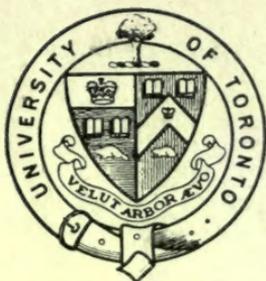




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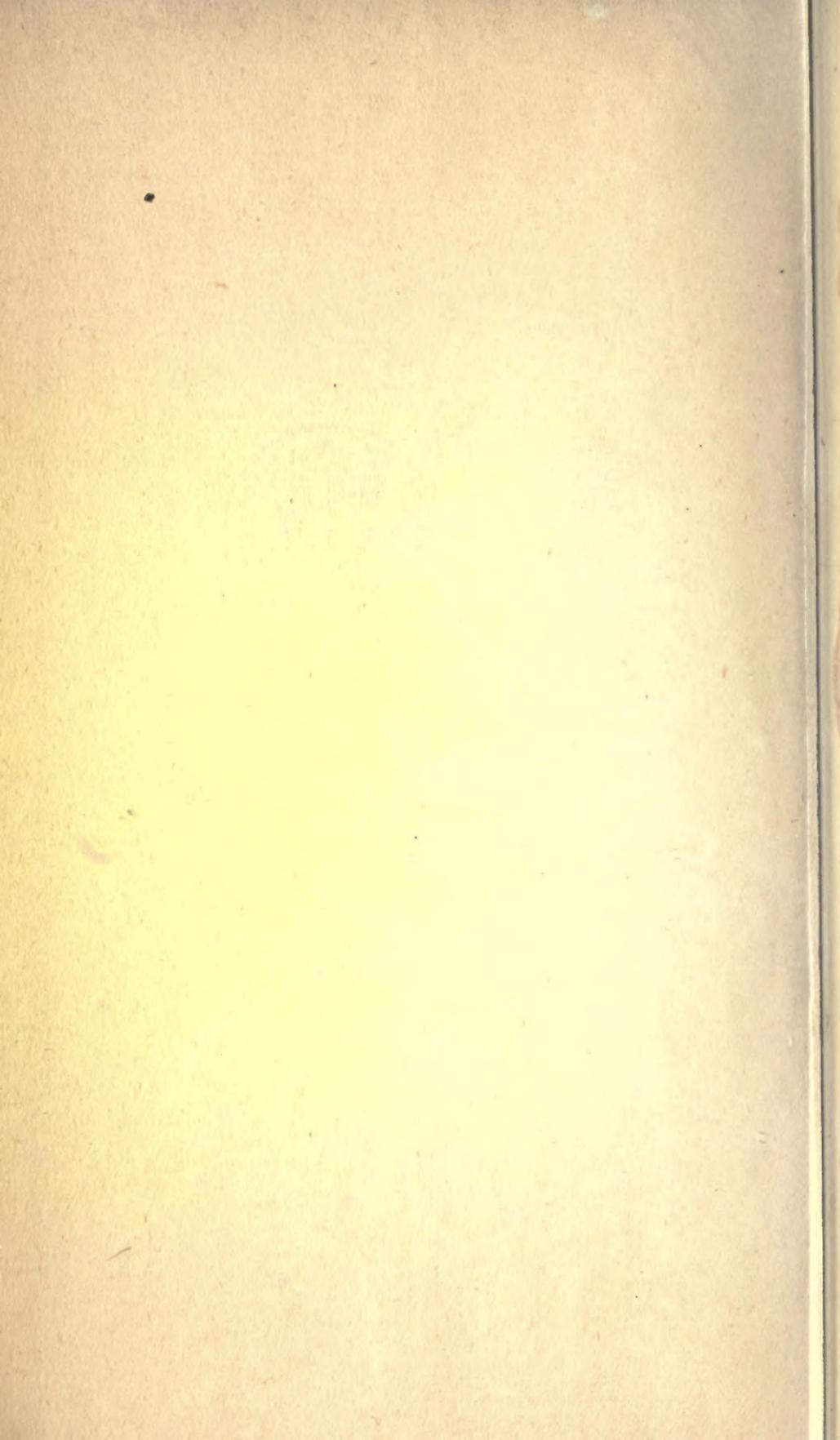
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR
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LEOPOLD THE SECOND
KING OF THE BELGIANS



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Leopold the Second.

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LEOPOLD THE SECOND KING OF THE BELGIANS

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BY

ANGELO S. RAPPOPORT, PH.D.

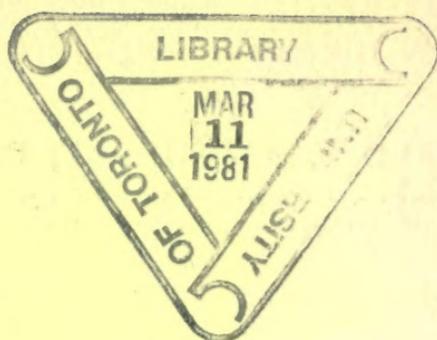
AUTHOR OF "THE CURSE OF THE ROMANOFFS"
"ROYAL LOVERS AND MISTRESSES," ETC.



WITH EIGHTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS
INCLUDING A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE



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LEOPOLD II

KING OF THE BELGIANS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

“LEOPOLD II was almost too great for his country. He was a great force, continually aiming at the ever-widening expansion of Belgium.” Thus wrote the Belgian poet, Emile Verhaeren, two days after the death of the late King. “Leopold II, who, single-handed, has laid waste a country, drenched a land in blood, offered up tens of thousands of human lives on the altars of his greed and his lust for gold. Leopold, the astute, the wily, the conscienceless—who played a game with the nations, with twenty million black men as his pawns.” Thus ran another judgment when the Congo-atrocities excitement was at its height. The general press, strictly observing the laws of conventionality, refrained from criticising the King immediately after his death. Some time must elapse before the critic may tell the truth about those who are dead and gone—disregarding the old dictum, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. No doubt many future historians will be

severe in their judgment of the late King, whilst some will continue to endorse the laudatory remarks of Emile Verhaeren and others. And is Leopold II, as regards contradictory statements, a unique example in the annals of the world? The student perusing the pages of history, written by impartial historians, will be struck by the varying and contradictory accounts given of sovereigns and rulers. Nero, the tyrant, the megalomaniac, has had his whitewashers. Tiberius has been represented as a great and glorious Emperor. Philip II of Spain, Ivan IV of Russia and Henry VIII have been described as cruel tyrants and mad monarchs, but also as great kings, pioneers of civilisation and promoters of religious and intellectual movements. Louis XIV and Napoleon I have had their numerous admirers and detractors. Posterity must judge for itself, but the judgment of posterity is often warped by the one-sided view of contemporaries.

