

The Letters and Journal of
**Brand
Whitlock**



Edited by
Allan Nevins

The LETTERS and JOURNAL of
BRAND WHITLOCK

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With a Biographical Introduction

by

Allan Nevins



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PREFACE

BRAND WHITLOCK had never kept a diary until, with the German invasion of Belgium, his crowded impressions of historic events demanded a record. But his journal soon became a habit, and without important intermission he maintained it until the close of his life. Filling more than twenty fat notebooks in his small, difficult handwriting, the diary contains material for three or four printed volumes. It has been necessary to make a selection from it. But my task in doing so has been lightened by the fact that the interest and importance of the record decline in marked degree after the date of Whitlock's resignation as Ambassador. I have felt it proper, since bounds had to be set somewhere, to ignore that part of the diary which followed his departure from Brussels. What we have here, therefore, is a chronicle of the Great War and its immediate results as seen from Belgian soil. It is true that for a year and a half Whitlock was not in Belgium at all, but at Havre with the exiled civil administration. Nevertheless, he was spiritually still breathing Belgian air, as politically he was still accredited to the Belgian Government. A fairly accurate title for the volume would therefore be, "A Journal of the Great War as Seen from Belgium." Perhaps, to make it complete, a phrase should be added to show that it covers the first steps in European reconstruction.

It is a record curious and illuminating in many ways. It contains, for one thing, much the frankest account of the revictualing of Belgium and its accompanying difficulties yet put into print. The editor has no desire to present sensational matter, or injure (were it possible) any figure concerned in that great work. But surely, after the lapse of more than two decades, it is possible to present the story just as Whitlock saw it; surely it detracts nothing from the splendid achievement by Villalobar and the other "protecting Ministers," by Mr. Hoover and his devoted aides, and by M. Francqui and his associates, to show how much friction accompanied their labors. The book, again, contains one of the most vivid presentations of a nation under the heel of an invader ever published. Only a day-to-day record can admit the reader to an appreciation of what Belgium suffered, and in these pages the effect is cumulative. A third feature of

the book is its shrewd view of European politics from the Armistice to the beginning of 1922; a mordant and disillusioned view, with not a few passages positively bitter. And finally, we have in this volume an interesting record of Whitlock's own inner growth; for the Midwestern mayor, under responsibilities that made him an international figure, learned a broader and deeper philosophy than he brought to Europe.

As Belgium is always in the foreground of the book, it should be added that the book is interesting also for the development of Whitlock's attitude toward that country. In one sense he was passionately devoted to Belgium; in another he was a critical and detached observer. Readers of this volume will soon perceive the distinction. The Belgium of art, architecture, poetry, romance, and history he admired without reservation. The Belgium that was a modern industrial state, busy with moneymaking, disturbed by racial, religious, and class differences, and led by highly practical politicians, he viewed realistically and critically. The Belgian nation during the war years seemed to him heroism incarnate. In the post-war years, perceiving both the defects and the virtues of the land, he commented upon it in a more incisive and balanced tone.

It was unfortunate that Whitlock had so little time to become acquainted with Belgium before the World War burst upon it. In the first few months after his arrival he was busy familiarizing himself with the Court, the Cabinet, his diplomatic colleagues, and the city. Of the great industries, the working people, the political parties, and the hard practical workaday Belgium he had yet seen little. He had observed the aristocratic life of the capital, had been admitted to artistic circles, and had begun to study the incrustations of history; that was all.

Yet Belgium was much more than a treasure-house of the past; it was a very modern country, boiling with new forces. Its seven and a half million people, crowded into some eleven thousand square miles, showed much social discontent. Great political changes were imminent. The Clericals who, with the aid of a system of plural voting, had long ruled the nation, were being pressed hard by the Liberals and Socialists under MM. Hymans and Vandervelde. By a general strike in 1913 the Opposition groups had forced the appointment of a commission upon electoral reform. The nation was torn by the agitation of the Flemish-speaking element for larger educational and political privileges for their tongue; the census of 1910 having shown that some 3,220,000 people spoke Flemish alone

against 2,833,000 who spoke French alone. Agitation against the Church, and especially against the grip which it attempted to maintain upon the schools, was continuous. The question of military preparation constituted a burning issue. When Whitlock arrived the army had just been reorganized and strengthened. Many, especially the Socialists, regarded this attempt to keep up with the military expansion of larger nations as a piece of costly jingoism; others held it vital to the nation's safety.

But the Belgium which Whitlock saw in his first months abroad was primarily the Belgium of the past. In Brussels, one of the most beautiful cities of Europe, he took an insatiable delight. He looked at it through the same eyes as William Hickling Prescott, and Prescott's description of it may be quoted as embodying the very spirit of Whitlock's admiration:

In Brussels I found myself in the very heart of the Middle Ages. Old buildings of stone, curiously carved, immense gables and fantastic architraves, and cornices of the houses; churches with antique Gothic spires. The Place Royale, in which my hotel stood, was the spot on which Charles the Fifth abandoned the crown in presence of the most royal assembly that ever met in Brussels. . . . I visited the Hôtel de Ville, a most glorious municipal monument of the Middle Ages, standing as it stood when, directly in front of it, those gallant nobles, Egmont and Horn, were beheaded on a public scaffold by order of Alva. I visited the house, a fine old Gothic edifice, still standing, from which the Flemish patriots walked out to the scaffold, and from the windows of which Alva witnessed the execution. What a square that is! . . . Then the noble cathedral of Brussels, dedicated to Sainte Gudule; the superb organ filling its long aisles with the most heart-thrilling tones, as the voices of the priests, dressed in their rich robes of purple and gold, rose in a chant that died away in the immense vaulted distance of the cathedral. . . . The setting sun was streaming in through the rich colored panes of the magnificent windows, that rose from the floor to the ceiling of the cathedral, some hundred feet in height. The glass was of the time of Charles the Fifth, and I soon recognized his familiar face, the *whapper-jaw* of the Austrian line. As I heard the glorious anthem rise up to heaven in this time-honored cathedral, which has witnessed generation after generation melt away, and which now displayed the effigies of those, in undying colors, who had once worshipped within its walls, I was swept back to a distant period and felt I was a contemporary of the grand old times when Charles the Fifth held his Chapters of the Golden Fleece in this very building.

