The rest of the men were kept for a long time in the Place. Among them lay two persons, one of whom had received a ball in the chest, and the other a bayonet wound. They lay face to the ground with blood from their wounds trickling into the dust, occasionally calling for water. The officers forbade their neighbours to give them any help. One soldier was reproved for having wished to give one of them his water-bottle. Both died in the course of the day.

While this scene was going on in the Place des Tilleuls, other soldiers spread themselves through the Town, continuing their work of sack, pillage and arson. Eight men belonging to the same household were led out into a meadow some 50 yards from their dwelling, some of them were shot, the rest cut down with blows of an axe. One tall red-haired soldier with a scar on his face distinguished himself by the ferocity with which he used an axe. A young boy and a woman were shot.

About 10 in the morning the officers told the women to withdraw, giving them the order to gather together the dead bodies and to wash away the stains of blood which defiled the street and the houses. About midday the surviving men to the number of 800 were shut up as hostages in three little houses near the bridge, but they were not allowed to go out of them on any pretext, and so crammed together that they could not even sit down on the floor. Soon these crowded buildings reached a highly insanitary condition. The women later in the day were allowed to bring food to their husbands. Many of them, fearing outrage, had fled from the Place. These hostages were not finally released till the Tuesday following.

The statistics of the losses at Andenne give the following total:— Three hundred were massacred in Andenne and Seilles, and about 300 houses were burnt in the two localities. A great number of inhabitants have fled. Almost every house has been sacked; indeed, the pillage did not end for eight days. Other places have suffered more than Andenne, but no other Belgian Town was the theatre of of so many scenes of ferocity and cruelty. The numerous inhabitants whom we have cross-examined are unanimous in asserting that the German troops were not fired upon. They told us that no

German soldier was killed either at Andenne or in its neighbourhood. They are incapable of understanding the causes of the catastrophe which has ruined their town, and to explain it they give various hypotheses. Some think that Andenne was sacrificed merely to establish a reign of terror, and quote words uttered by officers which seemed to them to show that the destruction of the place was premeditated. Others think that the destruction of the bridge, the ruining of a neighbouring tunnel, and the resistance of the Belgian troops were the causes of the massacre. All protest that nothing happened in the place to excuse the conduct of the Germans.

(IV.) SACK OF DINANT.

The town of Dinant was sacked and destroyed by the German Army, and its population was decimated on the 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th August.

On August 15th a lively engagement took place at Dinant between the French troops on the left bank of the Meuse and the German troops coming up from the East. The German troops were routed by the French, who passed over to the right bank of the river following them. The town had little to suffer on that day. Some houses were destroyed by German shells, aimed no doubt at French regiments on the left bank, and a citizen of Dinant belonging to the Red Cross was killed by a German ball as he was picking up a wounded man.

The days which followed were calm. The French occupied the neighborhood of the town. No engagement took place between the hostile armies, and nothing happened which could be interpreted as an act of hostility by the population. No German troops were anywhere near Dinant. On Friday, the 21st, about 9 o'clock in the evening, German troops coming down the road from Ciney entered the town by the Rue St. Jacques. On entering they began firing into the windows of the houses, and killed a workman who was returning to his own house, wounded another inhabitant, and forced him to cry "Long live the Kaiser." They bayoneted a third person in the stomach. They entered the cafes, seized the liquor, got drunk, and retired after having set fire to several houses and broken the doors and windows of others. The population was terrorised and stupefied, and shut itself up in its dwellings.

Saturday, August 22nd, was a day of relative calm. All life, however, was at an end in the streets. Part of the inhabitants, guided by the instincts of self-preservation, fled into the neighbouring country side. The rest, more attached to their homes, and rendered confident by the conviction that nothing had happened which could be interpreted as an act of hostility on their part, remained hidden in their houses.

On Sunday morning next, the 23rd, at 6.30 in the morning, soldiers of the 108th Regiment of Infantry invaded the Church of the Premonastrensian Fathers, drove out the congregation, separated the women from the men, and shot 50 of the latter. Between 7 and 9 the same morning the soldiers gave themselves up to pillage and arson, going from house to house and driving the inhabitants into the street. Those who tried to escape were shot. About 9 in the morning the soldiery, driving before them by blows from the butt ends of rifles men, women, and children, pushed them all into the Parade Square, where they were kept prisoners till 6 o'clock in the evening. The guard took pleasure in repeating to them that they would soon be shot. About 6 o'clock a Captain separated the men from the women and children. The women were placed in front of a rank of infantry soldiers, the men were ranged along a wall. The front rank of them were then told to kneel, the others standing behind them. A platoon of soldiers drew up in face of these unhappy men. It was in vain that the women cried out for mercy for their husbands, sons, and brothers. The officer ordered his men to fire. There had been no inquiry nor any pretense of a trial. About 20 of the inhabitants were only wounded, but fell among the dead. The soldiers, to make sure, fired a new volley into the heap of them. Several citizens escaped this double discharge. They shammed dead for more than two hours, remaining motionless among the corpses, and when night fell succeeded in saving themselves in the hills. Eighty-four corpses were left on the Square, and buried in a neighbouring garden.