In order to be able to form a clear, unbiassed opinion of great movements and great men, men who have made history and caused revolutions, political, social, religious and intellectual, we must study them not separately, but in connection with their environment. Points, otherwise obscure, will then become clear to us, actions which we were ready to condemn will appear in a different light, revealing an excuse. The influence of environment, epoch and heredity is responsible for many an otherwise inexplicable event in history.

Environment and heredity are factors which are too often neglected in the study of the history of

men and nations. Cause and effect are constantly being confounded. Physiological and psychological causes concur in producing a national as well as an individual character, and this character can only be understood fully if traced to the original influences which helped to shape it. Thus the political institutions of a nation are the effect produced by moral and religious beliefs, which, in their turn, are the result of its character. Peoples and nations have not only the governments and kings they deserve but those which best suit them. And what is true of nations is also true of individuals. They are the children of a combination of factors, heredity, epoch and environment, or to quote Hippolyte Taine—*milieu*.

It is impossible to understand the life of any individual as distinct from his environment, his descent, his parentage, and epoch.

For each epoch and each generation has a special *milieu*. Every man is born into a society—he finds a certain order of things awaiting him—the hereditary culture, or non-culture, is around him in his cradle and henceforth regulates his existence. He is impregnated by the ideas he receives from his parents and early environment. The mediocrity becomes an utter slave to them, whilst the superior man seizes opportune moments when he is able to shape circumstances, but even then he shapes them only in accordance with the hidden spirit of the time, whose voice he alone hears and obeys. He remains rooted in his environment, although he may appear to be towering above it, like the Spirit of God above the

Tohu Va Bohu—the chaos which preceded creation! The individual is the distillation of the thought of the age, of the spirit of the time. Much more so is this the case in the history of kings, whose career is not only the mingled result of their character and hereditary influences, but also of the history and institutions of the country they rule and the period in which they live. To study, therefore, the life of a king separately from the history of his country, from the great events which helped to shape and mould its political and social institutions, would be useless. The life and career of Alexander the Great can only be understood in connection with the state of Greece after the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, the great struggle between East and West, between Asiatic despotism and Greek culture. The history, character and policy of Philip II of Spain appear under a different light if we fully grasp the fierce struggle in that age between Catholicism and Protestantism; the work of Peter the Great will remain incomprehensible unless studied in connection with the condition of Russia, which was still under the *régime* introduced during the Mongol oppression.

How can one fully understand Christianity without mastering the religious ideas which moved Roman paganism? Luther without the individualistic tendencies of his century? Napoleon without the French Revolution? Bismarck without German national aspirations and unity?

Among the sovereigns of Europe—indeed, of the world—some have simply had to carry on and manage what they had inherited; they had merely to

continue old values, not to create new ones—to preserve, not to innovate. They can be mediocrities, and, especially when they are constitutional monarchs, they simply have to permit events to take their course. There are others, however, whom circumstances compel to take into consideration the new ideas, the ever-growing demands and interests of their time. Their greatness will consist in understanding the voice of the time and in laying the hand on the beating pulse of the epoch.

Leopold II can only be understood in connection with, and as a result of the Belgium of 1830 and the policy of Leopold I. Leopold II as a separate ruler is a reprehensible character. Leopold II, as a moment in Belgian history, becomes not only comprehensible, but in many ways excusable. He was the issue of the historical progress and development of Belgium's struggle for independence. In studying the history of a king or ruler, one must always ask, Who was he? Was he a conqueror, or was he the descendant of a long race of rulers who had become identified with the country? Was he a prince to whom a people had voluntarily offered a throne and a crown and who could at any moment give him notice to quit?—"Your services are no longer required; you may go. Take a year's salary or a pension. We invited you; we now dismiss you." When the Corsican giant put his foot on the neck of Europe he could talk as a master to France—France was in his power. Leopold I and Leopold II had sworn to observe the constitution of Belgium; and they were guided and ruled, apparently at least, by this consti-

tution. It is for this reason that it is necessary to tell the story, not only of Leopold II's life, but the history of 1830 and the policy and life of his father, Leopold I. Many factors helped to produce Leopold II—he was a Coburg, he was the son of Leopold I and he was the second king of a new kingdom and the first king born on Belgian soil, the son of a foreigner! The Belgians had revolted against William of Orange; and why should they not revolt against a son of the House of Coburg? Leopold was a Coburg, an Orléans and a Belgian, therefore prudent and energetic. Heredity played a great part in his life. A Socialist Belgian Deputy wrote some time ago: "The Belgians have committed two errors: one of them was 1830." And indeed many Belgian towns, especially the centres of industry, remained attached to the House of Orange; they regretted the flesh-pots of Dutch dependence, for the Dutch Indies were splendid outlets for their products. There was, therefore, danger for the dynasty only newly established. Leopold II was clever enough to understand that; and Belgian expansion became his one and great idea. But at the same time he made up his mind to realise vast profits for himself in any case. His aim was simple: on the one hand he wished to strengthen and consolidate the dynasty, to secure a firm footing in the country and to do something by which the nation would become his debtor. He succeeded; for, after all, Belgium is satisfied by having acquired the Congo and will soon forget the means by which the late King civilised it. On the other hand, Leopold

tried to put something aside for a rainy day, for a possible repetition of 1830. In these days of Socialism you never can tell what may happen. There are many sovereigns of Europe who, in case of a revolution or forced abdication, could retire to some quiet spot and live comfortably on the income derived from capital placed in foreign banks. History offers us many examples of speculating and business kings. Leopold chose the Congo; he gave his country a rich colony, and he pocketed a handsome sum, let us say as commission for his labours, just as many a noble lord used to be in receipt of a large salary for allowing his name to figure as one of the directors of a company. A royal commission, Leopold thought, must be a high one. He thus played the fairy god-mother and led Belgium as far as the River Zaire to take possession of the Congo. This ruler of a small constitutional monarchy was a clever politician, a man of constant and ardent initiative, endowed with a remarkable intelligence, and capable of hoodwinking at his will the diplomatists and financiers of Europe. As a king, he succeeded in his, apparently at least, humanitarian schemes. Philanthropic movements and peace conferences have all the chances of success, even, or rather especially, in democratic circles, if they issue from, are initiated and are convened by kings. Such is the complexity of human nature. If humanity likes to be hoodwinked, well—*tant pis pour elle*.

