



## CHAPTER VI

### AIX. RUMOURS OF WAR. A UNIQUE JOURNEY

**A**IX-LES-BAINS (they say it should be written “Aches les Pains,” because most of the people who go there are full of both) is a lovely spot, and if one has rheumatism or any of those ills that all flesh, even dog flesh, is heir to one could not choose a place with a greater variety of attractions—a Golf Club and Country Club, tennis, a big lake, a funicular to take you up to Mont Revard where the air is like crystal, first—class hotels and restaurants, wonderful shops like those in the Rue de la Paix, charming walks and drives, superb views, a celebrated casino, good opera, and last but not least, a number of celebrated people. King George of Greece, then a great favourite, always favoured Aix; Izette Pasha, the Egyptian Prince who entertained Master and Missus at his Palace in Cairo, never missed a season; and Mr. Chauncey Depew and his distinguished wife were among the well-known Americans who were also habitue’s. It would take too long to mention all the celebrities. Many of them had their dogs with them,

and interesting stories to tell about our world when we met them.

As soon as we arrived, paragraphs appeared in the papers to say that Master and Missus were there with their handsome Chow dog, Chi. Of course with all the prizes I had taken this was not the first time my name had been in the newspapers. In fact I was becoming quite accustomed to this sort of notoriety and to hearing people say:

“So this is the celebrated Chi, is it?” as well as to the sudden click of the frequent and familiar Kodak.

But it wasn't only because of the prizes that people noticed me, of that I am sure. There were other reasons. In the first place I was always with Master and Missus wherever they went. If they possibly could take me along there I was. This is really rather unusual if you come to think of it. One night, for example, we dined at the Casino called the Villa des Fleurs. Dinner was served in the open-air restaurant, which possessed a large theatre where Operas and Ballets were given, with the audience seated at tables under the open sky. One night Aida, one of my favourite Operas, was performed. I heard the whole thing through, lying quite quietly under the table, and when, at the end, the curtain fell and I walked out of my hiding-place everyone was amazed. They exclaimed : “Why! Chi's been there the whole time and he never budged ! How extraordinary !“

But it was not extraordinary, because I adore music.

Whenever anyone plays I always go and sit under the piano, and when they sing—even if they have awful voices—I never howl.

That is another point I want to make, showing why people are attracted to me quite apart from prizes. I always try to have perfect manners. This doesn't mean that I'm namby-pamby or that I have no spunk. No, indeed! I well remember a certain manservant at Elsinore who was once told to give me my bath. He took me up and threw me into the tub. It wasn't long before I settled my score with Aim, and when he came to repeat the operation the next morning, Missus saw there was nothing doing, so she said to Master :

“There must be something the matter. Chi won't let the man put him in his bath.”

“You try,” Master said. (Master was always a sort of mind-reader where I was concerned.) Of course with Missus I was like a lamb. This was because I knew she loved me, and with the servant I felt he was going to bath me just because he had to, and that he thought it was silly. It offended my dignity. In the world people liked me because they felt this dignity. That's the point. They felt they had to win me over. Personally, I can't bear the type of little dog who jumps up on a human's lap and begins licking his face just because he has said, “Hello, doggie !” I submit to caresses, but I never seek them from strangers. I tolerate admiration—one has to—it is part of the handsome

male's programme, but I only give my whole heart to those of whose true love I am sure.

Well, to go back to Aix.

The "cure," as it is called, is done in the early morning, nor do doctors trust their patients to get up in proper time. They send up for them in a funny sort of Sedan chair. I hated to see my dear one carried off in this way by two men, and was not at rest until they brought her back again, all rolled up in lots of blankets, and she tumbled into bed where I had breakfast sitting by her side.

This reminds me of a rather amusing story. The men who carry the Sedan chairs sometimes make mistakes, and the person inside, all curtained in, doesn't always see where she is being taken. This particular one was all rolled up like a mummy, and the two strong porters lifted her out and dumped her into a bed with a perfectly strange man, who protested wildly, saying, "She doesn't belong here," whilst the unhappy lady nearly had hysterics. There might have been serious complications, but everything was explained, and she was hastily put back where she belonged. I could never have mistaken the floor and the room like that, anyone with dog-sense would have known better.

One afternoon we motored over to the old Monastery where the monks used to make the famous Chartreuse Liqueur sold at present for priceless sums per bottle. Another day we took an equally lovely drive to the Lake of Annecy and we lunched at a celebrated little restaurant at Talloire.

It looked like nothing at all, but such food! The speciality is the fresh trout. It is taken from the Lake, and they call it “Ombre Chevalier” (Knight’s Shadow). It is cooked with lots of butter over a hot fire, and the wine drunk with it is the white wine of the country, Seyssel, a sort of sparkling amber fluid which everyone seemed to enjoy immensely and which made them feel happy and gay like the sunlight it seemed to have caught in its making.

