

a delightful walk of an hour and a half yesterday with the President, quite alone," he wrote to Mrs. White on December 11th. "He spoke of me in a much too flattering way. He said I had rendered him infinite service in many ways, and when I left him he sent his very particular remembrances to you, saying that he is extremely proud of you both as a woman and as an ambassadress. . . . He remembers perfectly well your talk with him about going on the Police Board of New York, and also, which I had forgotten, his visit to you in Stuyvesant Square to talk it all over."

The last weeks of White's Italian service were extremely busy. Returning to Rome, he wound up several matters of routine business at the embassy,⁵ and (March 1, 1907) had the experience of a long audience with the Pope. White wrote in detail of it to Root, and repeated his frank conversation with the Pontiff. He told Pius X, whom he described as a man of charming simplicity, that he felt strongly that the American Ambassador to the King should be received occasionally by His Holiness, not in a diplomatic capacity, but as a distinguished foreigner who could give the Pope non-clerical information of value regarding the United States. When he first came to Rome, he added, he had supposed that the opposition to any visit to the Vatican came from the Italian Government, but two foreign ministers had told him that this was not the fact and that the impediment was offered by the rules of the Vatican itself. The Pope seemed a little surprised at the readiness of the Italian Government to let an Ambassador see him, and struck by the possible utility of White's proposal regarding frequent visits by the American representative, though his reply was guarded—he merely said that "one must hope" that it might come about.⁶ White, at the special request of some cardinal who believed that Pius was misinformed regarding certain aspects of the dispute then raging between France and the Vatican, also spoke plainly on that subject, saying that the whole anti-clerical movement in France seemed to him to be the result of a popular determination not to

⁵ White put a stop to the careless issuance of American passports at the consulates in southern Italy, and particularly Naples; many applicants, not citizens of the United States, obtaining them on payment of a dollar without real inquiry into their identity. White-Root correspondence, 1905-06.

⁶ White to Root, Rome, March 7, 1907.

allow any foreign authority to intervene in French domestic affairs. At this the Pope protested that the Vatican was in no way interfering with political matters in France; to which White courteously assented, but pointed out that the support which the French clericals, including some Church officers, had given to the persecution of Dreyfus, had produced an opposite impression.

There ensued a flying visit to London, where White was commissioned by Secretary Root to ascertain confidentially the views of the British Government as to the discussion of disarmament at The Hague. The second Hague Conference was to begin in June, with Choate as the American delegate. It was to offer the world, as a few men dimly perceived, one of its best opportunities to arrest the fatal march of the great Powers to the catastrophe of 1914. Secretary Root and Sir Edward Grey were alike eager to raise the question of a limitation of armaments, and alike fearful that Germany and France would prove obstructive.⁷ The British navy had just been reorganized by Sir John Fisher, and was still far more powerful than the German, so that in Berlin many regarded disarmament as a British or Anglo-American scheme to keep Germany in a subordinate position; while France, Russia, and Germany were all unwilling to reduce their armies. White was asked to find out through his English friends just what could be done. His observations, as he talked with British public men, gave him a startled sense that Europe might be approaching a general war. His old friend, Arthur Balfour, who had played a leading part in erecting the Permanent Committee of Imperial Defence, spoke with a frankness which surprised him. Clearly the former Prime Minister was not at all serious in what he said, but his tone as he referred to German naval expansion nevertheless indicated the sentiments of many. The colloquy, as it was overheard by White's daughter, ran substantially as follows:

BALFOUR (*somewhat lightly*): "We are probably fools not to find a reason for declaring war on Germany before she builds too many ships and takes away our trade."

WHITE: "You are a very high-minded man in private life. How can you possibly contemplate anything so politically immoral as

⁷ The first Hague Conference had been held in the summer of 1899; the second was held June 15-October 18, 1907.

provoking a war against a harmless nation which has as good a right to a navy as you have? If you wish to compete with German trade, work harder."