From his cradle, one may say from the very moment he began to think, Leopold was dreaming of new outlets, not only for Belgium and her industrial and com-

mercial activity, but for his personal influence and the exercise of his sovereign power, and how the constitutional monarch could turn into an autocrat exercising the absolute rule of a Russian tsar. In this respect, Leopold contradicted his words that he was a Belgian in every fibre of his being, for he lacked the Flemish phlegm and the contented placidity of the Belgian. Heredity played a great part in the history of Leopold II and helps to interpret the psychology of his character. He had inherited from his father the admiration for English individualism, whilst he owed to his mother, the daughter of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois prudence. An autocratic spirit was coupled in him with a modern soul, and made the descendant of the feudal Coburgs accept the policy and constitution of the sons of the Belgian Revolution.

CHAPTER II

THE COBURGS

IN perusing the history of European sovereigns one is inevitably struck by the remarkable good fortune of the Coburgs. This family has spread all over Europe and its descendants are now either themselves seated on some European throne or related by marriage to some reigning sovereign. By dint of good looks and intelligence they have pushed their way, and their efforts have always been crowned with success. "After the Atrides and the Nechdi," writes the Belgian author Bertrand, "the Coburgs are the most fruitful and the most invading race of Europe. It is impossible to move a step in Europe without coming across a member of the Coburg family." At present, however, we are only concerned with the Coburgs who reign in Belgium, and who ascended the throne of this young kingdom with Leopold I. He was born in Coburg on December 16th, 1790, and was the sixth child of Francis, Duke of Saxe-Saalfeld-Coburg. From his very early youth he always found himself in difficult and embarrassing positions, but he continually triumphed over them, and fate constantly favoured him.

Prince Leopold was just fourteen when Napoleon became Emperor of the French. And whilst the future King of the Belgians was quietly pursuing his

studies in Coburg, his elder brother, Prince Ernest, was in Berlin, where he had become an intimate friend of King Frederick William IV and of Queen Louise, famous alike for her patriotism and her beauty.

In 1805, when Napoleon was conducting his invincible legions against Austria, Prince Leopold made his *début* in the Russian army, having joined, together with his brother Ernest, the head-quarters of the Tsar Alexander in Moravia.

The battle of Austerlitz, fought on December 2, 1805, put an end to the war. Napoleon destroyed the old German Empire; the confederation of the Rhine was established, and the victor of Austerlitz nominated as its protector. But Prussia rose in arms, determined to drive out the French from Germany. Prince Ernest joined his friend King Frederick William IV, whilst Prince Leopold retired with his father and the family to the citadel of Saalfeld. After the death of his father, Prince Leopold accompanied his brother, now reigning Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg, to Paris, and was afterwards present at the congress of Erfurt. He was attached to the Tsar Alexander and desired to continue his military career in the service of Russia. But Napoleon, who, at that moment, was the master of the destinies of the princes of Europe, forbade it, and made Duke Ernest responsible for his brother's actions and conduct. Leopold's efforts to make the Emperor of the French change his mind were all in vain—for Napoleon wanted the Prince to enter the service of France, and only through the intervention of the Empress Josephine and Queen Hortense could the future King of the

Belgians refuse Napoleon's offers without offending him. And when, on his way against Russia, Napoleon appeared in Dresden, surrounded by the Emperor and Empress of Austria, the kings of Prussia, Bavaria, and Würtemberg, and all the other princes whom the Corsican giant considered as his vassals, Prince Leopold was absent. Greatly did he feel the humiliating state of Germany. When, therefore, after the disastrous passage of the Beresina, Napoleon had lost his Russian campaign and returned to Paris, and Germany had begun to agitate against the French dominion, desirous of shaking off the hated yoke, the Princes of Coburg took an active part in the movement of liberation.

In 1816, Prince Leopold married Charlotte Augusta, the only daughter of the Prince of Wales and heiress to the crown of Great Britain. The death of the Princess, however, in 1817, was a terrible blow to the Prince of Coburg. But fortune soon again seemed to smile upon him.

In 1825 the Greek insurgents, in search for a king, cast their eyes upon Leopold of Saxe-Coburg; Orlando de Hydra and Luriotis were commissioned to ascertain the intentions of this Prince. They entered into negotiations with George Canning, British Minister for Foreign Affairs since the death of Londonderry in 1822. Canning acquainted Leopold with the Greek proposition but advised him to refuse the offer. The Prince, he did not hesitate to declare, would be much more useful in England—besides, Greece was still in an unsettled state.

Leopold himself would have accepted the offer, for

the perilous and honourable career rather attracted than frightened him, but the lack of harmony among the European powers with regard to Greece made him hesitate. He nevertheless followed with keen interest the struggle for the regeneration of Greece. Count Capodistrias was at that moment the President of the Provisional Government of Greece, and Leopold at one time having entertained intimate relations with him sent Baron von Stockmar to ascertain the exact intentions of the Greek Government. Capodistrias declared that Greece desired a monarchic government under the rule of a Christian prince—who would embrace the religion of the country and who, together with the representatives of the nation, would settle the principles upon which the country should be governed.

On the 3rd of February, 1830, the representatives of the three powers who were acting as protectors of Greece officially offered the throne of the country to Leopold—and he having accepted the offer on certain conditions, the three powers declared him sovereign of Greece. This is not the place to relate in detail the negotiations of the Prince of Coburg with Greece and the powers. Suffice it to say that after having convinced himself that he was not being freely elected by the country but imposed upon it by the powers, Leopold resigned the crown in a note written on May 21st. Greece, however, was not the only country in Europe which had been seized by the Revolutionary whirl of 1830.