The day of August 23rd was made bloody by several more massacres. Soldiers discovered some inhabitants of the Faubourg St. Pierre in the cellars of a brewery there and shot them.

Since the previous evening a crowd of workmen belonging to the factory of M. Himmer had hidden themselves, along with their wives and children, in the cellars of the building. They had been joined there by many neighbours and several members of the family of their employer. About 6 o'clock in the evening these unhappy people made up their minds to come out of their refuge, and defiled all trembling from the cellars with the white flag in front. They were immediately seized and violently attacked by the soldiers. Every man was shot on the spot. Almost all the men of the Faubourg de Leffe were executed *en masse*. In another part of the town 12 civilians were killed in a cellar. In the Rue en Ile a paralytic was shot in his armchair. In the Rue Enfer the soldiers killed a young boy of 14.

In the Faubourg de Leffe the viaduct of the railway was the scene of a bloody massacre. An old woman and all her children were killed in their cellar. A man of 65 years, his wife, his son and his daughter were shot against a wall. Other inhabitants of Leffe were taken in a barge as far as the rock of Bayard and shot there, among them a woman of 83 and her husband.

A certain number of men and women had been locked up in the Court of the Prison. At six in the evening a German machine gun, placed on the hill above, opened fire on them, and an old woman and three other persons were brought down.

While a certain number of soldiers were perpetrating this massacre, others pillaged and sacked the houses of the town, and broke open all safes, sometimes blasting them with dynamite. Their work of destruction and theft accomplished, the soldiers set fire to the houses, and the town was soon no more than an immense furnace.

The women and children had been all shut up in a Convent, where they were kept prisoners for four days. These unhappy women remained in ignorance of the lot of their male relations. They were expecting themselves to be shot also. All around the town continued to blaze. The first day the monks of the Convent had given them a certain supply of food. For the remaining days they had nothing to eat but raw carrots and green fruit.

To sum up, the town of Dinant is destroyed. It counted 1,400 houses; only 200 remain. The manufactories where the artisan population worked have been systematically destroyed. Rather more than 700 of the inhabitants have been killed; others have been taken off to Germany, and are still retained there as prisoners. The majority are refugees scattered all through Belgium. A few who remained in the town are dying of hunger. It has been proved by our Enquiry that German soldiers, while exposed to the fire of the French entrenched on the opposite bank of the Meuse, in certain cases sheltered themselves behind a line of civilians, women and children.

(V) MASSACRES AT HASTIERE AND SURICE

On August 23rd, the Germans entered the village of Hastiere-par-dela. (1.) They arrested Dr. Halloy, a Surgeon of the Red Cross, and shot him. Crossing the street, they went to the house of Alphonse Aigret, a butcher, drove out him, his wife and his children, and shot him and his elder son. Next they went to the farm of Jules Rifon, took him out of his cellar, where he had hidden with his daughters, and shot him. They also killed the farmer Bodson and his two sons, with ten other inhabitants of the village. The place was then sacked, and the greater part of the houses burned. The number of persons killed or wounded was very large.

(1) Testimony of the Right Reverend Monsignor X——annexed to the proceedings of the Session of Dec. 18, 1914.

The ancient church of Hastiere suffered odious profanation. Horses were stabled in it. The priestly vestments were torn and befouled. The lamps, statues, and holy-water stoups were broken. The reliquary was smashed, and the relics scattered about. Among them were some relics of the Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne, which had escaped the fury of the Huguenots of 1590 and the Revolution of 1790. The tabernacle resisted an attempt at burglary, but two of the four altars were profaned; the sepulchres at the altars were broken open and the remains in them thrown out and trampled under foot.

The parish priest of Hastiere, Abbe Emile Schogel, had taken refuge in the crypt, with his brother-in-law, M. Ponthiere, a professor of the University of Louvain, the wife and two daughters of the professor, two servants, the schoolmaster of the village with his wife and family, and other inhabitants. The Germans fired at them through the windows of the crypt, and then forced them to come up to the road, where they were brought before several officers, of whom some were intoxicated. Some questions were put to the Abbe, but he was given no time to answer. The women were then dragged apart from the men, and the priest, M. Pointhiere, the schoolmaster, and the other men were shot; their bodies were left lying on the road. All this happened on August 24th, 1914, at about 5.30 in the afternoon.

