May 5, 1917.—Off at 9:30 for La Panne, General d'Orjo de Marchevrolette accompanying us. We have three automobiles, one for Nell and me and the general, one for the Ruddocks and a third in case of accident, whirling away at the speed military chauffeurs love. We drive on toward Dunkirk. The general suggests that we go in and see the town, which is bombarded nearly every week and has suffered much, especially the church, the boches having an uncontrollable penchant for bombarding churches. Despite the shelling, however, Dunkirk is very much alive, swarming with English soldiers. Strange sight, when one thinks of those ages long past when they fought here—and sold Dunkirk to the French!

There are signs here and there in Dunkirk of the various bombardments to which the town has been subjected by the German destroyers in the channel, but the people seem unconcerned and move about as usual, children playing in the streets, life going on just the same. "They don't get on badly," remarks the General. Here and there, at intervals, red signs: "Refuge in case of alarm,"

rooms fitted out and protected with sand bags, where the people may rush for safety when the Germans get to work. The bombardments do not last long.

Out of Dunkirk and along the canal in a country all green with the beauty of French Flanders—picturesque scenes that remind one of Victor Gilsoul's paintings; indeed he must have painted much about here. The scenes of the road, so spirited in these times, flicker by as in a cinema, groups of soldiers, now and then a battery of artillery, and always convoys.

After awhile the general says: "We are in Belgium!" Strange sensation to be once more on that soil! We are two hours from Brussels and yet it has taken us how many days and what hard traveling to get here, through four countries, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and France! And then, on the road a regiment of Belgian soldiers, sturdy chaps in khaki now, with the new casque they wear, though here and there one sees the familiar police cap. They seem like old friends. We pass a flag, and the general takes off his cap: "It's a command just relieved," he says. Happy lads, they are going to the rear after their turn in the trenches!

Then at last, the little village of La Panne, historic for evermore—a few houses and stark, desolate summer hotels on the sand dunes changed into hospitals now.... An officer is standing by a high gate motioning; a sentinel presents arms and going out on the seashore on the sand dunes, we roll into the yard of what de Broqueville this morning laughingly called "The Palace of the King." There are three haggard villas in a row, ugly as all villas are, standing in a hollow that seems to have been scooped out of the sand, and all about nothing but the monotony of the dunes, the yellow sands that have been swirled up and down this bleak and unhospitable coast for countless ages. In front the grey North Sea rolling its white breakers on the shores and a barricade of sand bags.

We enter the first of the villas and the general turns us over to General Biebuyck, the King's aide. The Countess Caraman de Chimay enters and conducts Nell and Margaret upstairs, leaving Ruddock and me.

The general informs me that His Majesty will receive me first and alone, there—and he points to the closed door, with a sentinel standing before it. We wait. The general goes out, comes back, finally motions towards the door. It opens, I enter and there is the King.

He is standing in the middle of the room, tall, strong, handsome in that khaki that becomes him so well;[1] its yellowish drab is on the key of his blond hair; he is ruddy, bronzed, very fit, as though campaigning agreed with him. He wears his pince-nez, through the thick lenses of which his mild eyes peer purblindly. I bow and he comes forward and puts out his hand and in that slow, heavy English that he uses, he says: "I am very glad to see you; it has been a long time. I thank you for all you have done for my country and for all that America has done; we can never thank you enough."

Then there is some hesitation, a moment's embarrassment. The King has a timid social manner always and the protocol demands that he lead in the conversation. He turns suddenly and seizing a box from the mantelpiece, he thrusts it into my hands and says: "Here is a little souvenir for you. I hope you will accept it. I...I...I hope you will not decline it." I take the box and open it and there within, glistens the star and the wide, stiff magenta ribbon of the Order of Léopold I, the bauble that is so coveted, and now, from him here, under these circumstances, has a new significance. It is the highest honour the King can confer. I stand there thinking of the American inhibition against accepting decorations and of how —— had evidently failed to arrange to save me from this embarrassment. I lay the box on the table—it is a very simple room that we are in—no carpet on the floor, curtains drawn at the windows, a bald white barren mantelpiece, a few wooden chairs—we should almost call them kitchen chairs in Southern Ohio, not quite that perhaps, but hardly good for the sitting-room—the whole apartment wearing a stark, temporary, bleak air.