CHAPTER III

THE BELGIAN REVOLUTION—FOUNDATION OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

DURING the autumn of 1830 many well-known members of English society assembled at Brighton, the fashionable and aristocratic seaside resort where the King, like his predecessor, occupied the singular building called the Pavilion. This Sovereign was the former Duke of Clarence, the third son of George III and younger brother of George IV. He became King of England as William IV on the 26th of June, 1830. On the 1st of October, the Princess of Lieven, wife of the Russian Ambassador, wrote from Brighton to Prince Leopold, who was then at Claremont with his sister, the Duchess of Kent, and his niece, the young Princess Victoria: "Ah, my Lord, there is very bad news since the last letter that I had the honour to write to your Royal Highness. I dined the day before yesterday at the Pavilion, and the Duke of Wellington appeared quite calm and quite assured that Belgian affairs must be settled and that Brussels must have submitted. After dinner came a messenger from London with news that the King's army had retreated. The same dispatch contained the information that a large number of French soldiers had directed the defence of Brussels. Without making too dark a forecast, it seems inevitable that a general war will be

the consequence ; and how and when will it finish ? There is matter to puzzle the wisest, and what will they do, who as we have learned by experience, are only mediocrities ? ”

What was the event thus referred to ? What was this occurrence which seemed to threaten a European war ? It was the Belgian Revolution—a national revolution which, far from disturbing the peace of Europe, was destined, thanks to Prince Leopold, to become one of the best guarantees thereof.

We are not relating here the history of the Belgian Revolution, but it will be necessary to summarise the facts briefly for the information of the reader.

On the 4th of October, 1830, the provisional Government of the Belgian provinces, which had detached themselves from Holland, proclaimed an independent state and convened a national congress at Brussels. The representatives of the powers of England, France, Prussia, Russia and Austria met in London, and on November 4th proposed to Holland and Belgium the cessation of hostilities. Holland was to keep the frontiers which she possessed before the union, i.e. the Treaty of Paris, in May, 1814. The Belgian provisional Government accepted the proposal, and the same day the constitutional assembly of the Belgian people met at Brussels. Belgium was declared an independent state, and the mode of government was to be a hereditary monarchy from which the members of the House of Orange-Nassau were for ever to be excluded.

And thus Belgium too, being in search of a king, cast her eyes upon some European prince anxious for

a position as a king or ruling sovereign. Fate seemed to be favourable to the Prince of Coburg. He had scarcely lost the throne of Greece when another seemed to have been specially created for him. Circumstances were in his favour.

Before Prince Leopold's name entered into the discussions relating to the Belgian monarchy, it was necessary that this monarchy should have the sanction of the national vote. King William I having invoked the help of the five powers who had by the Treaty of Paris and Vienna constituted the kingdom of the Netherlands, the plenipotentiaries of the five powers met in London at the beginning of November, 1830. The first protocol of the conference, dated November 4th, proposed to the Dutch and Belgians an armistice, which they accepted. Six days later the National Congress of Belgium commenced its sittings at Brussels. After solemn debates the Congress announced the three principles which were to be the foundation of all further deliberations: the independence of Belgium, the establishment of the monarchy and the exclusion of princes of the House of Orange-Nassau. These three votes leave three dates memorable in the history of Belgium—the 18th, 22nd and 23rd November, 1830.

The weeks that followed, weeks of agitation and anguish for Belgian statesmen, were employed in the choice of a sovereign. It was not from Belgium, it must be confessed, it was from England, that the idea first came of proposing Prince Leopold. Belgium, at this moment very much discontented at certain decisions of the London Conference relative

to the Duchy of Luxemburg, was naturally inclined to turn to France. There were even in Belgium, as in France, adventurous spirits who, in the ardour of mutual sympathy, thought of the union of the two peoples. This was precisely what disquieted the English Foreign Office. They suspected the candidature of the Duc de Nemours, which under any other circumstances they would have accepted, of being a disguised form of union. In January, 1831, Van de Weyer, the illustrious Belgian citizen who went to London to try to settle all these difficulties, had long interviews with Lord Palmerston on the subject. Lord Palmerston did not at first pronounce so decidedly as he did later against the candidature of a French prince, but tried amiably to set aside the duc de Nemours; and as he could not set him aside without suggesting somebody in his place, he quietly proposed Prince Leopold. "The Duc de Nemours is very young," he said; "hands more vigorous will be needed to hold the reins of a new state. Why have you not thought of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg?"

Lord Palmerston had made a complete reply in this bold statement. When Van de Weyer pleaded certain political necessities—France to be considered, the French party to satisfy—the Minister replied: "As for that, Prince Leopold can marry one of the daughters of Louis Philippe." When Van de Weyer suggested that there would be a difficulty on account of the Prince's religion, "Have no fear," said Lord Palmerston; "we have sounded Cappocini, the papal nuncio. The representative of the Holy See has

formally declared that he does not consider the choice of a Catholic prince indispensable. The Court of Rome is much less afraid of Prince Leopold than of the Duc de Nemours ; Rome thinks that a Protestant sovereign in such a Catholic country will of necessity be more interested than another in respecting the rights of the Church and of the majority."

It was necessary for Great Britain to oppose every measure that, directly or not, would tend to make Belgium a province of France, and consequently also necessary to assure to Belgium an independent existence, to facilitate the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, to help her to find a king who would inspire confidence in Europe ; it was this chain of ideas that led Lord Palmerston, favourable from the first, like Lord Aberdeen, to a system of administrative separation between Belgium and Holland, to end by becoming one of the founders of the Belgian monarchy.

Even if Lord Aberdeen had arrived at the same conclusion, it is not probable that the ministry of the Duke of Wellington would have thought of Prince Leopold for the throne of the new kingdom ; the Prince was too much out of favour as a friend of the Whigs, and the Tory Ministers bore him too great a grudge for his renunciation of the throne of Greece. It is, therefore, to Lord Palmerston that the honour of this suggestion is due. Lord Palmerston completed his work when, resolved on preventing a French prince from ascending the throne, he made allowances for Belgian affection for a friendly nation and brought about the marriage of Prince Leopold with one of the

daughters of King Louis Philippe. The enfranchisement of Belgium from the Dutch yoke, the placing of the liberties of the new state under the shelter of a constitutional monarchy, the bestowal of the crown on a Prince who offered every guarantee of liberal wisdom and true patriotism, the marriage of this Prince to a Princess of the royal family of France—such was from January, 1831, the programme that Lord Palmerston marked out for himself and that was to be realised in every detail in the near future.