Whitlock, as his diary testifies, loved to go down from the Quartier Léopold to the older parts of town—to the spacious Grande Place, with the magnificent Hôtel de Ville and the old guild-houses, presenting an image of the ancient picturesqueness of the city; to Notre Dame du Sablon, founded in 1304 by the society of crossbowmen of which Whitlock was ultimately elected a member; to the palace of the Duc d'Arenberg, once the residence of Count Egmont, built in 1548; and other landmarks of the past. He loved the stately Palais de la Nation, where Parliament met, and the Palais Royal, where the King spent much of his time. He familiarized himself with the royal museums and library. He grew fond also of some of the environs of Brussels—the Parc du Cinquantenaire, just outside the Quartier Léopold to the east, a beautiful spot made more interesting by its industrial museum; Laeken, to the north of the city, with its cemetery and royal palace; and Tervueren, not far from the field of Waterloo.

All the world idealized Belgium from 1914 to 1918. It idealized itself; internal divisions melted away, for a time at least, in the fire of patriotism, and an unselfish heroism stamped the national character. Whitlock devoted himself wholeheartedly to the crucified land. From the moment the war broke out he was intensely on the side of the Allies, and bitterly antagonistic to the invader. What he saw of the Germans in the rôle of conquerors steadily deepened his animosity toward them. His Journal for the war years is filled with detestation of all things Teutonic, and a passionate affection for the Belgian people. One of the happiest days of his life was that in which, hard on the heels of King Albert himself, he drove from France over the old battle-lines, past bivouacs of troops just released from fighting, and back into the liberated and flag-bedecked city of Brussels, his old home.

Then, in the years after the war, the inevitable occurred. For the first time he really became acquainted with that modern Belgium which, with many admirable qualities, is after all on the same mundane level as the rest of mankind. It was a Belgium eagerly interested in the resumption of industry; making passionate demands of the Peace Conference, some of them exaggerated; anxious for trading privileges and the economic absorption of Luxembourg; ready to give up its old neutrality for a dubious military alliance with France; more nationalistic than ever. It was a Belgium with less unity than before the war—the Clericals struggling to defend old privileges, the Liberals and Socialists triumphantly battling for reform; the Fla-

mingants insisting more vehemently upon their rights; labor more determined to obtain social justice. Some of the politicians appeared as crass and unscrupulous as in America. Of this modern Belgium, at last realistically perceived, Whitlock was an honest critic, his pen sometimes touching it with acid strokes. Fond as ever of the Belgium of art and history, the Belgium of 1920-22 he presented as he saw it. In this contrast of mood lies one interesting feature of the Journal.

Here we have a volume very different indeed from *Belgium: A Personal Record*, though in the first part of it there are of course resemblances. It contains much more immediacy of emotion. It is far more candid and outspoken, for Whitlock frankly admitted that in *Belgium* he had omitted some controversial material. After April, 1917, the Journal is entirely new, and it constitutes the only record by Whitlock of the year and a half at Havre; of the return to Brussels; of Belgium during the work of the Peace Conference; of President Wilson's visit; and of the first struggles of Europe after the war to regain solvency, a workable commercial system, and a degree of harmony. All in all, the Journal may be pronounced one of the most varied, entertaining, illuminating, and at times moving of American records of the war and post-war period.

ALLAN NEVINS

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	v
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ	xiii
CHAPTER	
I. THE GERMAN INVASION	1
II. ESTABLISHING THE BELGIAN RELIEF	47
III. TROUBLES OF THE C.R.B.	90
IV. THE <i>Lusitania</i> AND AFTER	138
V. A VISIT TO THE GERMAN FRONT: NURSE CAVELL	181
VI. HOOVER, FRANCOIS, AND VON BISSING	225
VII. THE "SLAVE DRIVES" IN BELGIUM	275
VIII. AMERICA ENTERS THE WAR	338
IX. WITH THE EXILED BELGIAN GOVERNMENT	379
X. THE DARKEST DAYS OF THE WAR	431
XI. VICTORY: THE RETURN TO BRUSSELS	466
XII. THE YEAR OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE	529
XIII. POST-WAR POLITICS IN BELGIUM	584
XIV. THE LAST YEAR IN BRUSSELS	649
INDEX	725

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

(An Abbreviated List of Names)

ALBERT, KING OF THE BELGIANS

ALLARD, JOSSE. One of Whitlock's dearest friends in Brussels

BELOW-SALESKI, HERR VON. German Minister to Belgium at the outbreak of the war

BISSING, BARON GENERAL VON. German Governor-General of Belgium after the departure of von der Goltz

BLANCAS, ALBERT. Argentine Minister to Belgium during the war

BOTTARO-COSTA, COUNT. Italian Minister to Belgium at the outbreak of the war

BROHN, DR. Official of the German administration in Belgium, closely concerned with relief activities

BULLE, M. Mexican Minister to Belgium in 1914, later connected with the Commission for Relief in Belgium

CAVALCANTI DE LACERDA, FELIX. Secretary of the Brazilian Legation during the war

CAVELL, EDITH. English nurse, executed by the Germans for assisting English, French, and Belgians to escape to Holland

COMITÉ NATIONAL D'ALIMENTATION ET SECOURS. Belgian organization for the relief of the destitute and starving

COMMISSION FOR RELIEF IN BELGIUM (C.R.B.). American organization (though much of the money came from the British Empire and some from other countries) for the relief of starving Belgium

CONNETT, A. N. At one time Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium

CROSBY, OSCAR T. Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium in 1915

DAVIGNON, M. Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs when the war began

