

May 21, 1921.—A letter from Harding this morning, in reply to my letter, written in February, offering to resign if he desires my resignation, which Marshall had evidently placed in his hands. It is the letter—Harding's reply, that is—of a politician who wishes not to commit himself, and I defy any one to tell what it means....

At noon Countess Caraman telephoned from Laeken to say that the Queen said, "if we had nothing better to do," to dine with Their Majesties at 7:45 this evening, informally, the Earl of Athlone and Princes Alice being there. We were to have dined with the de Beughems, but of course countermanded that engagement, and went to Laeken.

We were ten at table, the King, the Queen, Athlone, Her Royal Highness the Princess Alice, His Royal Highness the Duke of Brabant, Countess Caraman, Major Blank, and a Lieutenant, officer of the guard. We went in informally; I sat on the Queen's right, Athlone on her left, the Princess on the King's right, and Nell on his left. Athlone very lively at dinner, while the Queen and I talked golf. She wishes me to come out and be photographed with her at the links. After dinner the King took me off to one side, and we sat there and smoked, while we talked of the state of the world, bad enough, goodness knows....

I asked him if he had read what Leopold I had said in one of his letters to Queen Victoria about the press. (I had read it in Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria*, but I didn't cite my source; for Queen Victoria's granddaughter, who so much resembles her, was sitting not far away, laughing and showing her gums, just like Victoria, and I wasn't sure that she liked Strachey's ironies.) The King had not heard and I told him. He said that the press in Leopold's time was not as bad as it is in ours, but he never seems to be very much interested in his grandfather or in his sayings.

He was down on the French and mainly sympathized with Lloyd George in the present row. . . .

Athlone and the Princess Alice were to go to the British Embassy to be present at a reception for the British colony, and at about 9:20 they prepared to withdraw. On leaving Princess Alice kissed the Queen's hand, saying, "That's to show you that I know," and then kissed her on the cheek.

After they had gone, Their Majesties remained standing, chatting and laughing a bit, and then withdrew. The Prince went with me to the door. The twilight still lingered; the great masses of rhododendrons showed a rich purple against the dark background of the luxuriant vegetation in the park. And against a clear sky of nacre the memorial to Leopold I showed its silhouette, like the Albert Memorial. And still under the impression of Strachey's great book, and just from the presence of the Princess Alice, I thought of Queen Victoria, of Uncle Leopold, of Stockmar and Lehzen, figures of that vanished past.