

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST YEAR IN BRUSSELS

The international scene during 1921 was filled with confusion, and Whitlock's eyes were fastened upon it rather than upon events in Belgium. The withdrawal of the American Government from world affairs, and its separate treaties with Germany and Austria; the efforts of France to dominate the Continent, and her support of the Polish leaders after the Germans carried the plebiscite in Upper Silesia; the Sinn Fein disorders in Ireland—all this he watched with disgust. The one bright event of the year was the opening of the Washington Conference, in which he assisted Belgium to find satisfactory representation. For some months after Harding's inauguration he and his Belgian friends hoped that he would be retained in Brussels; but as 1921 closed he was making his farewells and preparing to depart.

February 2, 1921.—At 12:30 to see Vandervelde, to give him the Red Cross medal. I have toiled for months distributing those damned Red Cross medals, for which, and rightly, nobody cares. He was at luncheon, and the butler was impudent, said that I was late and could not see the Minister, I should have been here before 12:30; but I ordered him to go at once and tell the Minister that the American Ambassador was here—and the knave went. A Socialist Minister and a Socialist butler, putting on such airs! Vandervelde came out at once, and I gave him the medal. I told him that I should not detain him, as I knew that nothing annoyed a Belgian more than to be interrupted at his meals; he said, "Oh, I am not Belgian; I am an international."

We chatted a moment, sitting by a table in a cold antechamber, he having his elbow on the table, placing his hands to his long ears, and presenting that curious Mephistophelian countenance which he wears. He is, however, very pleasant, and extraordinarily smart and clever; has really a great intelligence. He said that the state of

Europe was deplorable, and almost desperate; that in Russia anarchy reigned, tempered only by despotism; that Lenin and Trotsky had fallen out; that Lenin would inevitably be pushed aside and put down by the "better man"—the old, old story; that he knew all the Communist leaders, that there is not one of them who is intelligent, that Communism is an absurdity. I said that the love of property, of owning things, would never be eradicated from man, and he said that of course it wouldn't, that it was absurd to think of such a thing. With which admission, thought I, your whole Socialist doctrine goes by the board. But I said nothing, but let him go back to his luncheon, and left.