When the Belgian assembly began to discuss the question of electing a king there were practically only the names of the Duc de Nemours, of the Duke August of Leuchtenberg, and of the Prince Otho of Bavaria. But Paul Devaux, an influential leading member of the Belgian Assembly, called the attention of his colleagues to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg. "I know," he declared in one of his speeches, "why this Assembly is against an English prince. All those who are interested in industry are against such a choice; but you must not forget that this Prince is English only by alliance, and if he allies himself to France by accepting the crown of Belgium he will become more French than he is now English. History furnishes us many examples, proving that a prince does not readily sacrifice the interests of the people over whom he has been called upon to reign to those of the country to which he has become a stranger. Public opinion desiring a Catholic king is also unfavourable towards the Prince of Coburg. But the manner in which I have voted in this Assembly on questions partly political and partly religious

gives me the right to express my views frankly. And I am of opinion that the law should be neither Catholic nor anti-Catholic. If the Prince, who is to rule over Belgium, is a Catholic, well and good ; but if the Prince is not a Catholic, I again say well and good."

Devaux went even so far as to maintain that all that they had to fear, according to their New Constitution, was oppression by the majority, and as the majority was Catholic it would be better if the Chief Executive Magistrate was not Catholic. They were wise words of a wise and clever politician. But even if the traditional Assembly of Belgium was inclined to listen to the words of Devaux, France was still opposing the election of a Coburg to the throne of the new Belgian kingdom.

At the very same time, however, when the interviews took place in London between Lord Palmerston and Van de Weyer, no less singular conversations were being held in Paris between General Sebastiani and other representatives of Belgian patriotism.

The following events happened in January, 1831. The provisional Government of Belgium, seeking for a king who would be agreeable to Europe, had sent Alexandre Gendebien, one of its members, to Paris. Gendebien was passionately devoted to French ideas. Admitted on his arrival in Paris into the presence of King Louis Philippe, he expressed himself ardently about the eagerness shown by the National Congress to elect the Duc de Nemours ; but he only received from the King these discouraging words : " Do not let the Congress utter such a wish, I could not consent to

it." Gendebien then mentioned the candidature of Prince Leopold and the marriage of this Prince, when he became King of Belgium, with a Princess of Orléans. The King replied: "I have long known Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg; he is a good knight; a perfect gentleman, well instructed and very well educated; the Queen also knows him, and appreciates his personal advantages. But—there is a but which says nothing against the person or qualities of the Prince; there are family antipathies, prejudices perhaps, which oppose the projected union."

Repulsed thus in the whole object of his mission, repulsed even in the minimum of his demands, Gendebien had, on 8th January, 1831, a most heated conversation with General Sebastiani, Minister for Foreign Affairs. "Finally," said the Belgian envoy to the French Minister, "what do you counsel us to do? To accept Prince Otho of Bavaria or the Prince of Naples, that is to say, two children? Two children to realise, to guarantee at home and abroad the promises of our revolution! The only serious candidatures are those of the duc de Nemours and the Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. You reject both, when it is a question of life or death to us. What are we to do? In the peril into which you throw us there only remains to us one resource: to go to London and propose Prince Leopold with the French marriage. If King Louis Philippe persists in refusing us his daughter, well, we shall do without her; we will take Prince Leopold without a French princess." At these words General Sebastiani could not contain his rage: "If Saxe-Coburg," said he, rising, "sets

foot in Belgium, we will turn our cannon on him."

The Belgian envoy immediately replied, "Cannon! We shall beg England to reply."

"There will then be a general war," responded the Minister.

"So be it," added Gendebien; "better for us a general war than a Dutch restoration, permanent and hopeless humiliation."

On the 4th of June, 1831, a vast concourse of people was thronging the park at Brussels; only a few favoured ones had obtained permission to enter the hall where the Belgian National Congress was holding its deliberations.

Brussels was excited, for Brussels knew that the Congress was busily occupied in appointing a king for Belgium. There had been difficulties in choosing one: for the Belgians were insisting upon retaining the geographical boundaries—they required Limburg, but the Conference of the powers in London refused to grant Limburg to the Belgians. As is and often has been the case, the Conference of the powers acted in an arbitrary and somewhat illogical manner. After having imposed upon the Congress the election of the Duc de Nemours, they forbade the latter to accept the Belgian crown. And now the members of the Conference were again urging the Congress to elect Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, but at the same time told the latter that should the Belgian crown be offered unto him by the National Congress he should accept it—only under certain conditions. And should Belgium still persist upon

retaining Limburg—the Conference hinted that thirty thousand English and as many Prussian bayonets would suddenly make their appearance in Brussels. Such was the state of affairs when the members of Congress met on June the 4th to elect a king. It is interesting to note that on the very same day a witty writer in the *Figaro* ridiculed the Belgian election in an article entitled “The King-Makers.”

One member of the Congress is represented as protesting against a monarchic system and clamouring for a republic, modelled after those of Rome, Sparta, Thebes or Egypt, whilst another suggested the Republic of San Marino.

The Chief Magistrate should be paid *in naturalibus*, receiving yearly ten sacks of flour, two jugs of oil, and every month two quarters of an ox and a wife.

The President reminded the speaker that there being no oil in Belgium it would have to be butter. Another orator asked for the election of the Prince of Orange, which proposition, however, was vehemently opposed by the other members. Others were discussing whether the Duc de Nemours—married to Donna Maria de Gloria—the Prince of Orange—married to a daughter of Louis Philippe—Prince Leopold and a daughter of the King of Prussia, or an Austrian prince and a princess of Leuchtenberg, would prove the best royal couple to preside over the destinies of Belgium. But suddenly the people—the people who had driven the Dutch from the country, and who, under the rule of William of Orange, had at least lived but now

were starving and trembling for their lives—the people forced the doors of the Congress hall. They clamoured for bread and work—and the President ordered the people to leave the hall, to be quiet and not to disturb its representatives. “We are making laws for you, we are electing a king and you come here bothering us with such trifles as bread and work.”

In spite of the scathing article, however, the Congress had in reality achieved its purpose on the 4th of June. Belgium could be proud, she had a king of her own, a king to herself whom she need not share with the Dutchmen. She could now raise her head and be like other countries and nations.