On this same day the village of Surice was occupied by the German troops. At about 11 p. m. they set fire to some of the houses. Next morning, about 6 o'clock, the soldiers broke open doors and windows with the butts of their rifles, and forced all the inhabitants to come out. They were led off in the direction of the church. On the way several most inoffensive people were fired upon. For example, the old choirman, Charles Colot, aged 88, was shot as he came out of his door; the soldiers rolled his body in a blanket, and set fire to it.

A man named Elie Pierrot was seized by the Germans as he was coming out of his burning house, carrying his aged and impotent step-mother (she was over 80 years of age), and was shot at short range. The clerk, Leopold Burniaux, his son Armand, who had been recently ordained priest, and another of his sons were shot before the eyes of Madame Burniaux. She, with her last surviving son, a professor at the College of Malonne, were marched off with the surviving inhabitants on the road to Romedenne. In a garden below the road there was a dead woman lying, with two small children crying over her.

On arriving at Fosses the party were led to a piece of fallow ground—they numbered between 50 and 60 persons of both sexes. "It was about 7.15 a. m. when the men and the women were sep-

arated. An officer came up who said to us in French with a strong German accent, 'You all deserve to be shot: a young girl of 15 has just fired on one of our Commanders. But the Court-martial has decided that only the men shall be executed: the women will be kept prisoners.'

"The scene that followed passes all description: there were eighteen men standing in a row: besides the parish priests of Anthee and Onhaye, and the Abbe Gaspiard, there was our own priest, Mons. Poskin, and his brother-in-law, Mons. Schmidt, then Doctor Jacques and his son Henri, aged just 16, then Gaston Burniaux, the clerk's son, and Leonard Soumoy: next them two men named Balbeur and Billy, with the 17-year-old son of the latter: last two men from Onhaye and Dinant who had taken refuge in Surice, and two people more whom I did not know. Mons. Schmidt's little boy of 14 was nearly put into the line—the soldiers hesitated, but finally shoved him away in a brutal fashion. At this moment I saw a young German soldier—this I vouch for—who was so horror-struck that great tears were dropping onto his tunic: he did not wipe his eyes for fear of being seen by his officer, but kept his head turned away.

"Some minutes passed: then under our eyes and amid the shrieks of women who were crying 'Shoot me too; shoot me with my husband!' and the wailing of the children, the men were lined up on the edge of the hollow way which runs from the high road to the bottom of the village. They waved last greetings to us, some with their hands, others with their hats or caps. The young Henri Jacques was leaning on the shoulder of one of the priests, as if to seek help and courage from him: he was sobbing, 'I am too young; I can't face death bravely.' Unable to bear the sight any longer, I turned my back to the road and covered my eyes with my hands. The soldiers fired their volley, and the men fell in a heap. Someone said to me, 'Look, they are all down!' But they were not all shot dead; several were finished off by having their skulls beaten in with rifle-butts. Among these was the priest of Surice, whose head (as I was afterwards told) was dreadfully opened out.

"When the massacre was over the Germans plundered the corpses. They took from them watches, rings, purses, and pocket-books. Madame Schmidt told me that her husband had on him about 3,000 francs, which was stolen. Dr. Jacques had also a good sum on him, though his wife could not say exactly how much.

"After this some more German soldiers brought up a man named Victor Cavillot, and shot him before he reached the spot where the others were lying; they fired on him, and I saw him double up and fall into the hollow way." (1)

(1) From the testimony of Mademoiselle Aline Diericz, of Tenham, annexed to the Report of the Session of Dec. 18, 1914.

The village of Surice was thoroughly sacked. The pillage began on Tuesday night, and continued all day on Wednesday. The safe of Madame Laurent-Mineur, a widow, was blown open with dynamite. Of the 131 houses of the village only eight escaped the conflagration.

This Report gives no more than an incomplete picture of the German ravages and crimes in the Province of Namur. We lack detailed knowledge of what went on in three of the six cantons which form the district of Namur. The total of 800 persons killed and 1,160 houses burned in that district may have to be largely increased. In the district of Dinant, that town itself and 21 villages have been destroyed. In the district of Philippeville 20 villages have been sacked, plundered, and more or less burned down. In the whole province, which has 364,000 inhabitants, nearly 2,000 unoffending people—men, women, and children—have been massacred.

The Commission makes it a rule to limit its publications to a mere statement of facts, thinking that no commentary could add anything to their tragic eloquence. It thinks, however, that the evidence given above leads to certain conclusions.