DE BROQUEVILLE, BARON. Long Prime Minister of Belgium

DE LEVAL, MAÎTRE GASTON. Legal adviser to the American Legation in Brussels

DE MÉRODE, COMTE. Marshal of the Belgian Court and warm friend of Whitlock

- DESAMBLANCX, CHARLES. Brussels bookbinder and friend of Whitlock
- DE WIART, CARTON. Minister of Justice in the Belgian Cabinet during the war; later Prime Minister
- DE WIART, MME. CARTON. His admirable wife, a woman of English birth, who served a term in a German prison, and there translated Whitlock's *Forty Years of It* (with omissions) into French
- DIEDERICH, MR. American Consul-General at Antwerp, 1914-17
- ELIZABETH, QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS
- FRANCQUI, ÉMILE. Able Belgian banker, head of the Comité National during the war, later prominent politically
- GAHAN, REV. H. S. English rector in Brussels
- GERARD, JAMES W. American Ambassador to Germany
- GIBSON, HUGH S. Secretary to the American Legation in Brussels
- GOLTZ, BARON VON DER. First Governor-General of Belgium
- GREGORY, WARREN. Director of the C.R.B. November, 1916-April, 1917
- HARRACH, COUNT VON. German official in Belgium, in charge of the press
- HAVENITH, M. Belgian Minister in Washington
- HEINEMAN, DANNIE. Connected with Belgian relief from the beginning to the withdrawal; Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium October-December, 1914
- HOOVER, HERBERT CLARK. Chief organizer of the C.R.B., and its able head from the beginning until after the withdrawal
- HYMANS, PAUL. Liberal statesman of Belgium; long Minister of Foreign Affairs; first president (1920) of the League of Nations
- JACQUEMAIN, M. Alderman of Brussels
- JAROTSKY, GENERAL VON. First German military commander in Brussels, 1914
- KELLOGG, VERNON. The admirable Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium and northern France in 1915 and 1916
- LARNER, MISS CAROLINE. Member of the Legation staff
- LEMONNIER, M. Acting-Burgomaster of Brussels after the imprisonment of M. Max
- LUCEY, CAPTAIN JOHN F. Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium December, 1914-February, 1915
- LUMM, VON. German official in Belgium, charged with administering the banks

LÜTTWITZ, BARON VON. Second military commander in Brussels, succeeding von Jarotsky

MAX, M. Burgomaster of Brussels, arrested and imprisoned

MERCIER, CARDINAL. The most eminent churchman of Belgium, residing at Malines

NONCE, THE. Papal nuncio in Belgium

OMER, M. Whitlock's servant

POLAND, WILLIAM B. Director of the C.R.B. in Belgium, December, 1915—June, 1916

RUDDOCK, A. B. Secretary of the American Legation in succession to Hugh Gibson

SAUBERZWEIG, GENERAL VON. Military commander in Brussels in succession to von Lüttwitz; the man responsible for Miss Cavell's execution

SHALER, MILLARD K. One of the organizers of the C.R.B. and its honorary secretary

SOLVAY, ÉMILE. Leading Belgian industrialist, prominent in the Comité National

VAN DYKE, DR. HENRY. American Minister to Holland during the war

VAN VOLLENHOVEN, MYNHEER. Dutch Minister to Belgium

VILLALOBAR, MARQUIS DE. Spanish Minister in Brussels, and with Whitlock the leading protective Minister of the C.R.B.

VILLIERS, SIR FRANCIS. English Minister to Belgium during the war

WATSON, HERBERT A. GRANT. Second Secretary of the British Legation in Brussels

INDEX

- Adatci, M., 512, 513, 558, 683-684
- Air raids, 475, 490, 492
- Albert, King of the Belgians, 1-4, 18, 248, 250, 258, 350, 404-409, 454, 482, 510, 526-527, 530, 533, 541-543, 548, 552, 555, 577-578, 592-593, 595, 614-615, 618, 619, 627, 640, 642, 643, 651, 656, 662, 665, 672, 675, 692, 717; appeal to King George, 7; appeal to deputies, 10-11; orders no resistance at Brussels, 37-38; opposes peace conference at Brussels, 519; returns to Brussels, 524; concerned over French propaganda, 538; Wilson's visit to Belgium, 563-572; receives Poincaré and Foch, 576; approach to post-war problems, 582-584; on American loan, 599; interview with Gorgas, 603-604; criticism of, 616, 624; at Olympic Games, 632; trip to Brazil, 633, 634; urges retention of Whitlock, 663; and Léopold I, 669; at Louvain ceremonies, 694-696; returns from Morocco, 711; Whitlock's departure, 719-724
- Albert of England, Prince, 524-525
- Allen, General, 576, 641
- Alphonse XIII, King of Spain, 289, 350, 488, 554, 663
- Amiens, German drive against, 475 n.
- Antwerp, fall of, 48-49
- Arabic*, sinking of, 206
- Armistice, false rumour of, 514; signed, 516
- Armour, Norman, 573, 622
- Asquith, Herbert, 77-78, 331-333; conversation with Whitlock, 574-575; opposes occupation of Ruhr, 661
- Athlone, Earl of, 550, 552, 669
- Austrian peace note, 503
- Baden, Prince Max of, peace note, 507
- Baker, Newton D., 287, 610, 612, 626
- Baker, Ray Stannard, 490, 561
- Balfour, Lord Arthur, contacts with Whitlock, 210, 635-638
- Barrès, Maurice, 504
- Barthou, Louis, *Les Amours d'un Poète*, 498
- Zaruch, Bernard, 564
- Baucq, Philippe, 493, 555
- Baudelaire, 449
- Bavaria, King of, 504
- Bazin, René, 467
- Belgian Cabinet, 527, 531 n.
- Belgium, mobilization of, 2; reply to Germany, 7; mission from, in United States, 47; Flemish movement in, 246-247, 450, 471, 472, 488; "slave-drives" in, 275, 309, 322; reconstruction in, 515; financial situation in, 531
- Belleville, Comtesse Jeanne de, 540, 541
- Below, General von, 5, 7, 9, 12
- Bernstoff, Count von, 156-157
- Berthelot, 659, 665
- Bissing, General von, 75, 82, 98, 101, 123, 125, 138, 148, 168, 171, 172-173, 222, 231, 233, 238, 246, 259-261, 269, 279, 281, 302, 322, 328, 339, 372-373, 553, 706; his government of Belgium, 143-147
- Blade*, Toledo, 435
- Bolo, Pasha, 448
- Bolshevism, 516, 532
- Bootsma, Chanoine Tharcicius, 504
- Bourbon, Prince Sixte de, 493
- Bourgeois, Léon, 637, 638
- Boy-Ed, Commander, 227-228
- Branx, Émile, 463
- Brest-Litovsk, negotiations of, 465
- Briand, Aristide, 692; and Ruhr occupation, 658, 661-662; sustained by Chamber, 675-676; at Washington Conference, 718
- British demands on Belgian relief, 179
- Brown, Curtis, 506, 509