The King goes on: "I hope you will not decline this. Sanford accepted one over forty years ago; it is a souvenir for you and for your nation." As he said "a souvenir for you and *for your nation*" I thought I saw a loophole of escape; if the American Constitution was in my way it wasn't in the nation's way! So I thanked him somehow and told him how highly I appreciated the great honour, but he changed the subject as though he were relieved to have *that* out of the way. He changed the subject, impulsively turned

[1] "The King led his men in the trenches and from headquarters. He worked with his Minister of War, his Chief of Staff, and the Allied chiefs. And he went to the worst places of the worst sectors to cheer the men holding the lines." John Van Schaick, *The Little Corner Never Conquered.*

away—the Belgian protocol also demands that the King receive standing—and seizing one of the chairs by its back in his great strong hand, he planked it down on the floor beside the table, drew up one for himself and told me to sit down.

I had learned from ———, who has been able to gather many loose ends of the complot that has been going on for the last two and a half years, that some people near the King had tried to make much of the fact that I had not come around to Havre to see the King when I made my visit home to America a year and a half ago. I was determined that the King should know about it and we had not gone far in our conversation when I told him the reasons, how I was sick when I went away and how when I came back just at the time when Boy-Ed and von Papen had been bundled out it was a question as to whether I could get back to Belgium at all and that I thought the feeding of his people more important than ceremonial visits. He gave a gesture of impatience even at the mention of it: "Of course," he said, "I understand perfectly."

He began at once to talk about the President. He seemed by his allusions to go back to the first conversation I ever had with him, that first audience—and under what different circumstances!—there in the noble audience chamber in the palace at Brussels, with de Mérode, the Grand Maréchal, in uniform, and old Davignon a little to the rear of his sovereign, in uniform and an enormous sword, his hands folded across his huge paunch, looking on complacently and apparently bored to death—poor old man now gone forever!—and I hope bored no more!—and a great staff of aides around and a long line of footmen in red, with powdered wigs, stretching down to the place where the golden coach was waiting.

"You remember that I told you how much more powerful Presidents are than Kings." And then he added with a little laugh: "We Kings don't amount to much any more."

It was thus that he introduced our conversation about the President.

"Your President is the most powerful ruler in the world, he has more power than we Kings. He is the greatest statesman in the world today, he is the only statesman in the world today. We have no statesman in Europe. The President is the only statesman because he is the only one of all who looks ahead, who plans, who tries to build for the future. He has power to put his policies in effect; he rules, governs. How does he do it?"

He put the question in a tone of despairing envy.

"He rules," I replied, "by the force of public opinion, it is that which is supreme in our democracy."

He said: "Yes, but how does he know what public opinion is?"

"Ah!" I said, "that is the secret!"

The King smiled his appreciation, and I went on:

"He must be intelligent enough to discern it, to perceive it, to feel it, as it were. It is rather an instinctive or intuitive process, I think. And not only that but he must guide it and educate it at the same time. Unless he knows how to do that he loses his influence and authority and pretty soon ceases to be President."

I then spoke of how he, the King, embodied public opinion today in his own land, the hopes, the aspirations, the heroism of his own people, and I was pleased to be able to tell him how immensely popular he is in the land that is occupied by the German forces. He has a good deal of humour in a quiet way, has the King. "Yes, I have noted that Kings are popular when they are away from home and the farther away from home they are the more popular they become."

But he grew suddenly sober.

He began to ask me questions about conditions in Belgium, about the people, about the revictualing, about things there in general. Then about the Germans, who were there—he knew many of them or had heard of them—what they were doing, finally about the administrative separation and then about the deportations.