Once a week, at the Villa des Fleurs, they sent off fireworks. They say the Chinese invented these atrocities and I am sorry for it, as I spent, on their account, some very uncomfortable moments. I preferred to be shut up in my room with the window dosed, as even the beauty of the set pieces over which there was such a fuss made did not compensate me for the agony of those hiss ! boom ! bangs !

I simply adored Aix, even though I sometimes suffered with the heat, which was intense that fateful July, 1914. I say fateful, for about the last week we began to hear rumours which I saw were disturbing my dear ones. Master would read his paper and then come in and say to Missus :

“Have you seen this? It looks bad.”

I couldn’t tell, of course, exactly what was disturbing them, and, unfortunately, I could not ask any questions, but I kept my ears open.

One night Missus and Master came home from a Ball at the Country Club and I heard Missus say :

“It’s too awful. I can’t believe it!” And Master answered :

“We mustn’t believe it until it really comes, but from what everybody said to-night it looks awfully like war.”

War ! Guns ! Cannon ! Oh, how terrible ! How could I, how could any of us ever live through a war !

The next day Master took me motoring with one of his friends, Colonel Colt, of Providence, Rhode Island, over to Chambery, quite a large town near Aix. We had no sooner arrived in the public square than we heard the beating of drums. It was the town crier. He was announcing the mobilization of all the troops on land and sea. The enemy had already crossed the Frontier. The church bells began to toll, the poor people began to hurry about with anguished faces. Every man seemed to know what he had to do and where he had to go, so there was no confusion, only a silent resignation that gripped you at the throat.

As soon as we got back to the hotel the discussion started as to how people were to get away. The Mayor, Monsieur Raoul Mourichon, was very active and kind in helping some of the Austrians and Germans, who were there “curing,” to reach the Frontier as quickly as possible so that they would not be interned in camps, as many were, with great discomfort to themselves and expense to the Government. Our case, as that of the many Americans and English in the place, was not the same.

The first thing Master told us about was the Moratorium. All the Banks, he said, had practically shut down, so that people could only draw out very small sums of money. But

at this point I began to notice that spirit of charity which I met with all through the awful war. Everyone seemed ready to help everyone else. Those who had gave to those who had nothing.

It was the first of August when we heard those drums beating at Chambéry. By August fourth war had really started. England, Russia, Belgium and France were united, and it seemed already as if all this had gone on for years and that we should never be able to leave Aix.

By this time the town had taken on a dreary aspect. The shops were closed, the men had all started away, everyone talked with bated breath, and my dear ones gave me the impression of being very anxious. We had almost resigned ourselves to settling down in Aix for the rest of our lives when a message was posted up in the hotel hail. I heard Master read it out, and he said Ambassador Herrick had arranged that a train was to be sent to transport all the Americans back to Paris. We didn't know then that this would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire, or that we should live to regret these quiet days in Aix.

The great preoccupation now was how to take all our belongings with us, for it was announced that no one could send any trunks. Of course when people go to a fashionable watering-place they have very voluminous wardrobes. Missus and Master couldn't leave all their things behind, so there was a wild rush for carry-alls in which we tried to stuff as

many as possible of our possessions. My little suit-case was full to bulging capacity.

Worse than this was the fact that all motors had been commandeered by the Government and our chauffeur himself had been mobilized at the first beat of the drums. No one wasted any time, however, in regretting what was offered them because this calamity had befallen us so suddenly that every minute we feared some fresh disaster, so we tried to take what came to us and were thankful.

I shall never forget that trip.

In the usual express train the journey from Aix to Paris lasts nine hours; we were twenty-seven on the way, packed into a second-class compartment. Once, I remember, when we were almost famished for food, towards evening the train stopped and somebody came running along to tell us that we had forty minutes to wait for dinner. Glad news indeed ! So out we all piled and into the station restaurant. Missus, who must have been terribly hungry herself, put a plate down for me with some nice hot meat in it.

“There, Chi darling,” she said, “you poor old dear. We’ve had a hard day of it, but take your time and get a good meal as Heaven only knows when we may have another.”

I had just swallowed the first gulp—my favourite dish, too, liver, which most dogs love, and it was so hot that I had to wait a moment—when word came that the train would leave in five minutes. We scrambled back in a hurry for



fear someone might take our places in the train. No one thought of paying for all that delicious food untouched. How far away I seemed from the good old days when Olivier had my lunch ready for me before we had time to order it ! However, we were more fortunate than most, for we had brought a lunch-basket with us in case of accidents