And thus it was on June the 4th, 1831, that Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha was at last elected King of the Belgians. The Congress assembled almost in full members at the Palais de la Nation. Of the 200 members only four were absent from this solemn meeting. Each of the Deputies, when his name was called, mounted the tribune and gave the President his voting paper signed. This paper could contain more than the name of the person elected ; more than one voter among those who were unfavourable to Prince Leopold wished to give the reasons for their vote and make a protest. All these voting papers with reasons more or less developed, with protestations more or less vehement, the last echo of the discussions of the previous day, were read aloud : 152 votes were for Prince Leopold ; of the 44 against, 14 were for the President of the Congress, Baron Surlet de Chokier, who had already for several

months borne the title of Regent, 14 had declared their abstention from voting, 15 had protested against the Prince and the establishment of a monarchy; finally, the last paper was cancelled, because the deputy who wrote it, while voting for Prince Leopold, had made his vote conditional. With this issue, the President of the Congress, speaking in the name of the people, had proclaimed Prince Leopold King of Belgium on the condition of accepting the constitution.

The existence of the new kingdom was not yet finally regulated, but its bases—unlike those of Greece—were solid enough to prevent Prince Leopold fearing to set foot there. The London Conference was at work and about to establish, in agreement with the new King, Eighteen Articles to be proposed to Holland as preliminaries of peace. Would Holland accept them? Nobody knew, but that was no reason for hesitation. The constitution was voted, the monarchy set up, the Belgian nation had spoken by its representatives, Belgium was resolved never more to fall under Dutch domination. That was enough. Prince Leopold could not expect everything to be already settled between Belgium and Holland, since it was precisely to complete this settlement that the crown had been offered to him; delay would cause the ruin of the new state. Anarchy at home, a European war without, were inevitable consequences if the interim were prolonged: there was no time to be lost. A deputation left for England—officially to acquaint the King-elect with the decision of the Congress.

On June 26th the Eighteen Articles having been

decided upon by the Conference and communicated to the deputation from the Belgian Congress, the deputation visited Prince Leopold and read him the decree naming him King of the Belgians. The President of the Congress, Gerlache, was spokesman; he was accompanied by the worthiest representatives of the Belgian people—Comte Felix de Mérode, Van de Weyer, Lebeau and Devaux.

“Sire,” said M. de Gerlache, “it is a rare and beautiful spectacle in the history of nations, this decision of four millions of free individuals, who are spontaneously offering a crown to a Prince whom they only know by reputation—which speaks highly of his eminent qualities. Your Royal Highness is worthy of this mark of confidence. The happiness and prosperity of Belgium, and perhaps the peace of entire Europe, are in your hands. As a price for your noble resolution we are not afraid to say, Prince, that we are offering you glory and the thanks and blessings of a loyal people, who has always remained attached to its rulers as long as they respected the rights of the people.”

The Prince replied in suitable terms: “To be called upon to maintain the independence of a nation and so consolidate its liberties was the highest and most useful task that human life could offer. Only such a mission could induce him to separate himself from a country to which he was attached by sacred bonds and memories, a country that had given him so many evidences of goodwill. He therefore accepted without hesitation this mark of confidence, the more precious,” he said, “because it was unsought for.”

Finally, he was ready to respond to the call of the Belgian people as soon as the Brussels Congress had accepted the Eighteen Articles prepared by the London Conference. This was a condition imposed not by him but by the circumstances of the case.

CHAPTER IV

KING LEOPOLD I

THE Deputies returned to Brussels. The Eighteen Articles were submitted to the Congress and, after stormy discussions, the work of the London Conference was accepted, on July 9th, by the representatives of the people. On the following day a new deputation went to England to seek Prince Leopold and accompany him to Belgium. The Prince put his affairs in order, sealed his Claremont papers, bade adieu to the Royal Family, his sister and his niece, and departed, on July 16th, with the Belgian deputation.

Saluted at Dover by the cannon of the batteries on the coast, saluted at Calais by the artillery of Fort Rouge, it was with the twofold acknowledgment of England and France that the King of the Belgians sailed on a Belgian ship to take possession of his kingdom. His entrance into Belgium in the beautiful weather of July, 1831, was marked by great enthusiasm. At Ostend, at Bruges, at Ghent: indeed, as soon as the King-elect set foot on Belgian soil, his journey became a triumphant march. In Ostend he was met by the Bishop of Gand in full canonicals, who offered the homage of the Catholic clergy to the new King. Deep down in the hearts of the people of

Flanders and Brabant was the respect for monarchic power and institutions, and although Leopold was a Protestant, the Catholic population greeted him enthusiastically as the protector of Belgian independence.

At Brussels, where Leopold arrived on the 19th, the joy of the people prevailed throughout the city. The bishops took the first place in these great demonstrations. The welcome of the country even surpassed that of the towns. Village curates, as the procession passed, came to salute warmly this Lutheran King, restorer of the national independence, with an admirable union of wisdom and patriotism.

Finally, on July 21st, the inauguration of the new monarchy took place.

Again the streets of Brussels were crowded and the houses were decorated as on a festive occasion. Belgium and Brussels were anxiously awaiting their King. The throng was thick on the Place Royale. There a gallery had been constructed and on it rose the throne, the throne which was soon to be occupied by Belgium's first king. All along the gallery shields were visible bearing the mottoes of Brussels, Liège, St. Walburg, Berchem, Namur, Louvain, the chief places where the Belgian people had fought for liberty and independence. White flags bore the names of the provinces and over them the national colours were unfurled. On the throne the words could be read, "l'union fait la force."

The houses round the Place Royale resembled an amphitheatre, for windows and roofs were thronged with beautifully and richly arrayed ladies.

The bells of the St. Jacob's Church announced the approach of the members of the National Congress.

