

The Blame for the Sack of Louvain

The two articles published herewith touch an international controversy which has raged between the Belgian and the German Governments, unaffected either by the close of the World War or by the accession of a republican régime in Germany, since August, 1914.

Professor Christian Meurer of the University of Würzburg and Professor Fernand Mayence of the University of Louvain debate in these articles, written specially for CURRENT HISTORY in German and French, respectively, the responsibility for the sack of the city of Louvain by the German army in 1914.

This controversy recently flamed out anew as a result of the publication in Germany of the official report of Professor Meurer and the verdict of the Reichstag commission, on the one hand, and Professor Mayence's formal reply to both, on the other.

The inauguration of Louvain's new bells not long ago and the projected dedication of Louvain's new library, donated mainly by American friends of Belgium, to take place on July 4, 1928, with elaborate ceremonies, give this clarification of the issues involved in this international controversy a special timeliness—EDITOR OF CURRENT HISTORY MAGAZINE.

I—The Case for the Germans

By CHRISTIAN MEURER

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ON Aug. 25-27, 1914, there occurred in Louvain bloody events which are still the subject of warm dispute today.

On Aug. 30, 1914, a German account of the happenings was printed in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and was reprinted in *The Frankfurter Zeitung* on Sept. 5. And the *White Book*, issued on May 10, 1915, by the Foreign Office in Berlin under the title "The Conduct of the Belgian People's War in Defiance of International Law," occupied itself with the details of the Louvain events, supporting a comprehensive report with numerous sworn declarations by witnesses, assembled in an appendix. The accounts in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and in the *White Book* agree in the main.

The essential points of the German account are these:

On Aug. 19, the first German troops marched into Louvain and occupied quarters in the Old City. On Aug. 25 there was a sudden change in the good relations that had existed at the beginning between the townspeople and the troops. On that day Belgian troops from Antwerp undertook a drive in the direction of Louvain. The German troops in and near Louvain went out to meet them. Already at this point they

were subjected to a hot fire by the inhabitants in Herent as well as from the houses south of Bucken. Persons caught in the act of firing were shot and their houses burned. The attack ended with the defeat of the Belgians, who in the evening were thrown back toward Antwerp. But the inhabitants of Louvain, who knew about the impending attack and believed that the drive of the Belgian Army was bound to succeed, with the help of English troops, were strengthened in the belief that the Germans had been beaten through the return march of the German troops, and in various places in the city, after a rocket had been sent up, a furious fire was opened upon the German soldiers. Shots came from cellars, windows and especially from the roofs. A particularly hot fire was turned upon the market square and the first échelon of the general command stationed there. The hottest fire of all was upon the railroad station and in the railroad street, as well as upon the Place du Peuple.

The German troops penetrated into the houses from which shots had been fired, searching them for the culprits who, according to military custom, were shot, while the houses were set afire. While the street fights were raging General von Boehn, commanding the Ninth Reserve Corps, re-

turned to the city from the battlefield. It was about 10:30 P. M. He, too, was fired upon repeatedly on his way to the City Hall. He had some respected citizens seized as hostages. They were led through the city and had to urge the citizens to stop hostilities. But these efforts were in vain. Shots were fired even from houses flying the Red Cross flag and from hospitals. Explosives and bombs were also employed and hot tar was poured upon the troops. And later horrible mutilations were discovered.

In the morning of August 26 the attack was renewed. The disturbances continued this day and the following one, although hostages were again led through the city and warned the inhabitants to be calm.

In reprisal there was a brief artillery bombardment of a section of the city after the inhabitants had been requested to leave their homes.

THE BELGIAN VERSION

In contrast to this, the Belgian account is altogether different. Already on Aug. 28, 1914, a telegram was sent from the Belgian Foreign Ministry to the Belgian Ambassador in London, the dissemination of which was looked after by the Northcliffe press. In this message the happenings at Louvain were presented as follows:

After a defeat a Germany Army was streaming back toward Louvain in disorder. German troops had mistaken their own defeated countrymen for Belgians and had fired upon the fugitives. In order to cover up their own mistake the German military authorities had asserted that the inhabitants had done the shooting.

The *Gray Book*, entitled "Answer to the German White Book," issued by the Belgian Ministry of Justice and Foreign Affairs in 1917, clings to this version. The Germans, defeated by the Belgian Army, it says, returned in disorder to the City of Louvain. There was an exchange of shots between them and the troops in the city. At this moment there suddenly began a hot fire in quite distinct parts of the city.

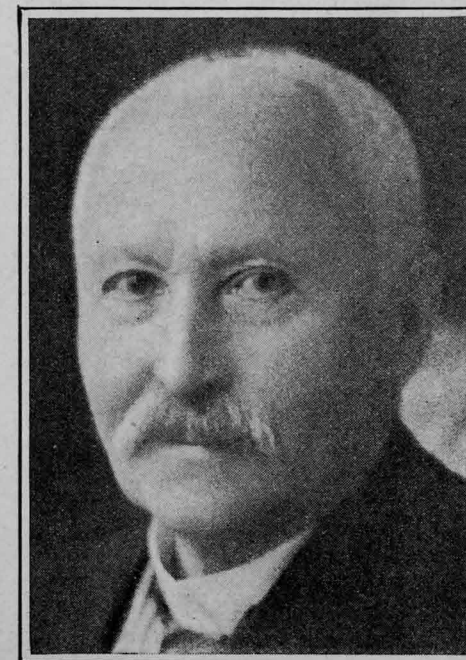
After further detailed description, the question of the reason for the destruction and mass murder is raised and the following statement is made: A great many witnesses declared at the hearing that the civilian population had refrained from any kind of hostilities. Many of them are of the opinion that the German authorities, in good faith or from a desire not to be obliged to admit the soldiers' mistakes, made the city responsible for the shots which were

exchanged among the troops. Other believe that the German Commandant only used the alleged attack by the civilian population as a pretext to destroy the city, according to a plan worked out in advance and in cold blood. The German *White Book*, it is declared on Page 301, "falsifies history."

Who has falsified history? That is the question.

The German Supreme Court instituted a thorough investigation, which resulted in the corroboration of the essential part of the German Government's view. And the Parliamentary Investigation Committee of the Reichstag also occupied itself with our problem. As the Third Sub-Committee had to investigate the violations of international law during the World War, it also had something to say about the Belgian people's warfare and about the events in Louvain, which were only a special phase of that warfare. It expressed the result of its deliberations in a resolution, reading, in part, as follows:

The Committee is convinced that the Belgian people's warfare is a fact which cannot be wiped out of existence by subsequent denials. The sworn statements of numerous German eyewitnesses of all ranks and classes as well as the statements of the Belgians themselves do not appear to be refuted. A general denial, as made in the



PROFESSOR CHRISTIAN MEURER



The main hall of the University Library before its destruction

Belgian *Gray Book*, cannot shake the detailed German evidence and does not stand up under objective criticism.