"Why did they do that?" he asked.

It was difficult to make the easy response, to say to a Coburg and a Hohenzollern that they did it because they were Germans. I gave him the reasons assigned by the Germans and those that occurred to me, and I told how that act had implanted a hatred in the hearts of the Belgian people that would not die out in three generations. If there had ever been the slightest possibility of toleration on the part of Belgium or of the two Flanders for the German Occupation, it had been destroyed by that one act; and I said that perhaps the men deported could have made no better sacrifice, could have rendered no better service to their country than they did in being thus the victims of a great and cruel injustice that would become historic.

The King spoke with feeling and appreciation, in his calm, slow way, of the interest that America had taken in the Belgians. I told him in some detail how America felt towards the Belgians and

towards him and remarked that it was after all rather curious that there had never been so much feeling about the Poles. I told him what Paderewski had said to me when I saw him in New York, how he felt it; thought it strange that our people were not more interested in the Poles who had suffered perhaps more in a material way than the Belgians. The King smiled as though it were a good joke on the Poles and then checked himself and said:

"Your people probably would have more sympathy with us than with the Poles because we are more nearly of your blood. The Poles are Slavs. We are of the Northern races and the Northern races understand democracy, it is in their blood, they know how to govern themselves. The one great danger in our present situation is in Russia, they do not know how to govern themselves there. They are a peculiar dreamy people and there can never be, at least for a long time, such institutions as you have in America or as we have in Belgium."

Speaking thus of self-government, it was natural to think of the communal system in Belgium, and I told the King how much I admired it and how it had helped the Belgian people through this great crisis.

"We are a country of little cities each governing itself," said the King, "and we are very jealous of our rights; we wish to be let alone, we know how to govern ourselves. I know the Belgian people, they are stubborn, they resist. It is a relic of their old communal life. They are very jealous of their own rights, of their own institutions, of their own form of government and habits in life."

He then went on to express his great appreciation of the President and the satisfaction he felt that the President had pursued the political course he had and he charged me to present to the President the expression of his admiration and deep personal gratitude for all that had been done for the people of his unhappy land.

I explained to him then somewhat at length the development of the President's policies and told him of the articles that had appeared in the *New Republic* for so long a time, devoted to what they called the new Americanism, and the resulting view that Belgium's neutrality should be guaranteed by the United States, and how out of this new notion had grown the President's idea of the League to guarantee the neutrality of all small nations. The King of course knew most of this already, and he said it made him happy to think of it.

He was extremely interested in the proposal for a League of Peace and said that he hoped that Belgium would continue to have the support and protection of America, not only during the war but after the war. He said that when the war is over and the great task of reconstruction begins, there will be great need in Belgium for American enterprise and capital and a great opportunity as well in the Congo.

"We want you to help us build railroads and all that sort of thing and we want your assistance in building up Belgium. We are a small country but our people are industrious and self-reliant, they do not ask charity but they do ask your sympathy and assistance and there is, I think, much of mutual benefit that can be done. America has espoused Belgium's course, we hope to render ourselves worthy of that confidence and show our gratitude in practical ways."

There was another point also that he approached with great delicacy. "We look to America to sustain us in a crisis that will be upon us when the war is over. We love our friends and we are grateful to them but we wish to be wholly independent and to govern ourselves. That, I believe, is the President's wish. That is one of the principles of liberty, that a small nation should govern itself according to the will and the aspirations of its own people."

What the King meant, as I know from personal conversations I have had with many leading Belgians of all classes in the Government and out, but what was perhaps too delicate for him to put in so many words, was that Belgium fully expects, of course, to be delivered from the hands of Germany but she does not wish in so doing to fall into the hands of either England or of France; and there is a great fear all over Belgium, among the intelligent classes of all parties, that the situation of the country will be difficult because of a perhaps natural disposition on the part of either England or France or of some statesmen or politicians of the two countries to take advantage of the services they have rendered to Belgium in protecting her neutrality.