- Bryan, W. J., 164-165, 387, 545, 640; resigns as Secretary of State, 157
- Bulgaria, asks for armistice, 505, 506 n.
- Butler, Nicholas Murray, 694-697
- Byng, General (Viscount), victory at Cambrai, 458
- Caillaux, Joseph, 437, 462, 463, 468
- Carpentier, Georges, 687-689, 698, 699
- Carson, Sir Edward, 211, 393, 469
- Casement, Sir Roger, 257, 286, 393, 397
- Castelnau, General, 591-592, 665
- Cavell, Edith, 216-221, 284, 493, 537, 540, 541, 546; Princess de Cröy's recollections of, 554-555; ceremony at Brussels for, 561-562
- Cecil, Lord Robert, opposes Ruhr occupation, 661
- Charles of Austria, Emperor, 493, 655-656, 674
- Château-Thierry, battle of, 486
- Clary, Count, asks Whitlock to take charge of Austrian Legation, 33
- Clemenceau, Georges, 456, 462, 471, 497, 513, 546, 558, 635, 655, 674, 693; reply to Austrian note, 504
- Colby, Bainbridge, 607, 608; made Secretary of State, 599; and recognition of Irish Free State, 603; at 1920 Democratic Convention, 612;
- Coolidge, Calvin, 612
- Cooreman, G. F. M., 484 n.
- Couperus, Louis, 501, 502, 584-585
- Cox, James D., 620, 636, 638, 639; nominated, 615; compared with Harding, 615-616
- C. R. B., *see* under Hoover.
- Creel, George W., 445, 530 n., 550-551
- Crowe, Sir Eyre, 583, 597
- Curzon, Lord, 469, 571, 583, 595, 597, 617, 650-651, 704; at Brussels conference, 613-614; criticized by Northcliffe, 699
- Czechoslovakia, recognition of, by Allies, 493
- Czernin, 493
- Daniels, Josephus, 558
- Darrow, Clarence, 500, 501
- Daudet, Léon, 448
- Davis, Norman, 561, 564, 565
- Davis, Richard Harding, 29, 32
- de Beughem, Vicomte, 549, 669, 719
- de Broqueville, Baron, 8, 11, 22, 396, 402, 435, 452, 456, 488, 559-560, 663; reply to German ultimatum, 4; rumoured Belgian foreign minister, 438; replies to Pope, 439; on Pope's note, 440; and Flemish movements, 450; remains premier, 463; resigns premiership, 482; overthrown as Premier, 484
- de Cartier, Baron, 566, 645, 692-693
- de Ceuninck, Belgian Minister of War, 455
- de Cröy, Prince Reginald, 493, 494, 495
- de Cröy, Princess Maria, 493-495, 541, 554-555
- Defrance, M., 534
- Delacroix, L., 531, 539, 568, 583, 594, 599, 623, 637, 645, 659; made Belgian Prime Minister, 527; proposed trip to Holland, 633-635
- de Leval, Gaston, 5, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 29, 140, 150, 171, 449, 546, 571, 658
- de Man, Lieutenant, 498
- de Margerie, French Minister to Belgium, 560, 572, 590, 598, 610, 617, 625, 648, 650-651, 660, 682; and Franco-Belgian alliance, 594-595; and port surtax dispute, 643-646
- de Mérode, Count, 525
- Dempsey, Jack, 687-689, 698-699
- Dernette, General, 486
- Deschanel, Paul, 21
- d'Esperey, General Franchet, 506, 672
- De Valera, Eamon, 592, 609; in America, 587; and Anglo-Irish crisis, 689-709
- de Wiart, Henry Carton, 8, 20, 396, 482, 552; forms cabinet, 640, 652; on Ruhr occupation, 662, 665, 682, 704; encouraged by Belgian elections, 715
- de Wiart, Mme. Carton, 33, 472, 476, 482
- Didelot, Admiral, 398
- Dodd, Mrs., 497, 498
- d'Oultremont, Countess Elizabeth, 547
- d'Oultremont, Guy, 535, 556, 571, 577-578, 622, 667, 720
- Echo de Paris, L'*, 508, 546
- Edward, Prince of Wales, 548