It has been said that when Belgium makes up the account of her losses, it may appear that war has levied more victims from the civil population than from the men who were called out to serve their country on the battlefield. This prophecy, which seemed contrary to reason, is now confirmed as regards the Province of Namur. In certain parts of it half the male adult population has disappeared: the horrors of the conflagrations at Louvain and Termonde, of the massacres at Aerschot and in Luxembourg and Brabant, are all surpassed by those of the slaughter at Dinant, at Andenne, at Tamines, and at Namur.

In this twentieth century the people of Namur have had to live through all the frightful details of a mediæval war, with its traditional episodes of massacres *en masse*, drunken orgies, sack of whole towns, and general conflagration. The "exploits" of the mercenary bands of the XVIIth Century have been surpassed by those of the national army of a State which claims the first place among civilized nations!

The German Government cannot deny the truth of these facts—they are attested by the ruins and the graves which cover our native soil. But already it has set to work to excuse its troops, affirming that they only repressed, in consonance with the Laws of War, the hostile acts of the Belgian civil population.

From the day of its First Session our Commission has been trying to discover what foundation there might be for this charge—a charge which seemed very unconvincing to anyone who knew the character of the Belgian people. After having examined hundreds of witnesses—foreigners and natives—and after having exhausted every possible means of investigation, we affirm once more that the Belgian people took no part in the hostilities. The supposed “France-Tireur” War, which is said to have been waged against the German Army, is a mere invention. It was invented in order to lessen in the eyes of the civilized world the impression caused by the barbarous treatment inflicted by the German Army on our people, and also to appease the scruples of the German nation, which will shudder with fear on the day when it learns what a tribute of innocent blood was levied by its troops on our children, our wives, and our defenseless fellow-citizens.

Moreover, the chiefs of the German Army have made a singular error when they try to influence the verdict of the civilized world by this particular argument. They seem unaware of the fact that the repression by general measures of individual faults—a system condemned by the International Conventions at which they scoff—has long been condemned by the conscience of the nations of to-day. Among those nations Germany appears for the future as a monstrous and disconcerting moral phenomenon.

(Signed) COOREMAN,

Minister of State, President.

COMTE GOBLET DE AVIELLA, *Vice-President,*
Minister of State and Vice-President of the
Belgian Senate.

CHEVALIER ERNEST DE BUNSWYCK,

Chief Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

ORTS,

Councillor of Legation to H.M. the King of the
Belgians.

THE GERMAN MILITARY CODE

In 1902 the Historic Section of the German General Staff published a collection of works for the instruction and guidance of the officers of the German Army. Among these works is a Manual upon "The Laws of War on Land." ("Kriegsgebrauch im Landkriege.") The following extracts from this manual show that the ideas of the German General Staff on the conduct of warfare are diametrically opposed to the views generally adopted by civilized countries. It is the systematic carrying-out of these ideas which has caused the devastation and desolation of Belgium.

It is by making a deep study of the history of wars that, "*one may protect oneself against exaggerated humanitarian ideas.*"

(Laws of War on Land, pp. 6 and 7)

The claims of professors of International Law (in regard to a certain point under discussion) "should be deliberately rejected in principle as being opposed to the rules of war."

(Ibid page 46)

The claims of certain professors of International Law in this respect are absolutely contrary to the necessities of warfare, "and should be rejected by military men."

(Ibid pages 44 and 45)

An energetically conducted war cannot be carried on solely against the combatant enemy and his defenses, but extends and should extend to *the destruction of his material and moral resources. Humanitarian considerations, such as respect for persons and property, can be taken into consideration only provided that the nature and object of the war adapt themselves to that course.*

(Ibid page 3)

The above extracts indicate clearly the spirit of the German military class, namely,

To protect themselves against humanitarian ideas, as against a dangerous infection.

To cast aside international law if found incompatible with convenience.

To strike not only at the enemy's armed forces, but to terrorise him by striking at his "material and moral resources," *i. e.* his home and property, his wife and children.

These injunctions of the German Code of 1902 have been fully carried out in Belgium, and have converted the German army into "a horde of barbarians and a band of incendiaries."

The "ethics" of the German Military Code have also been supported by German jurists inoculated with the germ of the same "Kultur."

Meurer, in his book on the Hague Peace Conference, says that there is no violation of international law "when an act of war is necessary to support the troops or to defend them against a danger which cannot be avoided by any other means, or when the act is necessary in order to realize or assure the success of a military operation which is not in itself prohibited."

