

CONTACTS WITH EUROPEAN ROYALTY

by

Charles C. Parlin, Sr.

Greece

The summer of 1967 the World Council of Churches met in Crete and Miriam and I attended. The young King and his beautiful wife, the former Danish Princess, the Queen Mother, Fredricka, and her daughter, the Greek Princess, came to Crete on their Royal Yacht. They were received with great pomp and ceremony by the officialdom of Crete and the Greek Orthodox hierarchy. The Royal Family attended a session in the cathedral and the young King read a very nice and appropriate speech in perfect English. Being one of the World Council Presidents in attendance, Miriam and I were seated up near the altar close to the family. Later, there was a small reception at the Orthodox headquarters adjacent to the cathedral and Miriam and I were able to meet and chat with the family.

Queen Fredricka was a stunningly beautiful woman and the young Queen was an outstanding beauty. The young King was most gracious. We didn't have opportunity for anything but small-talk as I had to leave the reception hall to fight with the King's staff. Two photographers, with flash guns, were busy taking pictures in the hall when word came that the official World Council photographer, whom we had brought to Crete, was being excluded. I located the man in charge, who had some title like Chamberlain to the King, and he reaffirmed the exclusion. I attributed the trouble to language difficulties so got some of my Greek friends, and some of the Orthodox hierarchy, to intervene in my behalf, but the fellow, and his assistants, became more adamant and quite abusive. I was furious. I started to re-enter the hall to appeal to the King and then thought: Perhaps he has no more control over that miserable so-and-so and his colleagues than do my friends of the Orthodox hierarchy. To make an appeal to the King and force him to acknowledge his impotence would be humiliating. After all, I was a guest in the country and, specifically, a guest of the King at his reception. So I re-entered the hall, got Miriam and we left to return to

our hotel. In all the years I had gone to World Council meetings in all the continents, I had never been so rudely or unreasonably treated.

Not long later, the regime was toppled and the Royal Family were forced under cover of night to flee Greece into exile. I thought then about the King having as his Chamberlain a man who excelled in administering insults and turning friends into enemies.

Sweden

The Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches met at Uppsala, Sweden, in August, 1968. Miriam was walking at that time with some difficulty, a cane in one hand and on the other side the need of someone's arm. This was to wind up my work with the Council and Miriam was anxious to go, so we flew over and I secured the services of a woman who would be with Miriam at all times when I had to be at meetings, or on the platform presiding.

The Archbishop of the Swedish State Church had written inviting me to attend a luncheon at his palace to follow immediately after the big ceremony and service on the opening day of the Assembly, and I had accepted. We had arrived some days prior to the opening because I had to attend meetings and help with the making of some decisions. We had a nice suite at the Uppsala Hotel. The day before the opening there was a rap at my apartment door and there was the Archbishop himself. He was covered with embarrassment: He had not known that my wife was accompanying me to Uppsala and therefore he had failed to include her in the invitation; of course she was invited; please bring her! I agreed.

At the conclusion of the great processional and service in the Cathedral I was able to locate Miriam and we walked over to the Archbishop's palace nearby. In Sweden there is a close state-church relationship. Stockholm with its government buildings and King's Palace is the seat of government, and Uppsala, with its big and ancient Cathedral and Archbishop's palace, is the seat of the church.

We were escorted through liveried guards and into what was obviously to be a grand and formal luncheon. Luncheon was to be at a large oval table and outside in the reception room there was a chart showing the seating order and where the place cards would be found. I took Miriam to the chart and I found my place and then Miriam's, who was to be seated between the Archbishop of Australia and an "H. M. Koenig." Miriam asked who he was and I said I didn't know but that obviously he was a Swede because the "O" had the funny markings distinctive to the Swedish alphabet. It was not until the Archbishop showed up to introduce the King, who was to escort Miriam into the

dining room, that we realized "H. M. Koenig" was "His Majesty the King," old King Gustaf of Sweden!

So, in some ways, it was nice, and fitting, that at the last social function to which I was to take Miriam, she was to go in on the arm of, and be seated by, a King!

England

The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches met in England in February, 1968, and, through the good offices of the Archbishop of Canterbury, one of my fellow members of the organization's Presidium, we were invited as guests of the Queen to stay and have our meetings at Windsor Castle.