- Elizabeth, Queen of the Belgians, 8-9, 30-32, 248, 409-411, 491, 524-525, 530, 543, 555-556, 578, 582, 599, 614-615, 618, 619, 627, 639-642, 651, 664, 669, 670, 711, 723; on Wilson, 560; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 563-572; attends Louvain ceremonies, 694-696
- Elst, Baron, van der, 5, 27, 30, 398, 419
- Emerson, Congressman, 435
- Englebert, Oscar, 282
- Ferdinand, King of Bulgaria, 534; abdicates, 506
- Flemish movement in Belgium, 246-247, 450, 471, 472, 488
- Foch, Marshal, Ferdinand, 478, 491, 515, 536, 538, 552, 601, 624, 674, 686; placed in supreme command, 477; presents Armistice terms, 515 n.; visit to Brussels, 576-577; at Brussels conference, 613-615; and Ruhr occupation, 657, 661-662, 665
- Forty Years of It*, by Brand Whitlock, 500
- Fourth of July celebrations, 486
- France, cabinet crisis, in, 439; political scandals in, 448, 451; Socialists in, 497
- Francis Joseph I, Emperor, 325
- Francqui, Émile, and Comité National, 48, 63-64, 68-69, 72, 78, 80, 91, 106, 125, 127, 130-131, 136, 166, 167-168, 172-173, 175-176, 177, 179, 202, 207, 211-212, 223, 229-230, 231, 234, 236-237, 244, 248, 249, 250-251, 252, 253-255, 258, 261, 264, 270, 272-273, 282, 283-284, 292, 293, 294-295, 297-298, 308-310, 311, 313-315, 316, 319, 321, 326, 335, 341-342, 344, 354, 369-370, 478, 507, 512, 529, 531, 532, 533, 535, 538, 550, 589-590, 595, 599, 628, 635, 644, 709, 711
- Friederich, Crown Prince, 515
- George V, King of England, 625, 699; disapproves of Strachey's *Queen Victoria*, 676; trip to Belfast, 686
- Gerard, James W., 97, 159, 235, 293, 439
- Germany, declares war on Russia, 1; invades Belgium, 1; declares war on France, 7; victory of, near Verdun, 241; peace offer of, 334; offer rejected by Allies, 341; submarine drive of, 348; replies to Pope, 446; tired of war, 477; advance of troops, 479, 480; retreat of troops, 508; reply to Wilson by, 510; revolution in, 515; conditions in, 535
- Gibson, Hugh, 4, 8, 13, 16-17, 18-19, 20, 21, 24, 32, 38, 49-50, 53-58, 61, 97, 234, 235, 248, 252, 269, 459, 461, 463, 478, 507, 530, 531, 532, 535, 557, 611, 656, 688
- Gompers, Samuel, 468, 474
- Grahame, Sir George, 621, 651, 656, 657, 661, 662, 664, 667, 704, 705; on Irish agitation in America, 668; conversation with Whitlock, 673-675; trip to Liège, 710
- Grayson, Admiral C. T., 615, 629
- Grégoire, M., 533
- Gregory, Warren, 308, 359-360, 363, 367, 369, 370-371, 380, 626, 628
- Grey, Sir Edward, 210, 244, 261, 588, 600; note on food, 229; trip to America, 628-630
- Haig, Sir Douglas, 434, 477
- Hanotaux, Gabriel, 512
- Hapgood, Norman, 437
- Harbord, General James G., 464
- Harding, Warren G., 636, 638, 641, 658, 667; nominated, 610-611; compared with Cox, 615-616; acceptance speech, 620; and Hoover, 627; elected, 639; and Whitlock's retention as Ambassador, 642-643, 649, 663, 669, 679-680; inaugural address, 652-653; and Irish agitation in America, 668; and Washington conference, 707-714; and Whitlock's retirement, 716-717, 719
- Harvey, George, 643, 654, 679, 680, 713; early activities in England, 665-669; impression of, in England, 676; blunders of, 704, 710
- Havre, conditions in, 470
- Hearst, William Randolph, 588
- Heineman, Dannie, 15, 53-54, 63, 66, 76-77, 87, 88, 108, 120, 125, 144, 172, 279, 533, 632, 643
- Herrick, Myron T., 391, 666, 680, 705, 712, 719; interview with Whitlock, 707-709
- Herron, George D., 551-552

- Hertling, Chancellor, 492
- Hindenburg, Paul von, 294, 434, 468, 478, 516
- Hirohito, Prince, 682-684
- Hirst, Francis W., 210
- Hoffman, 546, 563, 571, 575
- Hoover, Herbert C., 69-70, 72, 80, 81, 82, 90-91, 94, 97-99, 106, 118, 135, 138, 142, 157-158, 159, 162, 163, 165, 168, 169, 170-171, 207, 209, 211-212, 215, 240, 242, 244-246, 248, 251, 252, 261, 262-264, 271-272, 282, 283-284, 292, 295-296, 308, 311, 316-317, 321, 335, 341-342, 344, 357, 358, 363, 367, 369, 395, 428, 449, 480, 503, 507, 515, 520, 532, 534, 537, 550, 552, 554, 559; on Kitchener incident, 77-78; on British unpreparedness, 160-161; wishes to end C. R. B., 180; on British food blockade, 200, 210-211; dispute with Francqui, 313-315; hatred of Villalobar, 380; King Albert on, 454; to receive prix d'Audiffret, 476; made honorary citizen of Belgium, 491; rumored in opposition to Whitlock, 461, 463; proposed for prize, 472; Whitlock's treatment of in his book, 476; his fight with Spreckles, 505; arrives in Brussels, 530; on opposition to Wilson, 531; attends conference on Belgian reconstruction, 531; in London, 535; embarrassment because of his absence, 536; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 564-567; as Presidential possibility, 587, 589, 597, 611; opposed to Whitlock's retention in Belgian post, 643, 680; Secretary of Commerce, 652; estimate of, 709
- House, Colonel E. M., 159, 227, 241, 456, 458, 459, 460, 463, 559, 611, 612, 615, 655
- Howells, William Dean, 440, 626, 651, 721; *Years of My Youth* by, 439; death of, 597
- Hughes, Charles Evans, 272, 317, 628, 658, 693, 707, 710, 719; and Washington conference, 714-715; accepts Whitlock's resignation, 717
- Hugo, Victor, 478, 498
- Humbert, Senator, 448
- Huysmans, Camille, 472 n.
- Hymans, Paul, 8, 396, 418, 438, 463, 479, 484, 488, 500, 508, 511, 513, 531, 537, 550, 561, 568, 572, 574, 579, 591, 597-598, 619-620, 655; on Gompers, 473; Hoover's telegram to, 480; on Törring affair, 492; on Belgian universities, 505; receives Wilson's speech, 506; on peace conference at Brussels, 512; on French propaganda in Luxembourg, 546; on Belgian territorial guarantee, 581-583; Dutch-Belgian relations, 587, 603-609; and French in Frankfort, 593; and removal of American dead, 596, 603; resignation, 634; presides over League Council, 638-639
- International, projected meeting of, 472
- Irwin, Will, 77, 429, 549, 599
- Italy, declaration of war by, 152; army defeated, 453
- Janssen, Emmanuel, 262-263, 272, 333, 334
- Japan, possibility of intervention in Russia by, 473, 474; and United States in respect to Siberia, 474 n.
- Jaspar, H., 640, 642, 644, 704, 713, 717; on Dutch relations, 645-646, 659-660, 705-706; and Washington conference invitations, 691-697, 705-711
- Jaurés, Jean, 3
- Jewett, Rutger B., 550, 556, 654
- Joffre, Marshal Joseph J. C., 424-425; 429, 686
- Johnson, Hiram, 597, 609, 610
- Johnson, Tom, 436
- Jowett, Dr., 565, 571
- Jutland, battle of, 269
- Kaiser: *see* Wilhelm II.
- Kellogg, Paul, 469
- Kellogg, Vernon L., 274, 280, 291, 300, 304, 366, 367, 428, 552, 611
- Kirschen, Sadi, 535, 546
- Kitchener, Lord, 13, 34, 77, 114, 159, 270
- Klobukowski, M., 4, 6, 15, 19, 21, 26, 258, 480
- Kluck, General von, 494, 516
- Kuehen, General von, 495
- Lambert, Baron, 63, 92, 130-131, 177, 238, 244, 247, 264, 274, 313, 366