I participated in the work of the Sub-Committee as an adviser. In my written report on the Belgian people's warfare, which is now in print ("International Law in the World War," third series in the work of the Investigating Committee, published by Joh. Bell, Chairman of the Third Sub-Committee, 1927, Vol. II, 143 ff.), I said:

Decision can be made only by an impartial court possessing the means of verifying the testimony. I must limit myself to observations of opinion. And here the complete untenability of the Belgian viewpoint will be apparent.

A LABORED EXPLANATION

First of all one is struck by the fact that the Belgium Foreign Ministry, which was located far from the scene and was deprived of the means of investigation and review, was ready with its verdict as early as on Aug. 28. Furthermore the Belgian Investigating Commission, because of the circumstances, was not in any position to examine the correctness of the rumors brought before it and to grasp the continuity of the events. But the account in the *Gray Book* is based upon the work of this Investigating Commission, which had been cre-

ated already on Aug. 8 for the purpose of collecting the facts and reports of German violations of military law during the war in order to make them public through the press, or through penny pamphlets, in the interest of the State. In this connection the public was invited to send suitable information to the Ministry of Justice. The Belgian Investigating Commission was in existence before the world and the inhabitants of Belgium themselves were able to know anything about German atrocities. The imagination of the Belgians, who were naturally enraged by the German invasion, who had been frightened out of their peaceful life and dragged into the turmoil of war, worked under high pressure. But a collection of such depositions and reports, mostly supported by mere hearsay, has no value as proof. One notes how labored is the Belgian explanation of the cause of the shooting. The Germans were supposed to have been defeated by the Antwerp troops and to be streaming back toward Louvain, whereas in fact the battle had ended with a German victory. But when one considers that the people of Louvain regarded the return of the German troops, which, because of weariness perhaps, was to a certain extent disorderly, as a retreat, one understands their eagerness to attack and the local extension and the stubborn-

ness of the firing. Furthermore, the fighting is supposed to have been merely stupid shooting between the guards and the German troops. This is certainly the most idiotic thing a person could have thought out. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* of Sept. 2, 1914, tersely labeled such an account as "foolishness" and expresses its opinion as follows:

The assertion that Germans had fired upon the German troops by mistake can spring only from the brain of a man who either has lost his reason under the pressure of events or who considers any means justified if he believes he can thus avenge himself upon the Germans.

It is outrageous to assert that the Germans wished to cover up their own lack of discipline by accusing the Belgian population, or that they had trumped up the civilian attacks in order to destroy the city in cold blood according to a plan already prepared.

Moreover, the firing continued for days and the hostages were led through the city in order to induce the inhabitants to cease shooting. According to the Belgian assumption, this march of the hostages would have been a mere carnival procession.

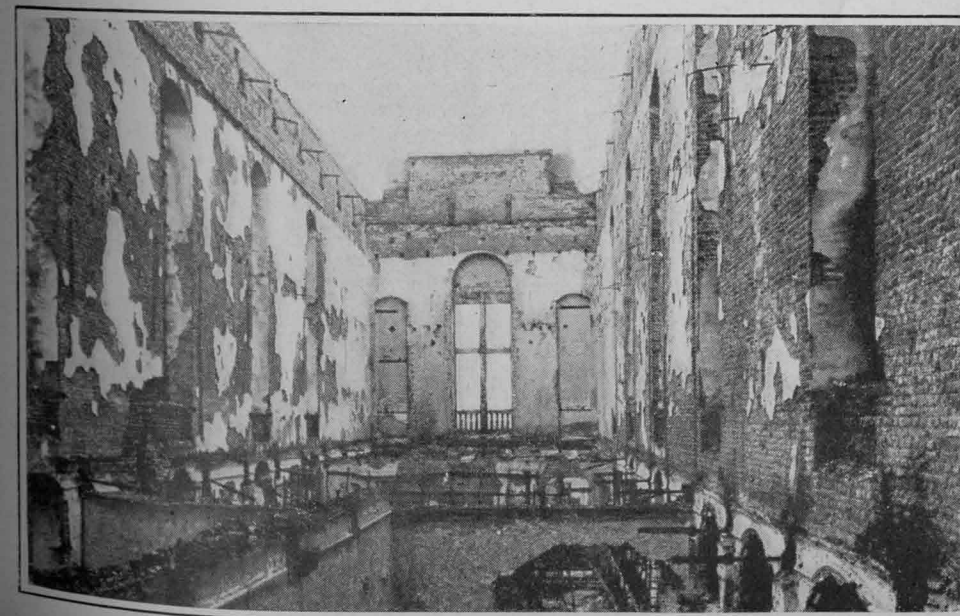
A GERMAN WITNESS

On Sept. 5, 1914, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* printed the following letter, which a Ger-

man officer had sent to his parents on Aug. 27:

From Liège we proceeded with the train on the 25th as far as Louvain. We arrived in Louvain at 9 o'clock in the evening. Even before the train stopped bullets were rattling against our cars, and when we got out they were whistling around us. We had no idea of what really was going on, and as we stood in the station, which was far back from the street, we were wholly in the dark. It is true that we had heard about a battle with the English in the neighborhood of Louvain, and we believed that the English had broken through and had defeated our men. But we were soon to learn something different. The citizens of Louvain, among whom were Englishmen and Belgian soldiers in civilian clothes and who had conducted themselves very calmly and in a friendly way toward us until that day, had suddenly fired upon our soldiers and upon transports of foodstuffs, munitions and so forth, and, in fact, the shooting had begun over the whole city as if by command. They had even set up a machine gun in a window of a house standing diagonal to the main street. It was a dangerous situation for our corps and division staffs which were quartered in the city. Because of the friendly attitude of the population the city had been stripped of troops, except for a small guard at the railroad station. And of course they had counted upon this. The staffs and the station guards simply would have been butchered off and the railroad station blown up. But, thank the Lord, they had reckoned without their host.

Naturally, they had not suspected that in the evening two more battalions would arrive. Five minutes ahead of us another



The central hall of the Library of Louvain University after the fire

battalion had arrived. A few volleys were fired at the houses, and it became quiet. I was the first one to receive orders to take a detachment of about eighty-five soldiers and search two houses, bring along the men and seize all munitions and arms. I stationed the greater part of my detachment in the broader spaces between the buildings and searched the houses. Everything went well. Right after me other detachments were ordered to do the same.

