

May 4, 1917.—This morning early, as we were in the hurry and confusion of preparation, Madame —— came, her eyes bright with eager interest. “The King wants to give you the Grand Cordon!” said she. She had permission from her husband to be the first to tell me. And then her face fell, because I had not responded to her enthusiasm. I explained to her the inhibition against our accepting decorations, asked if it would not be possible for her to save me the embarrassment of a refusal, if she would not tell her husband and have him communicate in some way with the King, do something at any rate! And she went away promising to do so.

We left the hotel about 10:30, in two big grey military automobiles provided by the Belgian Government, Nell and I in the

first, the Ruddocks in the second. It was a beautiful morning, spring was in the air, and as we got out toward Etretât the apple-trees everywhere in bloom. "It was apple-blossom time in Normandy," as our summer song has it. Ah! those happy summers of long ago! This is de Maupassant's country, and Flaubert's; Madame Bovary lived here somewhere and all those too intensely human people that de Maupassant writes about. . . .

The road rolled out like a white ribbon over the green hills. In the fields men, not many, alas! were working; here and there were splendid Norman horses with ribbons in their manes and tails and rosettes at their foreheads, I don't know why, unless it is some fête day for horses. Once in awhile we would see a lone *poilu* toiling along the side of the road in a sun unseasonably hot; after awhile in the chalky dust the long column of an English convoy going to the front, strings of horses, heavy lorries rumbling by, then more and more Englishmen, the smartest, cleanest-looking soldiers, quite the best of all of them.

Then the dust would lift, and now and then we would have glimpses of the blue sea through the embrasure of the hills. Then Dieppe with its interesting basin.

And so on to Eu. It was about one o'clock when we descended at the little Hôtel du Commerce et du Cygne, its name uniting the practical with the poetic. It is a typical hotel of the French provinces, with its courtyard and all that, and the *déjeuner* not too bad. There were two French officers lunching, and a Belgian Major-General with many decorations, Order of Léopold and all, at another table flirting with a young woman who was lunching alone; he flirted to such good effect that before the *déjeuner* was finished the young woman had gone over and taken her place with the Belgian General.

We were away after luncheon in a hurry; the road was more and more crowded with troops and the evidences of war as we progressed on through Abbeville and through countless little villages, in one of which there was a post of Portuguese soldiers, dark little fellows in flimsy grey uniforms with yellow trimmings, who did not look as if they would be good for much in this business of war. Everywhere one sees the domination of the English, English signs that were posted all about, for the English can not or will not learn French. It is amusing, sometimes irritating, to observe this naïve sense of superiority, this insular provincial attitude that the English and the Americans have toward those who

speak any other language—as when Gregory said: “Those Dutch are excellent men, they all speak English,” as though that were the supreme test, and all other languages were inadequate substitutes for the English tongue! But one must admire the English, one must especially admire their soldiers, so clean of limb, so well set up, so smart in their khaki uniforms, all their accoutrements so clean, the harnesses of the horses of artillery and the saddles of the cavalry horses well oiled and polished; far otherwise than those heavy, dirty Germans we used to see around Brussels and who literally stank—*odor germanicus*—so heavy in their clumsy brutal boots. Another thing, the Germans never smile, perhaps it is temperamental with them. Here every face is smiling, or if not smiling, interested and interesting. One sees it in the English and in the French and in the Belgians. These English lads with the fresh ruddy faces know perfectly well what they are about. They hate this war but they know why they are fighting and they are going to make a good job of it while they are at it. The French grumble always and are game. . . .

It was half past four when we rolled into St.-Omer. I told the chauffeur to go to some place where we could have tea and he halted rather helplessly in the vast public square, before an unknown hotel. I waited in some indecision and then saw two Englishmen coming down the street, both in khaki, but one of them wore the collar that is buttoned behind, and above his open khaki coat there showed a clerical waistcoat, and I knew him for a curate. He would certainly know where to get tea! I asked him and sure enough, without hesitation, he directed me to the proper place and there we went and had an excellent cup of tea with brioches and cakes and all sorts of things. The English invasion has done one great thing for France at any rate, it has taught the French people to serve good tea.

The Ruddocks had got lost somewhere, *une panne d'auto*, perhaps, and we went on alone up the canal toward Socx, passing a great French aviation camp. The country was growing familiar, red-tiled roofs and the trees that bend always toward the east in the west winds that have been blowing across the low lands for ages. We were in French Flanders and the land took on the friendly quality of the pleasant Belgian scene.

Thus in the quiet evening about five o'clock we rolled into the park of the château where de Broqueville is installed. It is a lovely spot; the château with its four stone towers is surrounded by a

moat and off a little way across the fields the village of little red-tiled roofs and the church spire. And everywhere peace, one would have no notion war is so near!

De Broqueville received us in the great salon that he has fitted up as a bureau. He is still suffering from sciatica but is very game, and General Melisse, Chief Surgeon of the Belgian Army, was with him. De Broqueville is always gallant, always debonair, very much of the grand seigneur, and received us with hearty hospitality. I had not seen him since that historic day in the Chamber when, striking the tribune with his fist, his seal ring punctuating his words, he had cried: "The watchword is, To arms!" Much water has passed under the bridge since then!

His daughter-in-law was with him, and insisted on our taking tea.

Dinner at half past seven. De Broqueville with Nell on his right, Margaret on his left, his daughter-in-law presiding at the table with me on her right and Ruddock on her left and her husband, a Lieutenant in the Belgian Army, sitting beside me, and General d'Orjo de Marchevrolette, who is to be our escort tomorrow.

Early to bed, a large restful old bedchamber with a dressing-room in the tower and the moat below and peace and quiet all around. Strange that we cannot hear the guns here when we used to hear them so plainly at Brussels!