I understood the King to intimate that I should convey this thought to the President in the assurance that it would receive a sympathetic consideration.

"We shall need the President's help," he said, "when we assemble around the table to discuss the ultimate terms of peace."

I assured the King that any suggestion he might make and any wish that he might have would receive most careful consideration

at the hands of the President; that it was the desire of all of us in America to cultivate closer and more intimate relations with his people.

He then said: "I think we had better join the others now."

We had talked for an hour, it was perhaps 12:30, and he arose and led the way through the door, putting on his khaki fatigue cap, which is like the caps the English officers wear.

"You will have to get your hat," he said, "for we are going over to the other house. This is where I have my office." There was a servant there who got my hat, and with the Order of Léopold under my arm, since I could not put it on my breast, we walked out on the sand, in the back yard as it were, and to the middle cottage, going into a room that was precisely like a sitting-room in the Middle West, a chimney and fireplace with a cushioned English fender, a table with a few papers, a few photographs, a few books—a dictionary, *Le Petit Larousse,* with the *Almanach de Gotha* and Macmillan's *Statesman's Year Book.*

And there was the Queen. I had not seen her since that day in the palace at Brussels that last Sunday afternoon before they all went away to Antwerp. How long ago and far away it all seemed! And what a changed world since! I think the same thought was in our minds. I kissed her hand and then she looked me in the eyes and said: "It has been a long time since we saw each other." She had that same wistful, charming smile, that comes and goes, playing about her sensitive mouth, that same effect of something timid and shrinking. She looked frail; life has written its experience on her face with a fine spiritual delicacy.... But there were presentations to be made. Nell made her courtsy and then Margaret, who did it beautifully, and I presented Ruddock. On the other side of the table was the little Crown Prince Leopold, taller than when I saw him last and brown with a lock of hair hanging over his forehead, he too, in khaki uniform—a soldier now; he is a Captain or officer of some kind in the Belgian army and as embarrassed as his father and mother seem most of the time to be. As we stood there I observed to the King that his son had grown much, and the King said: "But you ought to see my daughter! She is a young lady now, away at a boarding-school in Italy."

The Queen in that low girlish voice was saying:

"I want to thank you for all you have done; you have been so good to us and to our country."

Luncheon was announced immediately and we went into the next room without ceremony, the King saying: "Will you sit at my wife's right?"

The King and Queen sit always at table, side by side, she on his right. He had Nell on his left, and I on the right of the Queen, on my left the Countess Caraman de Chimay, then came Ruddock and then the General Biebuyck, then Margaret, then the Prince and then Nell, completing the circle of the round table.

The luncheon was very simple. The King and Queen drank no wine, and the King leaning across and saying to me: "We are abstentionists." And he asked me about the temperance movement in America. I told him then about it and explained to him the meaning of wet and dry. The Crown Prince, however, is not an abstentionist, for he tipped up his glass of champagne with the best of them. Nell spoke to him once or twice but he is almost painfully shy and it seemed a kindness to let him alone.

Conversation is always difficult with Kings and Queens; one is always under the depressing influence of the protocol, that leaves the direction of the conversation to Their Majesties, one must not speak unless one is spoken to, and as these particular Majesties find conversation a rather trying task there are long and awkward pauses. Finally I decided, Majesties or no Majesties, to put them at their ease. The King had been talking about bombardments by air craft, bombs had fallen near their villa several times, only the other day the wife and two children of one of their servants was killed. I described to them the visits of the Allied aviators at Brussels, and the Queen said: "I suppose their bombs hurt as much as any even if our friends do shoot them."