The houses where munitions and suspicious persons had been found were immediately set on fire and the men were shot. Thus in the night of Tuesday and Wednesday about thirty were shot. Afterwards firing suddenly began again and a number of our men were killed and wounded. That whole section of the city was set on fire. A fearful sight. But the people got what they deserved. Yesterday (Wednesday) we had to guard the station again, for we had been fired upon again. Now houses were again set on fire and about sixty or seventy persons shot, among them several Belgian soldiers in civilian clothes. Then I searched several more streets that had not been bombarded, for arms and munitions, and here heartrending scenes took place. But one has to be hard. Last night we were left in peace, but nevertheless our troops again were fired upon in another section of the city.

In the investigation procedure of the National Supreme Court it was testified that during the search of a hotel a woman had fired a pistol which she had had hidden under her skirts. It was also testified that in a hotel two built-in machine guns were found, with about 250 discharged cartridges lying near each one. As knapsacks of Belgian soldiers, with uniforms packed inside them, were also found, one has to assume that soldiers in civilian clothes were also in action, together with rash civilians. The participation of citizens is also proved by the numerous wounds by small shot found during the medical examination.

TESTIMONY OF DOMINICANS

German newspapers immediately sent reporters to the scene after the Louvain uprising in order to find out the state of affairs and they absolutely confirmed the correctness of the official German account. It is interesting to note what the *Koelnische Volkszeitung* printed at that time about the remarks of Belgian Dominicans who had been eyewitnesses of the fighting in Louvain. According to this paper, the Belgian Dominicans (remember, not German soldiers) said:

On Tuesday, the 25th, in the morning, calm and self-possession were again called for in the churches. At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon of that day fresh German troops arrived, who, like those who had preceded them and who in the meantime had left Louvain, were quartered in the city.

Soon afterward the rumor was spread through the city that English and French were approaching from two sides. At this time one heard the roar of cannon and rifle fire, and immediately scattered shots were fired from the houses upon the soldiers, which resulted in the soldiers being called to arms at 7:30 o'clock in the evening. Then the citizens in greater numbers began firing from the houses upon the Germans. The troops answered with rifle and machine gun fire. The fighting continued during the whole night. Already houses were going up in flames, especially in the railroad station street. The big St. Peter's Church, where arms had been found, was bombarded till it was in ruins. Any one appearing at a window was fired upon. The hostages were gathered together again and taken to the City Hall. Among them were Coenraets, Vice Rector of the University; the Sub-Prior of the Dominicans and two other priests. Under military escort these hostages were conducted from the City Hall through the streets, so that they could warn the population in French and Flemish from the street corners to be calm. This continued until 4 o'clock at night. Nevertheless, firing from the houses went on during this time. The soldiers returned the fire and the conflagrations increased. At noon on Wednesday the hostages were again led through the streets and they announced in both languages that they themselves would be shot unless resistance was abandoned. It was of no use. Even while this round was being made the firing was not stopped and shots were discharged even at the soldiers accompanying the hostages, as well as at the doctor. This disgraceful conduct continued the while night until Thursday. In the boulevard especially, more houses now went up in flames.

An interesting report was made to the *Koelnische Volkszeitung* by Reichstag Deputy Sittart, who went to Louvain on Aug. 31 to get important things for the Franciscans who had fled from Louvain. Here it is said, among other things:

While I was sitting for some time in an automobile in the street awaiting my companion, a number of frightened-looking women, among them the widow of a physician, approached me and inquired if it was probable that the terrible shooting would begin anew. I calmed them and made it clear to them that it depended entirely upon the population whether peace and quiet, or new horrors, were to be expected. During the conversation the women openly admitted that there had been lively firing from the houses. But they averred that it was members of the Citizens' Guard who had made this mistake. They also agreed with me that shooting from ambush was a mistake under all circumstances, and that it was no evidence of courage and soldierly sentiment treacherously to murder the enemy from ambush, instead of opposing him openly in uniform. When I told them that in Aix-la-Chapelle there were soldiers who had been severely injured by fire shot in the Louvain fighting, and therefore could not have been hit by shots from the weapon of a Citizens' Guard, and that, furthermore, women had taken part in the fighting, they condemned

such treacherous conduct. Nevertheless, they complained greatly because so many innocent persons had to suffer with the guilty, and one can well agree with them in that. But this is certainly unavoidable in such cases. But another admission from a competent witness was much more valuable to me. With the fugitive sisters a high member of the clergy had arrived in Aix-la-Chapelle and from him I heard the following:

He had been designated as a hostage, to-

not establish a single case of armed resistance by the civilian population. The investigating procedure of the National Supreme Court also brought out the fact that the Belgians in conversation never really denied that the shooting had been begun by the Belgian side. But they always denied that the population as such had participated or that, as the Belgian Foreign



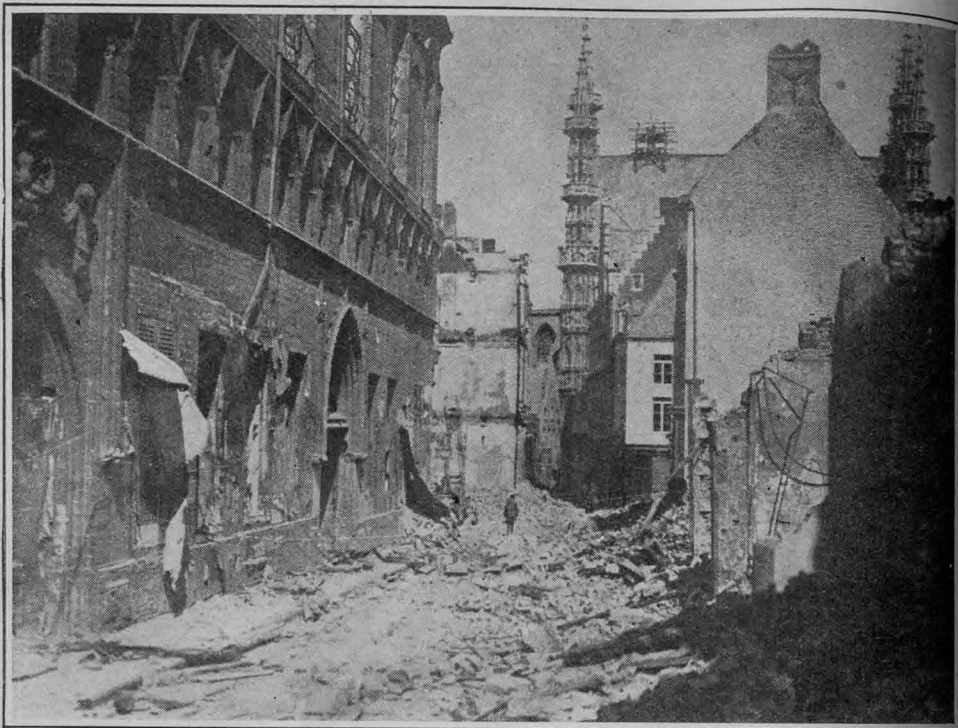
Interior of the library after its destruction

gether with a number of other Louvain citizens, and requested to read a proclamation in the streets of Louvain, under escort of an officer and a few soldiers, to the effect that he and the other hostages would be shot and the city bombarded if the population were guilty of acts of violence against the troops. Even before he had finished reading shots were fired upon the soldiers and our men wanted to seize him, but the officer restrained them and told the priest, who was shocked at such treachery, that he might seek protection in a neighboring cloister. The next day he went to Germany with the inmates of that cloister and returned. So out of the mouths of the common people, as well as from the declaration of the highly placed priest, who occupies an important position at the University of Louvain, I received the confession that the treacherous firing actually had taken place.