- Lancken-Wakenitz, Baron von der, 49-50, 53-54, 55, 59, 61, 66, 67-68, 73, 75, 82, 85, 98, 101, 105, 107-108, 113, 122, 124, 125, 128, 130-131, 135, 144, 154, 161, 162-163, 165, 167, 171, 172, 173, 176, 177, 178, 180, 201, 202-203, 211-213, 215, 217-218, 221-222, 223, 229-230, 231, 232-233, 234, 236-237, 238, 240, 242-243, 245, 247, 254, 255, 259-261, 264, 265, 268-269, 272-273, 294, 299, 302, 309-310, 320, 328, 337, 339-340, 346, 348, 353, 355-356, 357, 360, 361-362, 505, 507, 511, 520; visit to front, 182-198
- Lansing, Robert, 418, 468, 498, 507, 547, 562, 626, 628-629, 693; appointed Secretary of State, 172; on publication of Whitlock's book, 445; disapproves movie of Whitlock's book, 506; resigns, 586-587, 599-600; book on peace negotiations, 655, 656
- Lea, Colonel Luke, 545
- Lemonnier, M., 56, 79, 96, 102, 110, 118, 141, 174, 223, 239, 277, 293, 306, 324, 339, 359, 536, 550, 561, 587, 643
- Lenin, Nicolai, 468, 650
- Léopold of Belgium, King, 494
- Léopold of Belgium, Prince, 555-556, 576-578, 592, 627, 632, 640, 723
- Lewis, Sinclair, 652
- Libre Belgique, La*, 170
- Lincoln Hut, dedication of, 471
- Lippmann, Walter, 490
- Litvinoff, Maxim, 582, 596, 603
- Lloyd George, David, 210, 331-333, 335, 341, 393, 466, 558, 601, 620, 635, 652, 659, 692-693, 704; English workers' views on, 469; Whitlock's opinion of, 471; Anglo-Belgian relations, 559-560; against French in Ruhr, 593; Hythe and Boulogne conference, 612-613; at Brussels conference of Supreme Council, 613-615; and Ruhr occupation, 659-661, 665; attack on Poles, 666-668, 673; and Irish question, 689, 691, 700-701, 705-709, 714; assailed by Northcliffe, 699
- Lodge, Henry Cabot, 582, 590, 605, 635
- Long, Breckenridge, 716
- Louvain ceremony, 496
- Lucey, Captain John F., 73, 82-83, 87
- Ludendorff, General Erich, 434, 468; resignation, 512
- Lumm, Herr von, 53-54, 259, 278-279
- Lusitania*, sinking of, 154
- Lüttwitz, General von, 589
- Luxburg, Count, 468 n.
- Luxembourg, German invasion of, 2
- Malvy, M., 448, 462, 491
- Manchester *Guardian*, 496
- March, General Peyton C., 609-610
- Margulies, M., 438
- Marshall, Thomas R., 628
- Mary, Queen, 625, 686
- Maubeuge, capture of, 495
- Max, Adolphe, Burgomaster, 34, 44, 64, 79, 239, 324, 327, 516, 524, 532, 549, 550, 561, 567, 573, 576, 602, 622, 633, 651; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 567-570
- McCormick, Cyrus H., 697-698
- McCormick, Medill, 441, 443, 566, 644, 696-697; and King Albert, 456
- Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Duke of, 495
- Mercier, Cardinal, 86, 100, 123-124, 153, 233, 244, 248, 264, 265-267, 270, 281, 327, 329, 359, 525, 527, 540, 556, 592, 610, 663-664, 681, 682, 698; letter to Hoover, 442; on universal suffrage, 547; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 567-569; Louvain ceremony, 694-697
- Millerand, Alexandre, 586, 590; and French occupation of Frankfort, 592-593; Hythe and Boulogne conference, 612-613; at Brussels conference of Supreme Council, 614-615; President of France, 634
- Milner, Viscount, 469
- Moltke, Count von, 533, 534
- Napoléon, Prince, 624, 642
- Nicholson, Gen. John, 434, 441, 449, 475, 476, 480, 483, 488, 496, 502, 508, 520; and French politicians, 470; in South Africa, 464
- Nickerson, Captain, 535
- Nock, Albert Jay, 92-95
- Nottingham labour conference, 469
- O'Connor, T. P., 392-393
- O'Reilly, Mary Boyle, 28
- Orlando, and Fiume dispute, 558, 570
- O'Ryan, General John F., 621
- Otlet, Paul, 66

