

*August 4, 1914.*—Last night at seven o'clock the Government replied to the German ultimatum, in a dignified state paper, saying that Belgium refused to break her engagements and would resist German aggression; then at ten o'clock the King addressed a telegram of appeal to the King of England. This morning at six o'clock, von Below delivered his Government's brutal note saying that Germany would take what she wanted by force.

Germany declared war on France yesterday. The Government has been notified by both France and England that they will come to the defence of Belgium if her soil is invaded, and the formal declarations of war are all that remain to be made.

Nine Germans were today arrested in Brussels, accused of cutting telephone wires, and so forth.

Red Cross organizations and flags everywhere; half the houses in town are converted into Red Cross ambulances. The Palace Hotel is offered, and many big stores.

The Socialists have issued a long manifesto announcing that they will support the Government in resisting the invasion of Belgium. The Socialists are as human as anybody, and international solidarity is now replaced by the patriotism they used to sneer at as "emotion."

Telegraph and telephone service to Liége is cut off, and the trains service is for the military only.

We hear of the blowing up of bridges by the Belgian engineers at Visé.

According to report of military airmen, 100,000 Germans are said to be massed near Hervé.

The civil guard has been detailed for garrison duty in the capital.

Moratorium until August 31st has been declared and export of munitions is forbidden.

At ten o'clock the King went to Parliament; and this afternoon he is off for Liége. It has been a day of beautiful sunshine: the Belgian flags, of black, yellow and red, float from every house, and early this morning crowds gathered all about the park and

the Palace and the Parliament buildings to see the King and the royal family go by. The crowds were massed along the sidewalks, on the platforms and street-intersections; people hung out of windows, and even the roofs were black. The civil guard, the *chasseurs* and infantry, the mounted police, and companies of boy scouts, formed a solid line from the Royal Palace along the rue Royale to the Parliament houses at the other end of the Park. The Queen went by first in a landau, with the three royal children; preceded by the outriders of the Court. The King, booted and spurred, mounted on his big bay, came after, with his staff, and the squadron Marie-Henriette in their green tunics and grey busbies as guard of honor. The crowds were wild with enthusiasm, but were orderly.

At ten o'clock Gibson and I drove to the National Palace to see the King open Parliament. Sir Francis Villiers<sup>1</sup> drove up in his motor just as we arrived, and I entered with him, and we went slowly up the red-carpeted staircase together to the diplomatic gallery; Sir Francis heavy with care. The *Salle des Séances* presented a scene one would not soon forget. All around the galleries were crowded, the wives of the ministers in the seats opposite us—I was sorry that I had not brought Nell, though none of the ladies of the diplomatic corps were there. Below, the senators and deputies, all in formal black, some seated, quietly waiting—others in excited groups, discussing the ultimatum of last night and the invasion of the land. The Duc d'Ursel was there in the uniform of the Guides. The ministers, who have been having sleepless nights, were on their benches—de Broqueville, old Davignon, Carton de Wiart, and so forth. Hymans, the new Liberal Minister, and Vandervelde the new Socialist Minister, receiving congratulations. The hall in a hemicycle, with columns all around, not unlike the chamber of the Supreme Court—the old Senate—at Washington, though of course larger. A red and gold fauteuil was placed for the King on the president's dais; overhead under the statue of Leopold I the escutcheon of Belgium and a trophy of the flags of Belgium and the Congo. The diplomatic tribune was hung with Belgian flags too. Down there on the floor, before the president's desk, a great green table was set, and at it were seated Delvaux, Doyen, and Pecher and Devèze the youngest members, and the clerks of the court. Gold armchairs were set for the Queen and the royal family.

<sup>1</sup> British Minister to Belgium.

The dear colleagues were gathering, in these new changed conditions; the last time we assembled was at Ste-Gudule, scarcely a fortnight ago, at the Te Deum to celebrate the founding of the Belgian dynasty, now so rudely shaken. Von Below, of course, was not there, nor Clary, but Bottaro-Costa<sup>1</sup> was on hand, smiling as ever. We waited many minutes, then there came to us the strains of a band, and suddenly, a voice cried:

*"La Reine!"*

The deputies sprang to their feet, and against the solid black of their frock coats, there fluttered the white of the handkerchiefs they waved as they shouted:

*"Vive la Reine! Vive la Reine!"*

And there was Her charming Majesty, all in white, lovely and gracious, just entering the chamber below and to our left—our gallery is almost over the tribune—acknowledging this loyal salute with sweeping courtesies right and left. She had a modest suite—the old Countess Henricourt de Grunne, La Grande Maîtresse, in a violet gown, and the two little princes; Leopold the Duke of Brabant, the heir apparent, and Charles the Count of Flanders, in black satin suits today instead of the costumes of grey they usually wear. I had seen them last at Ste-Gudule, and my reflections watching them were manifold—will that fair-haired, serious, delicate boy ever mount a throne? So thought I then; so thought I this morning. I did not see the elfish little Princess Marie-José.

The Queen took the golden chair placed for her on the left of the tribune—she was so lovely, so calm, and the little princes taking their seats beside her, the little Count of Flanders, who reminds me so much of Frank<sup>2</sup> when he was that age and size, wriggling on to his chair in such a boyish manner. The deputies resumed their seats, and the chamber was still again, for an instant. And then, while we waited, there was suddenly a noise outside, a rumble, a roar, sounds of turbulence, and then suddenly an usher shouted:

*"Le Roi!"*

And then a heavy, hoarse shout:

*"Le Roi!"*

The Queen, the ministers, the deputies, everybody stands; we, in the diplomatic gallery, except the Papal Nuncio in his robes,

<sup>1</sup> Count Clary *et* Aldringen, the Austrian Minister; Count Bottaro-Costa, Italian Minister.