The Belgians do not deny that individual acts of hostility could have occurred, but the Belgian Investigating Commission did

Minister, Vandervelde, expressed it in his "Rapport" on the resolution of the German Parliamentary Investigating Committee on July 23, 1927, there had been an uprising "of whole cities and villages." This is merely a dispute over words. Germany never asserted that the whole population of Louvain, or the whole city, was in revolt. But there was firing from many houses in different places and streets, and this shooting, which continued to spread, lasted, with interruptions, several days. The Belgian Government itself must admit that there was firing in quite distinct parts of the city.

The case of Louvain is not an isolated one. All the armies that marched through Belgium encountered the same resistance and had the same experiences as the Fourth Army in Louvain. For instance, the First Army in Aerschot, the Second in Andenne,



Exterior of the library in 1914, showing the havoc wrought by the Germans

the Third in Dinant, not to speak of other places mentioned in the *White Book*. At first the Belgian newspapers proudly reported these patriotic deeds until the Government apparently warned them against it. And, as one can see from the incomplete collection of these press accounts in my report, not merely here and there a paper, but practically the whole Belgian press used the same tone, just as today it contrarily unanimously disputes any hostile action by the population. Either there was lying then, or there is lying now. At all events there was lying. I pointed out in my opinion, that in Belgium the Citizens' Guard, with its uncertain field of activity, was largely responsible, but that, besides, the most favorable preliminary conditions for international war had been created in Belgium. and that during the war the seed sprang up that had been scattered in time of peace.

It is remarkable that the German troops, which were on so many fields of battle, encountered armed resistance by the population in Belgium only. Naturally, the Germans, thus treacherously attacked, acted vigorously.

We have always been able to understand

the American General, Sherman, who issued the following order in 1864:

In case inhabitants of the country or bushwhackers disturb our march, or in case the inhabitants burn bridges, cut roads, or make any such local resistance, army commanders should order and enforce a devastation more or less relentless according to the measure of such hostility.

LOUVAIN NOT "HEAP OF RUINS"

The Belgians do not want to admit that they themselves were guilty of acts of destruction. Moreover, they take pleasure in boundless exaggerations. For example, immediately after the bloody events the cry went out from Belgium through the world: "Louvain is a heap of ruins!"

Regarding the appearance of Louvain after the fighting already described, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of Sept. 3, 1914, printed the following report by a wholesale merchant of Aix-la-Chapelle, who had made a trip through the occupied Belgian territory:

It is certainly a fact that a large number of the inhabitants of Louvain carried out a contemptible, murderous attack upon our troops and killed or wounded quite a number of our soldiers, among them many members of the Landsturm [last reserves], and

that the German military forces visited exemplary punishment upon the city because of the abominable crimes thus committed, but Louvain certainly has not been converted into a heap of ruins. I have made a careful personal inspection and consequently am able to establish the fact that first of all, the railroad station in Louvain is not damaged at all. In the broad street leading from the station to the city, of course, the houses on both sides from which the treacherous gangs fired upon our troops were shot to ruins, and in the big square in front of the City Hall the corner houses, where the *francs-tireurs* had their main posts, were subjected to a devastating fire. The City Hall itself is not damaged; only a few window panes were broken. And the treasure from St. Peter's Church, which is also occupied, has been brought to the City Hall and is in safety. St. Peter's Church itself was materially damaged in one wing by cannon shots. In the working-class section of Louvain about fifty houses were shot to ruins, but the German military authorities had given the inhabitants notice of this act of reprisal, and allowed them time to evacuate the houses. That in spite of this precaution, the guilty ones, in so far as one has been able to get hold of them, have not been allowed to escape, is a matter of course. This is how "Louvain in Ruins," looks. In the face of such exaggerated rumors, I, as an unprejudiced witness, confirm the fact that at least three-quarters of the City of Louvain stands there as undamaged as it was before.

For the purpose of a ruthless establishment of the truth of the matter, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* sent a special reporter

(F. Schotthoefer) to Louvain, who, on Sept. 7, 1914, wired the following message:

Through a thorough inspection of Louvain, I have been able to convince myself that four-fifths of the city is undamaged. The number of destroyed houses hardly exceeds 150. Above all, the beautiful Gothic City Hall, which because of the scaffolding used in the present work of restoration seemed to be in especial danger of fire, was maintained entirely undamaged through the efforts of the German soldiers. Some of the buildings in the adjoining blocks were blown up in order to isolate the City Hall. Only the woodwork of the roof of the Cathedral, which stands opposite and which was fired by sparks, is burned away. [Author's note—Because of the height of the building the work of extinguishing the flames was not entirely effective. The work of blowing up surrounding buildings was carried out by a company of railroad construction troops that luckily happened to be in the station.] The interior, with the exception of some small holes in the ceiling of the arch, is undamaged. The paintings did not suffer, nor did the church's treasure. During the fire the German officers brought the altar paintings by Dirik Bouts, Rogier van der Weyden and others to the City Hall where they now are. Unfortunately, the library, which also caught fire from sparks, could not be saved. The library is burned out inside, but the façade of the building remained standing. But this is the only irreparable loss. Most of the destroyed houses were modern structures without artistic or historic significance. The exterior of the Gothic halls of the university is



The ruined interior of the Louvain Cathedral as it appeared in 1914

saved. The hardest hit were the railroad street and its side alleys, Namur and Tirlemont Streets and some others. One notes everywhere that only the houses from which shots had been fired were involved, because in every street houses were left standing. The population has returned and is beginning to resume its regular life.

The Germans were absolutely justified in using drastic reprisals to crush the Belgian people's warfare, yet now the Belgians fill the world with their complaints about German terrorism. Of course reprisals, which pile one wrong upon another, must also be kept in proportion to the misdeeds and, just as self-defense can exceed its legal limits, so, too, reprisals under international law can go too far. We shall not oppose an impartial examination of the facts along this line. But first of all the cardinal question of the people's warfare must be decided. As the Belgians deny the fact of the people's warfare, they declare the Germans to be common murderers and incendiaries. But from the viewpoint of reprisals everything looks different. We shall not allow attention to be diverted from the cardinal point, i. e., that of the people's warfare, which first forced the Germans to reprisals, by complaints about German harshness and the telling of touching, or even irrelevant details.