BALFOUR: "That would mean lowering our standard of living. Perhaps it would be simpler for us to have a war."

WHITE: "I am shocked that you of all men should enunciate such principles."

BALFOUR (*again lightly*): "Is it a question of right or wrong? Maybe it is just a question of keeping our supremacy."⁸

White also had a talk with the Foreign Minister, and reported the gist of it to the Secretary of State.

WHITE TO ROOT, PARIS, MARCH 30, 1907

I saw Edward Grey shortly before I left London and his impression seemed to be that the French Government's reason for not favoring the discussion is the fear of pressure from their own people, many of whom are tired of the heavy taxation necessary to keep up and increase the heavy armaments, but Grey does not think the objection here is very deep-rooted. I hardly touched upon it with Pichon the first time I saw him, not knowing whether you wish me to urge it upon the Government here or not. I asked him how they feel about it and he answered that they have not made up their minds but are considering it.

Grey is distinctly against formulating any proposal in advance as suggested by Martens for reasons which you probably know and in which I imagine you concur. He told me that he always speaks and writes of the question as "expenditure upon armaments" and not "disarmament" or even "limitation of armaments." The British, Grey said, are determined to bring the question up at the Conference in any case. He told me of his correspondence with you through Bryce in reference to Martens's proposal as to mode of procedure—*i.e.*, that it should be referred to a committee of the great Powers at the Conference, and he was awaiting your reply when I left London.

In Paris White also saw the German ambassador, Prince Radolin, on the subject, and summarized his impressions in a cablegram to Secretary Root.

WHITE TO ROOT, PARIS, NO DATE

Very private. I have had confidential unofficial but frank conversation with German Ambassador whereof following is a summary. I said that

⁸ Conversation recorded by the Countess Seherr-Thoss.

I came as a friend of his, without authority or inspiration from my government; that I feared by opposing, as I had good reason to believe, and endeavoring to influence Russian Government to oppose, the raising at the Conference of certain questions which nearly all other first-class powers wish to discuss, German Government would find itself in same position of isolation as last year and incur besides the obloquy of rapidly increasing lovers of peace everywhere, including Germany. German ambassador replied that he had no recent communication with Berlin on the subject, but practically admitted the probability of my conclusions if my information was correct, which he neither admitted nor denied.

I gathered from subsequent conversation, which lasted over an hour, that the Emperor is in a very difficult position, as the military and imperialist parties firmly believe that England's sole reason for raising the disarmament question is to compel Germany to disarm in order to attack her when weakened and to reduce her to impotence; that the Emperor is very much blamed for having yielded at Algeciras instead of fighting, and if he were to agree to discuss the disarmament question and find himself, as Germany must in the event of serious proposals to disarm being adopted at the Conference, not only in a minority there but in Germany also on that subject, there is no telling to what extremes the party aforesaid might resort; possibly even change of form of government, all of which very desirable to avoid. I intimated that the proposed discussion need not necessarily involve action, but would serve to demonstrate either impracticability thereof or what progress possible, whereas its suppression would greatly increase general feeling and leave public ignorant.

When the Hague Conference was held, Great Britain and the United States duly raised the subject of disarmament, and Germany, tacitly supported by France and Russia, refused to discuss it. The Germans were in a difficult position. Outmatched by England's navy, and knowing that Italy was a dubious partner in the Triple Alliance,⁹ they felt it necessary to strengthen rather than

⁹ White left Rome with one fixed conviction: that the Germans were much mistaken in believing that Italy, if a general European war occurred, would side with them and Austria. He believed that the tactless German treatment of Italy, the historic antagonism between Italy and Austria, and the immense influence of the French free-masons in Italy were sure to draw Italy to France and away from Germany. Count Monts, the German ambassador to Rome, was exceedingly tactless. He came up to Mrs. White at a large dinner party and said in the hearing of everyone, "Mrs. White, I pity you for coming to