<sup>2</sup> Whitlock's younger brother.

never once sat down. The King is just below us, entering the chamber from the side opposite that from which the Queen had entered; the deputies sprang to their feet, waving their hands, no handkerchiefs in them now, and shouted in an united voice, deeper, rougher, more masculine, as it were:

*“Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi!”*

It is as though they could not shout it loudly enough, intensely enough, unitedly enough; as they stood there, some in tears—Catholic, Liberal, Socialist—no, not those distinctions now, but Belgium acclaiming its King.

And there he is, striding across the chamber, in the fatigue uniform of a Lieutenant-General, booted and spurred, his sabre clanking at his side. He strides along firmly, swiftly, mounts the rostrum, takes off his kepi, sharply deposes it on the table before him, clicks his heels together, makes a smart military bow, swiftly peels the white glove from his right hand, slaps the glove into his kepi, and without waiting, begins at once in his firm voice and his beautiful French, to read his speech from the notes he holds in his white gloved left hand.

The Queen, the little princes, the deputies resume their seats; the applause that greets His Majesty is quietly hushed by the usual sign of silence:

*“Sh! sh!”*

The doyen's gavel falls on the green table. The stillness in the chamber then is the stillness of poignant, nervous tension. The ministers, in the front benches with their portfolios, know what is coming, no doubt; but the others strain forward—old Woeste,<sup>1</sup> for instance, with his hand behind his deaf ear, to hear the fateful words.

The King is somewhat short sighted; he puts on his pince-nez, holds the narrow little strips of paper rather close to his eyes, and begins to read:

*“When I see this deeply moved assembly in which there is no longer but a single party...”*

The emotions break, the cries break forth; then

*“Sh! Sh!”* again, and silence. And the King reads on:

*“...that of the fatherland, an assembly in which all hearts beat at this moment in unison, my memories hark back to the Congress of 1830, and I demand of you, gentlemen: ‘Are you irrevocably*

<sup>1</sup> Count Woeste, a Belgian statesman of pacifist tendencies.

determined to maintain intact the sacred patrimony of our forefathers?' ”

The deputies spring to their feet, raise their hands as though swearing an oath, and cry:

“Oui! Oui! Oui!”

Several times thus the King striking out stiff emphatic gestures with his right hand. . . .

Below him, the little Duke of Brabant looks up intently into his father's face, never takes his eyes off him. What are the thoughts in that boy's mind? Will this scene come back to him in after years? And how, when, under what circumstances? . . .

The King has got to that part of his speech where he says

“...in the chamber in which there is no longer but a single party. . . .”

Silence breaks; the cries, the applause suddenly repressed by those imperative “Sh! Sh!” The King heeds not, reads on, finishes with that moving phrase:

“I have faith in our destiny. A nation which defends itself, which vindicates its integrity in the eyes of the world, that nation cannot perish. God will be with us in our great cause.

“Long live free Belgium!”

The mad passionate applause breaks—handkerchiefs waving, then pressed to weeping eyes. The King seizes his kepi, the Queen and the little princes rise, and he stalks out again, sword clanking; away on stern business now! The deputies remain standing while the Queen courtesies and with the princes retires.

And I find myself leaning over the balcony rail, catching at my throat, my eyes moist, applauding with the rest. But my colleagues, too, are clapping their hands.

Then there is a universal inhalation in the chamber, a long breath, and de Broqueville is opening his portfolio, taking out the pages of his speech, standing up.

“*À la tribune! À la tribune!*” the deputies cry, and he marches down, climbs up into the tribune, stands there, looks about him, bows. A handsome man, de Broqueville; and a striking figure, there in the tribune, in that moment, for that business; tall, slender, in black frock-coat, curly black hair, smart moustache, the ribbon of the Order of Leopold in his boutonnière. He speaks dramatically, reading the German ultimatum, the Belgian reply, asks almost peremptorily for a vote of supplies, and, at the end, smiting the

desk, his seal ring striking sharply on the hard wood, he finishes with:

“The watchword is, To Arms!”

The service for us is over, though the Senators and the Deputies are to hold formal sessions, to ratify the Government's acts and to vote supplies. But the dramatic tableau is done and we turn to speak to one another, and then drift out of the gallery. And as we go, Koudacheff<sup>1</sup> comes up to me, takes me aside, and asks me to take over his Legation in case he has to go away. I tell him I shall be honored to do so, of course.

The Nuncio asked us to wait a moment and we gathered in an anteroom, and then held a little impromptu meeting of the diplomatic corps; the Nuncio in his purple robes, standing in the midst of us, his soft Italian voice lending its accent to his French. He spoke of the possibility of the Court and Government going to Antwerp, and said that we should have to go too in that eventuality.

Pleasant prospect, that, of going to Antwerp, abundantly recognized by Sir Francis, Villalobar,<sup>2</sup> and me as we walked out together. Then the sunshine once more, and the motors rolling up into the paved court before the Parliament buildings, and the colleagues lifting their tall hats to each other, and then rolling away in the crowded, agitated, sunny streets.

When I got back to the Legation I found a telegram from Washington saying that I might take over French interests, provided such action would not prevent my taking over any other legations the chiefs of which might ask me to do so. And on the heels of this, word from von Below that he was leaving in the afternoon and would ask me to take over the representation of German interests. Pleasant task that. One I should like to escape—but how, under the terms of Washington's instructions?

<sup>1</sup> Prince Koudacheff, the Russian Minister to Belgium.

<sup>2</sup> Marquis de Villalobar, the Spanish Minister, an old friend whom Whitlock had known in the United States.