BURNING OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The world, Germany included, was horrified at the burning of the university's library. It was a matter of one of the "halls," which consist of the administration rooms of the university and of a large ante-room of the Court of Justice (*Salle des pas-perdus*), from which a stairway led to the library on the first floor. The Belgian "*Rapports et Documents d'Enquête*," (Premier volume—Tome II, p. 73) declare briefly that the Germans must have set this on fire: "Fire must have been set to several sides of the building," and then further along they say, "Later, when one digs through the ruins one will find several kinds of incendiary tubes" [!]. But no German soldier had entered the library, the doors of which, as the "*Rapports*" themselves point out, were bolted and barricaded on the inside. German soldiers were quartered only in the basement and they had left after a little while. At 10 o'clock in the evening the porter had found everything all right, and when he went up into the library a second time he was met by smoke. That German soldiers would especially seek out the library to set it on fire is more than

improbable, as they could hardly have been aware of its existence. Rather, according to all the circumstances to be considered, it can very well be taken for a certainty that it was set on fire by the sparks from the burning houses in the immediate vicinity. Indeed, several Belgian eye-witnesses saw the sheets of fire and the rain of sparks themselves. With the wind that was blowing and the extremely rich wooden decorations, the flames found plenty of food.

It probably would have been possible to have saved the university building, together with the library, from the flames if even the simplest provisions against the danger of fire had been at hand. The Swiss architect, Eugen Probst, writes about this as follows in a pamphlet published in Zurich in 1916: "The windows of the extensive library opened, unprotected, upon the rear walls and the yards of small private houses, and there was no arrangement of any sort for protecting the library from the danger of fire. In no place did a fire-wall separate the library from the adjoining houses, and close to the entrance to the university, in the same building, a saloon was kept. There were no hydrants in the interior of the building. Neither the house warden, nor the librarian, Delannoy, nor any one of the professors was on the spot, to save the most valuable manuscripts or to direct the work of rescue."

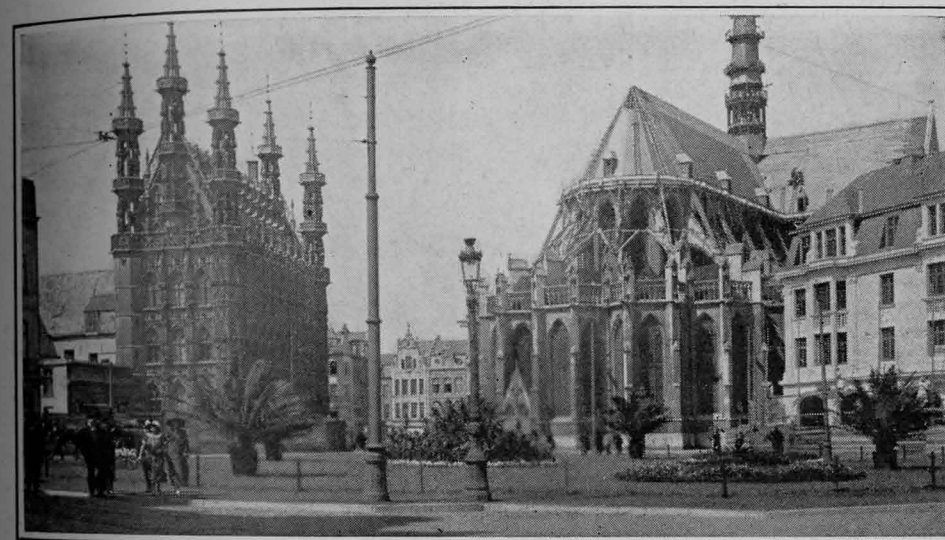
German troops at that time carried the valuable paintings from the burning church in safety to the City Hall opposite, and they probably would have done the same with the most important contents of the library if they had been aware of their presence. There is not a single word in the official report about the rescue work of the German troops in those days, which was carried on under the two-fold danger of the flames and the fire of the Belgians and which was chiefly responsible for the saving of the City Hall, although they are accused, again without more exact charges, of having wrecked the water conduits, again something that would have been quite nonsensical.

A short time after the fire the city architect, Vingerhoet, and the Professor of Archeology, Lemaire, searched in the still-glowing ashes for books, and in all probability found some. The rumor that valuable manuscripts were saved and brought to Germany is first of all opposed by the fact that the German troops then in Louvain could hardly have known that there were valuable printed works and manu-

scripts in the library. Furthermore, the Vice Rector, Mgr. van Cauwenbergh, told the Director of the University Library in the Breslau, Privy Councillor Milkau, who had been entrusted with the investigation of the condition of the Belgian libraries, that everything that the university had possessed of value, all that it cherished as traditions, the busts and portraits of the Louvain scholars, the entire archives, including the foundation charter, all the

of whole cloth. The German troops engaged in an advance indeed had no time and no room to seize such things and carry them along. Furthermore, during the steady advance they would hardly have thought about stealing such things.

These assertions may be countered rather by the little known fact that immediately after the burning of Louvain there was plundering by Belgian inhabitants. This has been attested to by the Belgian Attor-



Times Wide World

The Town Hall of Louvain, which was spared in the wreck of war, and the Cathedral, photographed during its restoration

manuscripts, had been destroyed by the fire.

In August, 1917, the Germans, with the knowledge and consent of the officials of the Louvain University, had excavations made by experts in the fire debris, at places two meters deep, and the remains of charred books were found. And also at that time it was suggested by the Germans that they would be willing to participate, by giving up duplicate copies from German libraries and by taking part in the collections, in the restoration of the library during the war. Nevertheless, these suggestions had no result, because the university circles of Louvain refused to cooperate.

BOOKS AND TREASURES NOT STOLEN

The frequently recurring assertion that the Germans carried off books and valuable articles during the burning of the university can only be characterized as a lie out

ney General himself. For instance, among the requests for pardon handed by the Attorney General to the German Governor General in 1915 there were fifteen pleas for condemned persons who had participated in plundering in Louvain.

After this digression let us return to the main question.

Is the Belgian people's warfare only a German legend, or is it a historic truth? First of all this question needs to be cleared up and decided. We are far from esteeming our well-grounded position to be already an authoritative decision for the world. On this point I pointed out the following in my opinion on the violations of the laws covering prisoners of war (III. 2B. 862):

The German complaints are based on sworn testimony by credible persons taken in a strictly juridical manner and critically examined. From the outset they were not intended to serve a horror propaganda, but to establish the truth. One notes this right

through the testimony. The fine gradations in the charges are almost outdone by the carefully selected scale in the admissions. Persons who are desirous only of avenging themselves upon an enemy do not testify that way.