("Die Haager Friedenskonferenz, II Band, page 14)

In other words "Necessity Knows No Law." It is the same doctrine proclaimed by the Imperial German Chancellor, Dr. von Bethmann-Hollweg, and upheld by other German jurists such as Dr. Karl Strupp, who says:

"A body of troops may be obliged to let their prisoners starve, if the commander thinks this is the only means of carrying out an order which he has received, for example, an order to reach, at a certain time, a place indispensable for the proper conduct of the operations.

"The stipulations of the Laws of War may be disregarded whenever the violation of them seems to be the only means of carrying out a military operation or of assuring its success, or, indeed, of supporting the armed forces, even though it be only one soldier."

("Das Internationale Landkriegsrecht," 1914, pages 7 and 8)

In short, according to the German idea, the recognized Laws of War, as understood by civilized nations, are to be practised by Germany only when found convenient. The alleged killing of one German soldier in Aerschot led to the destruction of the whole town and the massacre of many innocent citizens. It was contrary to Law, but it was in accordance with the spirit of the German Military Code of 1902.

The German Army invaded Belgium with the full intention, in case of resistance, of carrying on a war of terror by means of massacre, robbery and destruction—a war to "destroy the material and moral resources of the enemy." Moreover, the German officers were provided with forms drawn up in the French language to facilitate them, especially in their work of robbery and arson.

They do not seem to have needed anything to facilitate them in their work of massacre.

These forms are found in a book published at Berlin by Bath, in 1906, entitled "The Military Interpreter," destined for the use of German officers "in the enemy's country," which seems to be a French speaking country such as Belgium or France, as the forms are drawn up in French. The book contains, to quote its introduction, "the French text of the majority of the documents, letters, proclamations and other forms which may be needed in time of war."

Among these interesting documents we find the following form to be used by officers when wishing to rob a whole city at once. It will be observed that the pretended excuse for the robbery is supplied. The document is as follows :

"A fine of 600,000 marks, on account of the attempted assassination of a German soldier by a, has been imposed upon the City of O..... by order of....."

"Fruitless efforts have been made to secure the remittance or reduction of this fine.

"The limit of time fixed for the payment of the fine expires tomorrow, Saturday, December 17th, at noon.

"Bank Notes, Coin, or Silverware will be accepted."

The general outline of this useful form was followed by General Baron von Leutwitz when on November 1st, 1914, he imposed upon the City of Brussels "an additional fine of Five Million Francs" on account of an alleged altercation between a Belgian policeman, named De Ryckere, and a German soldier.

Here is another form, intended to give an air of justification to an act of robbery :

"The German authorities, having demanded a war contribution of two million francs from the city of M....., because its inhabitants fired upon the German troops when entering the city, and the municipality having declared that it has not the necessary funds and that it cannot find such funds among the citizens, the German authorities demand a settlement by bills of exchange."

If the above demand failed to produce the desired results, the German Commanders were provided with another form to be used

as a "follow-up" letter. This is a form of letter to be written by the Commanding General to his subordinate, and the substance is to be communicated to the recalcitrant citizens.

"I acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 7th of this month telling me of the great difficulties you think you will meet in collecting the contributions.

"I can only regret the explanations that you think proper to make on this subject. The order in question (which comes from my Government) is so clear and precise, the orders which I have received (on this subject) are so explicit, that, *if the amount due by the City of B..... is not paid the city will be burned without mercy.*"

The foregoing form seems to have been substantially followed by Lieutenant General von Niebur in his letter to the Burgomaster of Wavre on August 27th, 1914. A fine of three million francs was imposed upon the little town of Wavre for an alleged attack on the German troops, and in his letter of the above date Lieutenant General von Niebur declares that "*the City of Wavre will be burned and destroyed if the levy is not paid in due time, without regard for anyone; the innocent will suffer with the guilty.*"

Here is another form for extorting money from a community :

"On account of the destruction of the bridge at F..... I command, as follows :

"The district shall pay an additional contribution of ten million francs, as a fine. This information is brought to the knowledge of the public with the following notice, namely, that the manner of distributing the assessment will be indicated later, and that the payment of the said amount will be exacted with the greatest severity. *The village of F..... has been at once burned with the exception of certain houses reserved for the use of the troops.*"

The foregoing form recalls the Proclamation of General von Buelow to the Municipal Authorities of Liege, on August 22nd, 1914, in which he said :

"*It is with my consent that the Commander-in-Chief has ordered the whole town (of Andenne) to be burned and that about one hundred people have been shot.*"

The scenes of horror and barbarism depicted in the Reports of the Official Belgian Commission of Inquiry have not been brought about by accident. They are the direct result of the orders given and the doctrines inculcated by the German General Staff.

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