- Paderewski, Ignace, 429, 552
 Page, Thomas Nelson, 496, 570, 571
 Page, Walter Hines, 308, 497
 Painlevé, Paul, 424
 Parliamentary democracy, 436
 Peltzer, Belgian Minister to Switzerland, 492
 Pershing, General John J., 424, 459, 486, 499, 527, 528, 536, 545, 562, 575, 614, 715; arrives in England, 417; wishes to be received by King Albert, 464; offers troops to Foch, 477; made member of Legion of Honour, 491
 "Pertinax," 657, 714, 715
 Pétain, Marshal, 434, 491, 576, 636, 694-696
 Phillips, William, 656
 Phillpotts, Eden, 501
 Pichon, Stephen, 538
 Pinchot, Gifford, 106, 116
 Poincaré, Raymond, 23, 451, 586, 663-664, 674, 686, 694-696, 709; assailed by Wilson, 566; visit to Brussels, 575-577; and Ruhr occupation, 657, 661-663
 Poison gas, 438
 Poland, William B., 242, 262-264, 428, 502, 531
 Polk, Frank, 579, 599, 629
 Pope Benedict XV, 440; peace proposal of, 431, 440; Belgian reply to peace proposal, 463
 Poulet, P., Minister of Science and Arts, 396, 463, 539
 Prescott, Samuel C., 477
 Priestley, Captain, 450, 488, 513
- Ravenstern, M., 538
 Rawlinson, General Sir Henry, 544
 Reid, Mrs. Whitelaw, 440
 Reinach, Joseph, 429, 460
 Reul, Paul de, 557, 690
 Revere, M., 438
 Ribot, Alexandre, 391-392, 427, 546
 Rolland, Romain, 384-387, 458
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 550
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 83-84, 155, 164, 513,
 Root, Elihu, 635
 Ruddock, A. B., 304-305, 319
 Roumania, conditions in, 438
 Rupprecht of Bavaria, Crown Prince, 184-186, 489, 533
- Russell, Charles Edward, 497
 Russia, rumors of intervention in, 473, 474
- Sacco-Vanzetti case, 712
 St. Mihiel, battle of, 502
 Samuel, Herbert, 553, 561
 Sauberzweig, General von, 218-222, 223, 232, 240, 284
 Saulsbury, Senator, 579
 Saxe-Meiningen, Duke of, 494
 Scheidemann, Philipp, 472 n.
 Schleswig-Holstein, Duke of, 494
 Schwabach, von, Herr, 49
 Sedan, taking of, 536
 Sharp, William Graves, 389, 391, 424, 552, 575
 Sheppey, Marshall, 611, 642-643, 716-717, 719; visit to Brussels, 679-682
Shropshire Lad, A, 501
 Siberia, Japanese-American negotiations about, 474 n.
 Siegfried, M., 504
 Simmons, Senator F. M., 589-591
 Simon, Sir John, 210
 Sinn Fein, 444
 "Slave-drives" in Belgium, 275-276, 309-310, 322-324
 Smuts, General Jan, 701
 Sobanski, Count, 617, 621, 624
 Socialism, 517; Brest-Litovsk an example of, 465
 Socialists, pro-German, 439
 Solvay, Émile, 55, 68, 130-131, 172-173
 Sothern, E. H., 471, 474
 Soviet revolution, 453
 Spargo, John, 635
 Stanton, Colonel, 426
 Steed, Wickham, 699
 Steffens, Lincoln, 558
 Strachey, Lytton, 664, 669-670, 676
 Stuart, Governor of Virginia, 531
 Submarine warfare, 451, 470
Sussex, sinking of, 251
 Swift, General, 490
- Taft, William Howard, 635
 Tardieu, André, 709
 Thomas, Colonel, 610, 642, 650, 656, 667, 678
Times, London, 437

- Times*, New York, 443
 Tirpitz, Admiral Alfred von, 434
 Törring, 492
 Trotsky, Leon, 468
 Tuohy, John Peter, 444
- United States, result of 1916 election, 317-320; break with Germany, 351; transport sunk, 449; arrival of troops, 485
- Vacaresco, Helene, 439
 Vanderlip, Frank L., 558, 713
 Vandervelde, Emile, 1, 395, 438, 499, 500, 545-546, 590, 619, 624; sends his book, *La Belgique Envahie*, 439; on Gompers, Lenin and Trotsky, 468; approves meeting of International, 472; opposed to Franco-Belgian alliance, 594; on Russian affairs, 649-650; opposes French militarism, 656
 Vandevyvere, A., 414, 453, 454, 455, 456; on possible German peace offer, 472
 van Dyke, Henry, 23, 27, 34
 Van Schaick, Colonel John, 544, 589
 Van Vollenhoven, Mynheer, 108, 125, 175, 212, 233, 266, 281-282, 289, 324, 333, 340, 344, 348, 354, 355, 532, 540, 545, 549, 550
 Van Vredenberg, M., 594, 607, 633-634; on Dutch-Belgian relations, 645-646, 659-660
Vers la Democratie Nouvelle, 437
 Victoria, Queen, 669-670
 Villalobar, Marquis de, 12, 21, 26, 34, 36, 37, 55, 61-63, 65, 67-68, 70, 75, 78, 80, 91-92, 96, 105, 108, 122-123, 124-125, 128, 135, 142, 151, 153, 154, 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, 165, 166, 174, 175-177, 178-179, 201, 202-203, 211-212, 221, 222, 223, 229-230, 232-233, 236-237, 238, 242, 244-245, 247, 249, 253-255, 259-261, 265, 268-269, 270, 272, 274, 288, 289, 292-293, 294-295, 298-299, 302, 308, 312, 313-314, 327, 333, 334, 337, 342-343, 346-347, 348, 350, 352, 354, 358, 360, 361-362, 363, 364, 370, 371, 374, 380, 461, 507, 511, 520, 523, 530, 532, 533, 534, 536, 539, 540, 546, 549, 550, 561-562, 567, 572, 581, 586, 597, 601, 624-625, 633, 635, 647, 651, 654, 662, 663, 667, 684, 709; determined to stay in Brussels, 33; visit to front, 181-198; in Cavell case, 217-218; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 567-570; hopes for embassy, 555; on Franco-Belgian relations, 594; retirement rumoured, 650; marriage, 685, 688; indignant at Whitlock's retirement, 718
 Villard, Oswald Garrison, 554
 Villiers, Sir Francis, 8, 12, 21, 28, 33, 398, 435, 472, 479, 483, 508, 509, 510, 518, 520, 540, 544, 550, 555, 557, 561, 583, 587, 593, 598, 613; sends archives to Whitlock for protection, 26; turns over his Legation, 36-7; death of son, 461; alarmed at French conduct in Belgium, 534; service in honour of Edith Cavell, 537; on Anglo-Belgian relations, 559-560; and Wilson's visit to Belgium, 569; raised to Ambassador, 579; on Franco-Belgian relations, 595; to leave Belgium, 617, 621, 625
 Viviani, 430
- Wadsworth, Eliot, 682, 703, 705
 Weede, Jonckheer de, 502, 510
 Wells, H. G., 714-715, 718
 Wharton, Edith, 479, 566
 White, Chief Justice, 670
 White, Henry, 570
 White, William Allen, 447, 551-552
 Whitlock, Brand, reassures the American tourists at outbreak of war, 3, 5, 6; takes charge of French, German and Russian interests, 12; objects to French proposal, 16; supervises return of Germans, 20; resolves to stay in Brussels, 33; advises no resistance at Brussels, 37-38; telegram to Wilson, 56; receives Belgian note of appreciation, 126-127; visit to Front, 181-198; activity in Cavell case, 216-218; at Washington, 226-227; leaves Belgium, 374-378; at Havre, 395; report on atrocities, 439; receives offers for book on Belgium, 445; elected to American Academy of Arts and Letters, 467; his admiration for the English, 476; on French chauvinism, 478; articles in *Everybody's* attacked, 484; comment on Bolsheviki, 496; on his *Belgium*, 507;