But nevertheless I must make the following declaration for my four reports (Printed in "International Law in the World War"):

I have avoided the mistakes of our opponents in counting accusations as truths. In fact, the so-called established truths of our opponents are only accusations. War psychology leads to exaggerations and accepts things invented by one's self as truths. This is true generally. The contradictory procedure often results in a different picture than one might have expected after the preliminary examination. In my reports there were considered, I admit, only such charges as must be taken seriously and which must be reckoned with. In case the opposing side still tries arrogantly to shake off the charges, then let destiny have its way.

In my reports on the "Belgian people's

warfare" (ibid. II, 185) I again remarked with especial emphasis: "Why did the victors after the war refuse the German demand for an international investigation?"

A short while ago it looked as though my wish might be realized. The Belgian Foreign Minister, Vandervelde, had declared to the German Government that he was willing to consent to an investigation by an international commission, but under the pressure of the Belgian Cabinet and presumably of still other forces, he had to withdraw his assent.

The matter cannot be left standing this way. The Germans, as well as the Belgians, are partisan. Only a non-partisan establishing of the facts can allay the strife and bring us back to a condition of genuine peace. Not by speeches, but by deeds, will the world receive what it wants: real peace, true security.

II—The Belgian Rejoinder

By FERNAND MAYENCE

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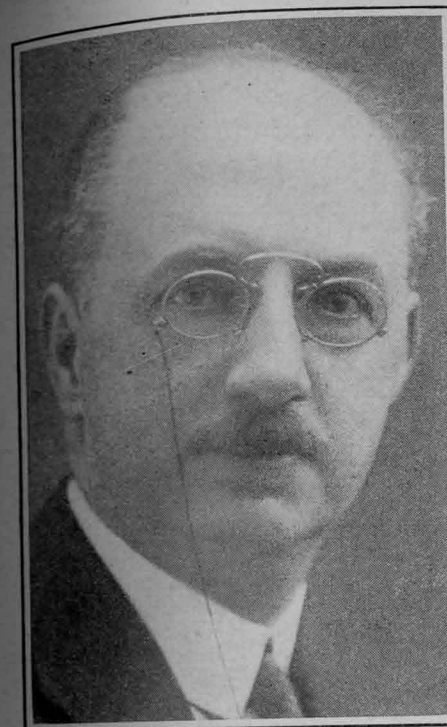
THE sack of Louvain constitutes one of the tragically celebrated episodes of the invasion of Belgium by the German Army in 1914. On August 25 and the following days the German Imperial troops, at the order of their commanders, put to death 209 inhabitants, among whom were eight old men over 70 years of age, twenty-one women, seven of whom were over 60 years of age, and eleven children, among whom was one 18 months old, and one only 6 months old; they burned the St. Pierre Church, the university halls and the large library which it contained, the Palais de Justice, the Academy of Fine Arts and over 1,100 private houses; they deported to Germany 600 inhabitants of Louvain, 100 of whom were women and children; finally, they expelled all the population of Louvain (about 40,000 people) from their homes, leaving what remained of the old Brabant city to the mercy of their soldiers.

The pretext for all these horrors was a so-called attack by the population who, in execution of a long premeditated plan, allegedly assailed the German troops. Some days after the town was sacked Emperor William, in a famous telegram, informed the whole world that his army, in order to defend itself against the inhabitants of

Louvain, had been compelled to destroy the University City * * * and that his heart was bleeding.

The charge was made, it must be supported. In the month of September, 1914, the Imperial Government organized an investigation, the results of which appeared in May, 1915, in a *White Book* entitled "*Die Völkerrechtswidrige Führung des Belgischen Volkskriegs*" ["The Conduct of the Belgian People's War in Defiance of International Law"]. This publication appeared to every impartial mind to be a tissue of improbabilities, contradictions and errors; it was not difficult to show the groundlessness of its conclusions. [F. Mayence: *L'Armée allemande à Louvain et le livre blanc*. Louvain, 1919.]

After the fall of the Imperial Government the Government of the new Germany, though it did not disavow the investigation, maintained silence regarding the destruction and massacres committed in Belgium during the first weeks of the invasion. Many Belgians naïvely imagined that the legends invented by the 1914 commission had been definitely abandoned; they were not far from believing that no one in Germany, with the exception of a few fanatics, gave any further credence to the fantastic



PROFESSOR FERNAND MAYENCE

tales that had sprung from what has been called the "war psychosis." They were soon forced to admit that this was a delusion.

And, in fact, the Parliamentary Commission of the Reichstag, recently created to investigate and report upon the conduct of the German troops during the invasion of Belgian territory, declared that the guerilla warfare charged was a proved fact; it declared, moreover, that numerous acts of inhuman cruelty were committed by Belgian civilians against the German soldiers, while the Imperial army, in the reprisals to which it was compelled to resort, did not depart from the duties imposed by the laws of humanity.

These charges are based on the report of the expert, Professor Meurer, of the University of Würzburg, published in 1927 in the official publication *Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg*, [International Law in the World War] 1914-1918, Vol. II, pp. 129-261. The author takes up and at times amplifies all the assertions of the *White Book* of 1915. The Reichstag Commission, disregarding the protests raised against this report, not long ago (on March 29, 1928) confirmed purely and simply its previous statements.

This new offensive of error, the more pernicious because based on the prestige of German scholarship, must be met by a propaganda of truth. Encouraged and supported by the Municipal Government, the judicial authorities and the whole population of Louvain, we have undertaken on the strict basis of scientific research a campaign against the charges of Professor Meurer and the Reichstag Commission. A pamphlet, with a preface by the legal representatives of all the inhabitants of our city, has recently been published under the title: *La Légende des Francs-tireurs de Louvain* ["The Legend of the Irregular Sharpshooters of Louvain"]. It will be widely distributed in English, German, Spanish and Italian translations amongst University circles and will reveal to the intellectual élite of all nations the true value to be attributed to Professor Meurer's charges.

Certain organs of the German press accuse us of carrying on a Germanophobe campaign and of opposing the magnanimous efforts being made on all sides to restore harmony among the nations. Should we then permit Professor Meurer and the Reichstag Commission to distort the facts and dishonor the memory of the victims of the Imperial army? And when the unanimous voice of a whole calumniated city rises, without hatred, without passion, but with all the energy imparted by being conscious of the justice of one's cause, to reply to the unjust attacks made upon it, should it be accused of betraying the cause of peace? To track down error and reveal the truth, is that not working for the establishment of true peace and for reconciliation between all men of good will?

We give in the following pages in brief form, the story of the tragic days as it was revealed after a minute investigation made on the spot immediately after the events, and conducted, we can formally guarantee, in accordance with all principles of historical method.

The first German troops entered Louvain on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 1914, toward one o'clock in the afternoon. During the first week of occupation, the population was subjected to iron discipline: excessive requisitions, taking of hostages, searches, threatening proclamations speaking only of burning and shooting without mercy—every means was employed by the military authorities to terrorize the inhabitants.