Royal honours were accorded to the members ; and they were greeted with enthusiastic cheers. Suddenly the roar of cannons announced to the crowds that the King had left his residence at Laeken and was *en route* for Brussels and the Place Royale. The arrival of Belgium's King-elect was again the signal for long cheering to which, by a sign, the President of the Congress put a stop. Turning to the King, who had taken a seat to his right, the President addressed him in the following words : "Sire, we have assembled here to-day in order to receive your oath as prescribed by the Constitution. I shall at first, however, ask the Regent to resign his power into the hands of Congress." Count Vilain XIV then read the Constitution, and Nothomb handed the King the formula of the oath. The crowd was now hushed, and in breathless silence was awaiting to hear the King speak. In a firm voice Leopold I took the oath. "I swear," he said, "to observe the Constitution and the laws of the Belgian people, and to maintain the national independence and the inviolability of the boundaries." Scarcely had His Majesty pronounced these words when the crowds broke out into tremendous cheering. Fifty thousand people shouted, "Long live the King!" Belgium, like other nations, had a king, and the Belgian people were happy. The shouts were accompanied by the strains of music and the roar of cannons. Having signed the formula of his oath,

Leopold now mounted the throne and addressed himself for the first time to his people: "I have accepted the crown which you have offered me with the intention of fulfilling and carrying out a useful and noble task, namely, to uphold the institutions of a magnanimous people and to maintain its independence. I know no other ambition than that of seeing you happy. Proud of having become a Belgian through your choice, it will be my constant endeavour to be such by my policy. The Belgian nation has just gone through a crisis; may this day extinguish all hate and all bitter feelings of revenge. May the thought of it inspire all Belgians, the thought of a public, sincere union—and I shall be happy if I am able to contribute to such a beautiful result. I hope to serve to you as a guarantee of peace and prosperity—but man's proposals may fail. If, in spite of so many sacrifices, we should nevertheless be threatened with war, I shall not hesitate to appeal to the courage of the Belgian people—and I hope that the nation will follow its leader to defend the country and the national independence."

And again the people cheered, for Leopold had gained the hearts of the people and had conquered Belgium—he had established the dynasty of the Coburgs in the newly created kingdom.

The King's speech, the acclamations of the crowd, the incidents of the day, the fête in the evening, the many enthusiastic speeches and congratulations, and, above all, the absolute confidence of four million men, happy in being able to honour, in the head of their nation, the sign of their reconquered independ-



From a photograph

THE ROYAL PAVILION IN THE PARK AT LAEKEN

ence—all these things crowned that 21st July, 1831, and gave good augury for the future. Peace might already be regarded as concluded.

But the King's position was far from being an easy one. The hostilities with Holland had suddenly broken out afresh. Holland dared to attack that united and resolute people which had just consecrated itself in a royal person, and which was protected by England and France.

The great deed of 21st July had exasperated the King of the Low Countries, and fifteen days after inauguration, the King suddenly learned that the Dutch invasion had begun. For several weeks the Dutch Government had been making formidable preparations for war. The King's son, the Prince of Orange—who seventeen years before had proposed for the hand of Princess Charlotte of England, been curtly refused, and seen Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg preferred to him—made warlike speeches to the troops in the camp at Ryen. Finally, a paper in the interest of King William, the *Journal de La Haye*, printed such manifestoes as this: "The crucial moment has come. . . . Let Saxe-Coburg enjoy a few more days of triumph, let him play on the Brussels stage the rôle of a comedy king! But when he hears the cannon of Holland, when he knows that his inauguration has been the signal of war, when, etc. . . . he will try in vain to conjure away the peril. Prince of Saxe-Coburg, it is too late! Without you, the affairs of Belgium would have been settled by the intervention of the Great Powers; now floods of blood and tears will flow because Saxe-

Coburg has tried to take his place on the throne of King William !”

This was the echo of the rage of King William and of the resentment of the Prince of Orange. He could not reconcile himself to the declaration of Belgian independence and the accession of Leopold. War was imminent. But the new King of the Belgians was ready for the emergency. He had made his military apprenticeship in the wars of 1814 and 1815, and he now placed his military skill at the service of his adopted country. In a solemn proclamation to the nation he declared, “Every one of us will do his duty. Belgian, like you, I shall defend my country.” And the King kept his word.

After the armistice imposed on the combatants by the London Conference, the citadel of Antwerp had remained in the hands of the Dutch, while the city belonged to the Belgians. On August 1st General Chasse, Commander of the citadel, notified the military commander of the city that hostilities would be recommenced on the 4th at 9.30 in the evening. This very day Leopold made his entry into Liège amid acclamations.

It was during these celebrations that he received the notification of General Chasse.

The King, undismayed, looked the danger in the face. The peril was great. The Dutch had an army ready made, that of the Belgians was still to be formed. If he had only had time to organise an army, perhaps the Dutch attack would have been very opportune. Such a war well carried out would have consecrated the new royalty. To march with his people against

the enemy and repulse the invasion would have been his real coronation. What could be done? Was he to expose himself to certain defeat, a defeat by which all would be lost, he who had just sworn to maintain the integrity of the national territory? Under such conditions rashness, even if heroic, would have the character of a crime. There was only one expedient to be adopted: it was his duty to call England and France to his aid; but then, he was a constitutional sovereign and could do nothing without his responsible counsellors, and none of his Ministers were with him! However, there was not a day to lose, not an hour, not a minute—the danger was pressing. The King called Lebeau, one of the Ministers of the Regent, and one of the founders of the Belgian monarchy, who had just resumed his post of Attorney-General at the Court of Appeal at Liège. Lebeau had been Minister the preceding week and could still be so if he wished. In the absence of his official counsellors, the King consulted him: “Are we in a condition to fight? Shall we demand the succour of the French army?” Lebeau agreed with the King; he also would have liked to see the Belgian army, under the command of Leopold, send the invaders back over the frontiers; but he knew that it would be playing too high. Assuming therefore the whole responsibility of the deed, he immediately wrote to the Belgian Ambassadors in Paris and London, Lebon and Van de Weyer, charging them in the King’s name to obtain the armed intervention of France and England.

“On August 4th at nine o’clock in the morning,”

writes Montalivel, "we were at the Council table. The latest news left no doubt as to the recommencement of hostilities. Louis Philippe spoke in the animated and often captivating way of happy or difficult days. A ray of youth lit up the features of the most liberal sovereign of his age, which, by a strange contrast, recalled those of his ancestor, Louis XIV of Absolutist memory. 'This morning, at five o'clock,' he said to us, 'I received a letter from King Leopold which calls France to the aid of Belgium. Let us not lose a moment if we do not wish to see Belgian independence mortally wounded by the capture of Brussels and the circle of fire of the fortresses constructed against France close round her. Let us hasten, then, to place her flag between Brussels and the Dutch army. I only ask, as a favour, that Chartres and Nemours shall be in the van and lose no chance of a shot.'" It was decided by the Council that an army of fifty thousand men should be sent to the aid of Belgium. Orders were immediately transmitted by the Maréchal Soult to General Gerard, appointed Commander-in-chief. At two o'clock Lebon was received for the first time by the King in his capacity of "plenipotentiary and envoy extraordinary of H.M. Leopold I, King of the Belgians." At four o'clock the *Moniteur*, in a special supplement, announced to Europe and France the instantaneous decision of the French Government. At 11.30 at night the King's two sons set out to join the army where the Duc d'Orléans and his young brother, the Duc de Nemours, aged seventeen, were placed at the front.