Whitlock, Brand, *continued*:

on French opinion, 509; on European reaction against America, 513-514; returns to Brussels, 521-3; disapproves of Wilson's visit, 530; attends conference on Belgian reconstruction, 531; elected burgher of Brussels, 532; to make speech explaining Hoover's absence, 535; difficulties over decorations, 537; speaks in Belgian chamber, 539-540, 568-569; and King Albert, 541, 547, 578, 582, 619, 665, 669, 692; on prohibition, 548, 583, 610, 699, 721; mentioned as Ambassador to Italy, 562, 569, 572, 579; on Peace Conference, 557 n., 558, 571, 573, 580, 585, 591, 602, 606; audience with Queen, 560, 572, 618; raised to Ambassador, 572, 574, 575; receives Serbian decoration, 601; on League of Nations, 620, 625, 630, 637-639, 693; attitude on U. S. peace with Germany, 625-626, 661, 689-690, 690 n., 703 n., 703-704; dinner with the Belgian royal family, 627, 669, 723-724; on Italy, 634, 635, 658; on 1920 presidential election, 636, 638, 639; on position after Harding's election, 641, 642-643, 645, 663, 669, 679, 680, 682, 708, 716-717; on the Socialists, 649, 658, 700, 712; presentation of plate by Belgium Government, 651; on Harding's inaugural address, 652-653; on French occupation of the Ruhr, 592, 652, 653, 656, 657, 658, 661-662, 663, 665, 693; on Dollar Diplomacy, 659; on Upper Silesia (Poland), 665, 666, 673, 698, 700; on vivisection, 670-671; elected member of the Grand Serment Royal de St. Georges, 675, 686-687; on Irish question, 565, 591, 603, 689, 691, 700, 705-707, 708; on Louvain University, 687-688, 694-697; on Dempsey-Carpentier fight, 688-689, 698-699; on the Far Eastern question (Washington Conference), 691, 692 n., 692-693, 699, 704, 707, 708, 710, 713, 714-715; on leaving Brussels, 717, 718, 719; visited by King Albert, 721-723

Whitlock, Frank, 97

Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 60, 64, 159, 233, 434, 468, 516, 542, 554, 558; on Cavell

case, 222; on Russian peace, 472; abdicates, 515

Wilson, Margaret, 549, 564, 567-568, 587, 599-600

Wilson, Sir Henry, 614, 714, 715

Wilson, Woodrow, 317, 506, 538, 539, 542, 655, 669, 693, 704; *Lusitania* note, 158; replies to Germany, 203-204; Whitlock's interview with, 226; speech to Congress, 256; renominated, 274; Peace League address, 276-277; Mexican affair, 280; mediation offer, 336; war aims note, 343; message to Senate, 347; breaks with Germany, 351; de Broqueville on, 441; reply to Pope, 442; message to Congress, 467; superior to Lloyd George and Clemenceau, 471; Mt. Vernon address impresses, 487; reply to Austrian note, 504; his New York address, 505; on Prince Max of Baden's peace note, 507 n., 508; refuses armistice, 508; replies to Germany, 510, 511 n.; his electoral appeal, 513; creates jealousy, 529; to come to Europe, 530; plans for Belgian visit, 547-548, 554; and George Creel, 551-552; and Belgian opinion, 557, 560-561; and Fiume dispute, 558-559; visit to Belgium, 562-572; conversation with Asquith, 574, 579; visit to Belgium, 578; state of health, 582, 615; and Lansing's resignation, 586-587; letter to Simmons, 589, 591; state of health, 599; and Lord Grey, 600, 628-630; disapproves separate peace with Germany, 606; calls League meeting, 620; plans in event of Hughes' election, 628; tactlessness in dealing with Senate, 625-626; conversation with John Spargo, 635, 648; retirement, 653; King Albert's views on, 723-724

Wilson, Mrs. Woodrow, 23, 564, 567-569; Crawford-Stuart affair, 629-630; relations with Mrs. Lansing, 587, 599-600

Wood, Leonard, 614

Woog, Raymond, 446, 447, 459, 486

World, New York, 444

Wotan line, broken by British, 506 n.

Zimmermann note, 364-365