On Aug. 25 during the afternoon, numerous troops arrived in Louvain; they took

quarters in the citizens' houses, intending to pass the night in the city and to resume their march the next day. Suddenly toward 6 o'clock, the alarm was sounded. The roar of far-off cannon was heard; the Belgian army had made a sortie from Antwerp and had reached a point within ten kilometers of Louvain. The troops, now awake and active, marched to the place of assembly; certain detachments were sent to the front; others remained in the city.

Eight o'clock had just rung, when, in several parts of the town, one or two shots resounded. Who fired? Where the investigation made it possible to ascertain the facts, it was proved that the shooting was done by German soldiers. These shots spread panic among the troops; the frightened soldiers began to shoot in every direction. Machine guns were brought into action to reply to the attack of the enemy, who, according to the depositions of the Germans themselves, could not be identified as Belgians, British or French. Repeated and continuous shots rang out. Soldiers and officers fell, runaway horses dragged driverless carts behind them; wild confusion prevailed. The commanders had a difficult task to restore a degree of order, and only after many efforts did they succeed in putting a stop to the firing. Dead and wounded lay scattered on the ground. Of whom had they been the victims?

The judgment was speedily pronounced; of the irregular sharpshooters. Whereupon the German soldiers and officers burst brutally into the houses whose frightened inhabitants, through fear of the fusillade, had taken refuge in the backrooms and in the cellars. A few hapless victims were struck by the bullets of certain soldiers who, to defend themselves against an imaginary enemy, continued shooting inside the houses. Men, women, old men, children were all driven out of their homes; some were assassinated; others were led, under a strong guard, amidst shouts and insults of every kind, to different places of concentration. Meanwhile, companies of soldiers began their sinister work of incendiarism, setting fire to the houses, to public building, to the Library of the University.

On Wednesday, the 26th, the pursuit of the so-called francs-tireurs began still more energetically in the districts which had escaped the flames. The men were arrested; the women were notified to assemble at the railway station whence a considerable number—more than 100—some of them with infants, were deported to Germany. Packed into stock cars, these unhappy

women had to endure a terrible journey of more than sixty hours, their only sustenance a little black bread and water. They were liberated only on Sept. 27.

GERMAN CRUELITIES

As for the men arrested, they had diverse experiences; some had to march at the head of the troops and food convoys crossing the city and they were the luckiest ones; others were treated like playthings by the soldiery, made to run, then to kneel, and then to run again. They were told that they were to be shot, and when all was ready for the execution, the order was given to march on until a more favorable spot was found, and this infamous comedy was repeated several times, renewing in the soul of these unhappy wretches the agonies of belief that their last moment had come. Others were led to the station square, where they were so tightly tied together that they could not even move, and were forced to remain in this position until 6 o'clock in the morning of the next day (Thursday), in the rain, without food or drink, exposed to all the abuse of officers and soldiers who threatened every moment to finish them off. Other groups of prisoners were deported to Germany, where they had to endure five months of captivity.

On Thursday, the 27th, under the ridiculous pretext that the people of Louvain were continuing to fire on the German troops, all the inhabitants were ordered to evacuate the city before noon, for at that hour the town was to be bombarded and not a stone would be left intact. Then began the tragic exodus of the whole crazed population starting out with a few articles of clothing and scanty provisions snatched up at random upon the sad road of exile. The bombardment that had been announced was limited to a few cannon shots. The evacuated city was delivered over to pillage.

CONTRAST WITH GERMAN VERSION

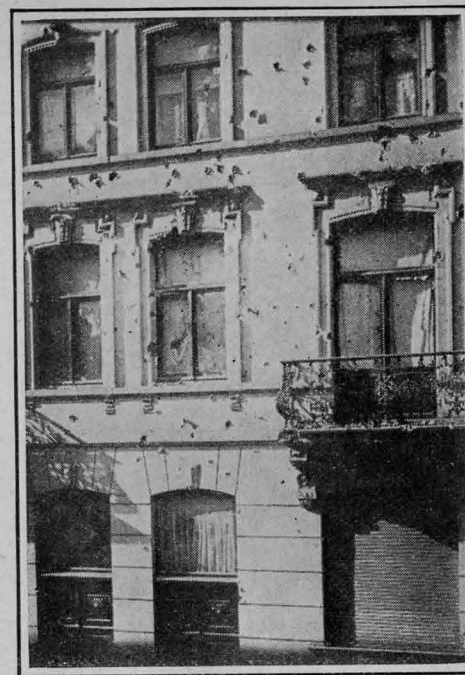
Such is the history of the sack of Louvain. And here follows this account of the German Commission of Investigation taken up by Professor Meurer and twice confirmed by the Reichstag Commission:

The inhabitants of Louvain, paid especially by members of the clergy, had long been preparing a revolt against the German troops. On the evening of Aug. 25 they judged the moment favorable for carrying out their project. A signal was given, and they opened a terrible fire on the German soldiers with guns, revolvers, pistols and even machine guns and hand grenades; they poured burning tar on the troops. In

their fury they attacked members of the medical staff, and sick and wounded men; they committed nameless cruelties and inflicted on the German soldiers acts of sadism worthy of the most savage tribes. The inhabitants who had taken part in the attack were immediately shot and the houses from which the shots had come were set on fire. The battle lasted all through the night of Aug. 25-26, all through the day of the 26th, and through the night of Aug. 26-27. On the 27th the German Army, unable to control the population, had the city evacuated.

The improbability of such an account is obvious. Who will believe that it took the German army three days to crush the unhappy population of Louvain, completely disarmed and terrorized since the first evening of the alleged revolt by massacres and burnings? The people are accused of having used machine guns and hand grenades. But they hardly knew the name of this war implement; moreover, hand grenades were not used in the Belgian Army until the beginning of 1915. And how explain that after four years of occupation the German military authority, aided by numerous secret police agents whom it had at its disposition, never succeeded in finding the least trace of this alleged conspiracy? Is it not absurd to suppose that 40,000 conspirators, representing every shade of political opinions and belonging to all parties, succeeded in preserving to this day the most complete silence regarding a plot which so lamentably failed? If any francs-tireurs had existed, would there not have been one or two to boast after the war, when it was no longer dangerous to speak, of an exploit which he considered glorious? And would we see the population of Louvain so divided from all points of view, rising up today en masse to protest against the conclusions of the German reports?

The fantastic tale of the revolt of the inhabitants of Louvain taken up by Professor Meurer is the work of the Commission of Investigation of 1914. Now, what confidence can one have in the labors of that commission? It was presided over by Dr. Ivers, who subsequently (Nov. 29, 1916) was sentenced by the Criminal Court of Berlin to nine months of imprisonment for extortion of funds and exaction of hush money in the exercise of his profession as a lawyer. The trial revealed that this Dr. Ivers was an inebriate and an addict of morphine. His counsel appealed to the pity of the judges on the ground that his client could not have any comprehension of justice, inasmuch as he was utterly lacking in moral sense.