When I arrived early morning at the London airport, a taxi driver was willing to take me and my suitcase to Windsor but he insisted that what I wanted was the Windsor Hotel and not Windsor Castle. When I insisted, he reluctantly drove me to the great gate of the castle and was greatly surprised when the guards, after examining my fancy invitation, opened and waved us in.

A wing of the castle had been recently renovated with a series of small, but comfortable guest rooms. There was central heating but the plumbing was concentrated down at the end of a hall. We had been invited to a cocktail party to be given by the Queen on the arrival day, and for this we were to assemble at a given hour at a room in this newly renovated wing. There we were met by Field Marshall Slim, of World War II fame, who was now serving as Governor of the Castle. He had a printed list of our names and he checked each one of us off against his list and explained the procedure. He would escort us across the courtyard and to the Queen's private living quarters; there we would be asked to stand in line in the order shown on his printed list; each of us would then, in turn, be presented to Her Majesty by the Archbishop of Canterbury; then would follow the serving of cocktails and the Ladies of the Castle would join us.

Arriving at the Queen's private apartment, the Field Marshall formed us in a line and three times went down the printed list, checking off in almost military manner the order in which we were standing.

Shortly the Queen arrived, accompanied by her Chaplain of the Castle, Bishop Woods, and her two corki dogs. The Archbishop received the Queen at the door and proceeded to take her down the line, presenting in turn each one of us. A male British subject in line bowed and kissed her hand and a woman subject, Dr. Kathleen Bliss,

curtsied. The rest of us merely shook hands.

The Queen was just a slip of a girl, much more petite than I had expected from the pictures; not particularly pretty but a very soft, friendly personality. She was dressed in a two-piece raspberry-colored suit, had black patent leather pumps and carried a black patent leather handbag. She wore a choker of rather large-sized pearls and when she turned I noticed that the clasp at the back of her neck was a large, rectangular-cut emerald.

As she was taken down the line she had some little thing to say to each of the eighteen in the line, and I could then see why the Field Marshall had been so intent in having us in the correct order. To me, for example, she said, "Mr. Parlin, you live in New York." I could have told the Queen she was wrong but I said, "Yes, I do." To which she replied: "Oh, New York must be an exciting place to live in!" And I said, "Yes, Your Majesty, it is."

When she had gone down the line, the room was suddenly invaded by a group of charming British ladies and waiters, in fancy dress, circulating with trays of drinks. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the Queen select a glass of sherry, so I did the same. Can a Queen do wrong!? As if by magic we found ourselves in little conversational cliques. I was enjoying myself with a group when a major-domo came to me and said the Queen wished to put me to a question. Joining her group, which included the Archbishop, she said to me:

"Mr. Parlin, you are a New York Wall Street lawyer."

"Yes."

"Then my question is this: How did you get into the Presidium of the World Council of Churches alongside my Archbishop?"

"That is a good question, Your Majesty, and I can explain exactly: To the 1961 Assembly in New Delhi, two churches—the U.S.A. Congregational and the German Lutheran—brought petitions saying substantially the same thing: We must have lay representation in the highest echelon, the Presidium, because the use of laymen is one of the marks of the Protestant Church and now that we are to come into conversations and contact with the great Roman Catholic Church, which is

governed totally by the clerical hierarchy, we should have an organizational structure reflecting Protestantism. This proposition was voted, almost without debate, by the Assembly; and then the Nominating Committee, in selecting a Presidium of six, was faced with all the problems of representation found in the United Nations plus the complicating factor of Communion. So—first they took your Archbishop, and that took care of England and all Anglicans of the World; then Archbishop Iakovos, and that took care of all Orthodox of the World; then Pastor Niemuller, and that took care of Europe and all Lutherans of the world; then Dr. Moses, distinguished Indian theologian, and that took care of Asians and the United Churches of the world, he being a member of the United Church of South India; then Francis Ibiem, and that took care of black Africa and the Presbyterian and Reformed churches of the world. This left them with the problem: From North America, English-speaking, white, layman and a Methodist—and I was the only one around.”

The Queen feigned shock and said: “Oh, Mr. Parlin—I am sure there were other factors!” And the Archbishop gave the group, including the Queen, a good laugh when he said very solemnly, “Yes, Your Majesty, there were!”

Contrary to some published reports, I gathered the impression that Queen Elizabeth II had a good sense of humor.