We had grey bread except the Queen, who had white beside her plate, though she didn't eat it. She is very delicate.... The servants—all in black now, not the brave scarlet liveries and knee breeches of happier times—would enter, serve and then withdraw. The King would tap a bell at his right hand to call the servants back. There was a course first of eggs, then roast beef with potatoes and carrots, then a kind of thick apple pie, which wasn't very good, the Queen didn't eat it, though I did because I was hungry as I always am when I am rushing about and excited. Luncheon over, we went back to the drawing-room for the coffee. The King got a box of cigars and handed them about and then a box of

cigarettes. I saw that Nell was anxious to smoke but did not know about the Queen.

"Does Your Majesty smoke?" asked Nell.

"Yes, I smoke too much and that is why I have had to stop," replied the Queen. "But do you smoke, and beside me, I like the odour." So Nell lit her cigarette. We all smoked cigarettes except the King, who in his purblind way took out a strange little cigar, short like a stunted stogie, with the end widened, fumbled about for some time on the mantelpiece and from a number of wooden cigar-holders scattered there, selected one and fixed his odd little cigar in it.

He seated himself on the English fender, stretching out his long legs in their puttees before him, a favorite posture of his, and motioned me to the chair near-by. Thus we had our coffee....

At the hospital (at La Panne) we were met by Dr. Depage, looking as out of place in khaki as doctors always do in uniform, not knowing in the least how to wear it—cap on the back of his head and spectacles far down on his nose. When last I saw him it was in Lambert's salon at Brussels, a long time ago that seems, he and his wife were there—his wife who went down on the *Lusitania*—whose body is buried here in the sand dunes near the hospital that she did so much to establish, the hospital that she fitted out with its American instruments and apparatus that she got while she was over there....

We must go at once and look at the hospital. Depage is a very great surgeon, one of those men who is completely absorbed by his own occupation; he has but one interest in life, thinks and talks of but one thing and here in this vast establishment he is in his element. He showed us rigorously everything in it—and I detest being shown about hospitals, factories, and so on, it causes in me a fatigue and depression that are inexpressible. I always think of Riley, who accepted the invitation to go to Minneapolis provided they would not show him the new plough works. Well, Depage showed us everything, all the operating rooms, all of the dormitories where the wounded lay, all of the kitchens, all of the sterilizing plants, all of the offices for the doctors and surgeons, the laundry, the places where the nurses slept and where they ate, all the bathrooms, public and private, all the water closets, literally opened one door after another that not one should be missed.

It became confusing and I felt as though I were being whirled

round and round through white operating rooms. In one of them a half dozen surgeons in white with their heads bound up and nurses were ready for an operation and on the table a naked woman with grey hair who hastily and instinctively gathered some sheets about her as we burst in upon her sacred privacy in this moment.

But Depage, with professional detachment, said:

"It is only a secondary operation," as if that made any difference! and led us on through. At last he took us to see the place where they manufacture artificial limbs and they do it splendidly. Really it was quite interesting; they take casts of the limbs and make a leg that is really like a man's, has toes carved in it, toes that will move. One of these legs costs thirty francs—$6.00—the most perfect leg ever made. In America, for an imperfect artificial leg, one pays six hundred francs or $120. These limbs are made by the war crippled and they make them for English officers, French officers, Belgian officers—for everybody except themselves. Depage had one man get up and show us how he could walk on his stump. Finally the long torment ended and that visit was over. But one must have great admiration for Depage, a splendid man and a humane one, who is doing a noble work. If I had twenty hats I'd take them off to him.

Just as we were going, his son arrived in uniform—a lad of sixteen who had just come out of the trenches—sprang at his father and kissed him, a touching scene. Many of the people in the hospital from Brussels asked me for news of their relatives, among them Emmanuel Janssen's brother. The nurses were all English, strong, ruddy, many of them pretty, healthy, and wholesome women.

Ah me! Those long white wards where the wounded lay, heads bandaged, arms dressed in splints, irrigating tubes and vessels about, some of them laughing, most of them happy; "the lucky wound"—the best they can have in life to be wounded and come to the rear.