Effect of machine gun fire on house in Louvain when attacked by German troops

The commission summoned before it a number of notable people of Louvain, among them Mgr. Ladeuze, rector of the university, and several professors. The questions put to these witnesses were farcical; they were unable to speak freely; they were allowed only to answer the questions asked of them, and the investigating Judge even tried to distort their answers. Even taken under such conditions, these depositions must have appeared to the commission too incriminating, for they were not reproduced in the report. With one exception (a simple sworn statement by M. A. Lemaire, professor at the university, declaring that the German soldiers billeted in his house during the week preceding the sack of the town had given no cause for complaint), the *White Book* contains only German depositions.

GERMAN POINTS CONTRADICTED

We cannot, in the space of this brief article, refute point by point the assertions of the report, so we will limit ourselves to citing a few examples which will suffice to form a judgment of its value:

1—The report declares that the fire was accidentally spread to the Saint-Pierre



A photograph of the theatre in Louvain almost immediately after it was wrecked by the Germans in 1914 and its famous mural paintings were destroyed

Church by sparks from the burning houses of the francs-tireurs. If we enter the church we will immediately be convinced of the contrary, for despite the restorations there are still very visible traces of a number of fires lighted inside the church.

2—According to the report, there are visible on the wall of the Colettines convent numerous traces of gunshots fired beyond all doubt by the francs-tireurs posted on the upper floors of the houses across the street. Now we find there in all six bullet marks, at a height of 2m. 50 at least. If the statement of the Investigation Commission is correct, we should have to admit that the francs-tireurs posted on the floors of the houses and wishing to shoot the German soldiers in the street would have been clumsy enough to fire at the wall across the street, at the height of 2m. 50! From examination of these places, it results from all evidence that these bullet marks came from shots fired from the street, a few yards away: now from the admission of the *White Book* itself, there were only German soldiers in the street at that time.

And those are the only traces which the violent fusillade of the francs-tireurs left on the walls of the city! The commission found no others. It was very careful not to refer to the houses that escaped the fire and whose fronts were riddled with bullets by the German soldiers.

3—The commission declares—and Professor Meurer repeats this—that the inhabitants killed during those tragic days were convicted of having taken part in the revolt. *We deny this statement categorically. We have been able to reconstruct the circumstances under which each one of the victims met death, and we can assert most emphatically that all these unfortunate beings were murdered without cause and perished suffocated in the burning of their houses.*

4—Professor Meurer, repeating one of the conclusions of the investigation of 1914, says that the inhabitants of Louvain inflicted revolting mutilations on the German soldiers. To support this infamous charge he can invoke only the evidence of the soldier Westerkamp (Deposition No. 37). Now, what does this witness say?

*I saw a soldier pass by, borne on a stretcher. I learned that during a patrol of the city he had been surprised by several inhabitants, and that they had inflicted on him an odious mutilation. * * * A few days later I met Lieutenant Forster. He told me that acts of sadism defying all imagination had been inflicted on German soldiers.*

These German soldiers—who are they? This is not revealed and it is solely on the basis of these stories that the Commission of Investigation and Professor Meurer bring such infamous charges against the inhabitants of Louvain!

The formal act of accusation drawn up

by the defenders of the Imperial army contains only depositions in which vagueness vies with improbability.

That a number of German officers and soldiers may have been sincere in declaring that they had been attacked by the population, we are far from denying. These witnesses were caught in the darkness by a violent affray during which they could not recognize those who were handling the guns whose shots they heard and saw. And to the German soldiers, whose minds had been excited by the obsessing fear of the franc-tireur, as soon as a shot rang out it could be only the work of those terrible enemies who could never be seized and who were never more than phantoms. Most of the German witnesses declare that they heard shots; only about ten of them allege that they saw the francs-tireurs; each one of these witnesses may be convicted of bearing false witness (we ourselves have demonstrated this in the work cited above).

What shall we say of a method like that of Professor Meurer, who accepts without control or criticism all evidence, even the most open to suspicion, from German sources, and systematically ignores all Belgian evidence, as well as everything else which has been published in Belgium about the sack of Louvain? He even goes so far as to declare, regarding the investigations of Cardinal Mercier and the other Bishops of Belgium, that "the evidence of the Bishops bearing on events which developed far from the seat of their Bishopric, has no value." For Professor Meurer the statements made under oath by Cardinal Mercier are not worthy of consideration! Bad faith or incompetence? We find it difficult to find any other alternative.

We had the right to expect from Professor Meurer's report an explanation of the act of vandalism involved in the burning of the university library; like the Commission of Investigation of 1914 he maintains on this subject the most obstinate silence.

On our part we have neglected no source of information. In our refutation of the *White Book* we reproduced and discussed all the German depositions without omitting one. No point was left obscured; all the official documents of the trial were placed before the readers; we are convinced that we adhered rigidly to the principle of scientific honesty.

But without believing in a methodical attack may we not suppose that certain inhabitants, urged on by a patriotism as foolish as it was futile, might have fired a few shots at the German soldiers? On

the day following the events, on the repeated statements of the military authorities that civilians had fired the shots, we believed this ourselves; like many others we could not imagine that the German Army would take such cruel reprisals if at least a pretext therefor had not been afforded it. It was in that state of mind that we began our investigation. Well, we declare honestly and conscientiously that despite all our researches we have not been able to conclude that a single shot was fired by a civilian.

The advocates of the Imperial Army, utterly unable to prove the truth of their thesis, seek a last argument in the refusal of the Belgian Government to agree to the proposal of an international investigation made in 1927 by the German Government. They do not realize that this argument turns against themselves. As a matter of fact it was Belgium who first, in 1915, asked for an international investigation; Germany refused. How can Germany, therefore, have a grievance against the Belgian Government today for having refused an offer which she herself rejected soon after the events, when the traces of the crime were still fresh? Belgium has nothing to fear from the most searching investigation, but she does not intend to allow herself to be used as a tool by those who wish to distort the undisputed facts of history.

IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION DESIRED

For our part, we ardently long for the day when a commission of historians will come, free from all political ideas, to examine on the spot the respective value of the investigations made by the Belgian Government and the German Government. This would not be a case for the discussion of questions like that of war responsibility, where the interpretation of the facts plays a certain rôle and where, consequently, the opinions of people of equally good faith may be diametrically opposed; it would be solely a case for setting forth facts, the evidence for which convinces every mind which sincerely seeks the truth.

We believe we do not err in declaring that the intellectual élite of Belgium would welcome an initiative for such a project by some great and impartial institution of historical documentation like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In so doing it would perform a signal service to history and would greatly contribute to raising the standards of international morality.