and this now came in very useful. We shared it with our travelling companions, and there was more than enough for me as it was, for they had given us nice things. There was a strange unusual savour or aroma about that first “war meal,” the first of so many hundred others, that was to mark it off for ever in my memory as different from any of its predecessors. “The shadow of war” is no mere phrase, it brooded over everyone of us that day in that railway restaurant as a definite, tangible shape, every bit as real as the big creeping shadow of the house or the cedar tree that used to fall across me as I lay, nose on paws, on the velvet lawns at home, only infinitely more sinister. “What an imaginative Chow !” I can hear you say, but what is it, I wonder, that makes you marvellous humans, so understanding in other ways, yet take it for granted that all imagination is a purely human quality, like speech, and that it is denied to us? Watch a light-hearted dog worrying a slipper or playing with his ball, pretending that it is alive, and then deny us imagination if you can ! Forgive me if I seem to labour this point—I touched upon doggy thoughts before, at the opening of this book—but as I hinted to you then,

being a Chow of culture and education, and one who has had excellent advantages, I feel my responsibility towards my less-favoured brethren, who are always glad to have their point of view explained to their adored humans. The war, for us as for them, quickened our alertness, our awareness. Always quicker than they to snuff and sense a smell, a sound, an atmosphere, all reacted (this is the very newest word that everybody uses nowadays) to that rather disquieting state of mind of our various masters and mistresses. They were the masters and mistresses we had always known, but they felt and seemed different somehow, combatants and non-combatants alike. (We and ours belonged to a very important set of people called “neutrals” at this early stage of things.) Our dear ones still spoke to us, caressed us, and thought for us, but there was something mechanical about it all, and we seemed to sense or sniff something rather exciting about them, some blend of eagerness, anxiety, and strong emotion which lifted life on to a different plane. (I don’t mean an aero-plane, though we were to see plenty of these later on, and hear them too.) Missus did her “bit” of war work, and I did mine too, but more of all this presently.

Oh, what a journey that was ! The worst of it being that at every station we met much the same crowds of people, broken-hearted mothers, wives, children, saying farewell to the poor soldiers who were starting on all kinds of trains in every possible direction.

When at last we reached Paris, the City of Light, we found it plunged in utter darkness. The Zeppelins were expected in one from one instant to the next. The Meurice Hotel was closed, most and most of our friends had got away at the first alarm, knowing how complicated things might become. So we took up our quarters in the Hotel Edouard VII, which was under the same management as the Meurice.

Every afternoon we were visited by little bombing airplanes—"taubes" or doves they called them though they were far from gentle. I hated their noise and could not get used to it, alas, poor pacifist me ! The people of Paris were very brave, however. The day after a raid, which had left its customary trail of destruction, they would say with a shrug—thinking of their loved ones at the Front—"Well, it's our turn now."

Master told us never to go off the block nor far from the hotel, but one day we did take a little walk, and sure enough an enemy plane dropped a bomb near the Printemps and sent us all flying for our lives.

We heard that Police dogs were doing splendid work up on the Front with the Red Cross units. They are marvellous dogs and much in demand. A little boy, Johnnie Jones, seeing a policeman on his beat, went up to him and said :

"Please, sir, when you have puppies could you give me one, as I do want a Police dog." Some thought this very funny. In Paris no one seemed to know what was going to happen next. Ambassador Herrick let it be known that any

Americans who could get away had better leave, because they couldn't help and they made just so many more for the Government to feed and worry about. If this were true of people it would be all the more so of civilian dogs.

Next day an order came that no more automobiles could leave Paris. That gave me a very uncomfortable feeling as they said the Germans would be arriving in three days, and after hearing some of the things they did to people I felt in my bones that it would be all over with this dog if they ever saw me. I should not be there to cheer up and protect my family or bark a warning. My Master went to the Embassy and was told by Mr. Islin that if we got to the gates of Paris by two o'clock we should probably be able to pass. Then we rushed back to the hotel, collected the rest of the family and the hand luggage, and passed the gates at five minutes to two o'clock.

This was on the 2nd of September.

There was a general exodus. A never-ending stream of people and vehicles of every description. What struck me most were the baby carriages piled high with household effects, and the number of poor dogs wedged in amongst all the rest.

It was days before we could reach Biarritz, our destination. Everywhere we met the same throng, soldiers moving up to the Front, wounded and civilians getting away from the Lines.

We stopped at Blois at the little Hotel d'Angleterre (so

attractive in days of peace) on the edge of the Loire ; we had stayed there before, making it a centre from which to see the Chateaux of Touraine. Now, all the landlady could give us to sit up in was the reading-room on the ground floor, and all night long we heard the motors rushing by. At Angouleme we had to pile in one room over a book-shop. Rochefort was the next stop, and there we took possession of some fairly comfortable quarters which were being reserved for some high official. Everyone was kind, for all were in trouble.

Finally we arrived at Biarritz, at the Hotel du Palais. It used to be the Palace of the Empress Eugenie before it became a fashionable hotel, but now the large salon was already filled with wounded. Indeed, it was not long before the proprietor came and told us that all the rooms must now be given over to hospital service, and though he was grateful to Missus and the other ladies for all the kindness they had shown, he must ask us all to move on. Master decided then and there to motor on to San Sebastian in Spain, where we were to spend many happy days and make many delightful friends. We took up our abode at the Hotel Marie Christina.