No time had been lost. However, susceptibility

about the national honour began to be manifested by the Belgian Ministers. Article 121 of the Constitution said expressly : "No foreign force may be taken into the service of the State or occupy or cross its territory except by virtue of a law." The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Muelenaere, less concerned by the danger of the country than by his own responsibility, considered the appeal to France as the violation of the fundamental law. He said this to the King in the most urgent way. One of the officials in his department, Charles White, sought Leopold in the General's quarters at Malines, and said to him : "Your Majesty, M. de Muelenaere begs you on his knees to prevent a measure that is contrary to the constitution and which may compromise the military honour of the country." Respect for the constitution and the scruples of military honour moved the King ; he gave way and wrote to General Gerard that he begged him to suspend his march.

Leopold gave this order on August 6th. On the 8th, after two days of conflict, the army of the Meuse, under the command of General Daine, was utterly routed, and on the 12th the army of the Escaut stood alone in the face of superior numbers and underwent a crushing defeat in the plains of Louvain. Fortunately for Belgium the French army had recommenced its march. The very Minister (Muelenaere) whose fatal counsels had inspired the King's letter of August 6th was on the 11th obliged to write to Van de Weyer : "France replied to our King's appeal with characteristic precipitation *that at first disconcerted us*, but on which we ought to con-



gratulate ourselves now. The French troops have arrived at Namur and Mons."

On the morning of the 13th the Belgian battalions appeared at Corheren and Tuerveren and confronted the Dutch. This was the end of the invasion; Belgium was saved. The Prince of Orange was forced to sign an agreement with General Lawoestine, representative of General Gerard: the Dutch army was immediately to begin its retreat and be followed by the French to the frontier. This programme was executed in detail; on August 20th, 1831, there remained not a single Dutch soldier on Belgian soil.

King Leopold had thus shown great courage. He had more than once been seen pushing forward to the most exposed points, and there, in the vanguard, leading forward the new troops. "He fought like a sub-lieutenant," said a French officer, a good judge of bravery, General Belliard. But he was not only praised for the ardour of a sub-lieutenant, but appreciated also as captain: several times he arranged the artillery, drew up the columns and directed every movement. "Without him," said General Belliard in a letter to General Sebastiani, "the Belgian army would have been annihilated." There were, in fact, many elements of destruction of which the King knew a part, having been obliged on August 5th to displace his War Minister, General de Failly; but he did not yet know in the midst of what treason he had displayed his heroism.

Despite the courage of the King, despite the ardour of the soldiers, whatever was the cause of the disbandment of the army of the Meuse on August 8th,

conquered Belgium could not recover favour in the sight of the London Conference. After this unfortunate ten days' campaign (4-14th August, 1831), brought within an inch of ruin and only saved by the arrival of the French, she had to expiate her defeat. The Conference could no longer impose on Holland the Eighteen Articles, by which the relations between the two countries had been fixed, as they were after the September revolution. These relations were changed. Conquered in September, 1830, Holland had been victorious in August, 1831; she had retreated, not before the Belgian cannon, but at the command of the two great powers whom she wished to keep friendly to her. Evidently the plenipotentiaries of Europe assembled in London ought to consider both the victory of Holland over the Belgians and her prompt deference to the will of Europe.

Baron Stockmar, in his *Denkwürdigkeiten*, throws some light on the history of the year 1831. King Leopold, he informs us, rather than undergo with Belgium the sort of disgrace resulting from her defeat, had seriously conceived the idea of abdicating.

At the beginning of August, 1831, Leopold sent Stockmar to London to examine the situation created by the news of the defeat of Louvain, and discover what was to be hoped or feared from the English Ministry and why England had lent no assistance in repulsing the invasion. Had the Cabinet of St. James's renounced its Belgian sympathies? So many questions and doubts tormented the King; whatever the truth was he wished to know it.

Stockmar, then, arrived in London towards the

end of August, and without losing a day went straight to Lord Palmerston. "I attacked him," he says, "with the first word. I told him that our confidence in the protection of England had been weakened. Before the sudden invasion of Holland we could not believe that England had been ignorant of that project, and that everything that had followed confirmed our suspicions. Since England had taken no direct part in the expulsion of the Dutch, it appeared clear to us that she was disposed henceforth to aid Holland against Belgium." This reproach of having known the plans of Holland Palmerston denied in such terms as removed Stockmar's suspicions. It was clear that the Cabinet of St. James's either knew nothing or, if informed of the approaching breach of the armistice, had refused to believe it. As for the general question, the English Minister treated it trenchantly, and said that the "Belgians have most clearly shown that they are unable to resist the Dutch. Without the help of France they would again have been put under the yoke. Both Belgians and Dutch, therefore, to live in peace must abandon some of their mutual pretensions. The Belgians can no longer pretend to the position assured them by the Eighteen Articles, any more than the Dutch can claim the old protocol of January to which they clung at the beginning of the fight. If the Belgians will make no concession, there is only one thing for us to do—absolutely to withdraw and say, 'So be it! We will permit the Dutch to finish their quarrel with the Belgians alone. Arms will decide.'"

Stockmar adds, in his *Memoirs* : "To this terrifying conclusion of Palmerston I said not a word, but I thought to myself in silence that even if four of the great powers could desire and aid such a thing, it would be impossible for France ever to consent to the conquest of Belgium by Holland."

But the menaces of Lord Palmerston were not to be realised; the wisdom of the Belgians, as well as the policy of Louis Philippe, prevented this danger. It was a question of limitation of her territory to the south-east, that is, of Limburg and Luxemburg; Belgium, after her unfortunate August campaign, was on the point of losing part of what had been accorded to her on this point by the Eighteen Articles. Suppose that the matter could not be settled, that Holland took arms and France came to the succour of Belgium in spite of the disapprobation of the four powers, there would be a general war, and the reaction throughout Europe would benefit by it.

Stockmar, in his *Memoirs*, also informs us that one of the friends of King Charles X, the Baron de Damas, who knew a good deal at that time of the situation in Holland, eagerly desired such a European war, hoping that the victory of the four powers would bring about, with the reconstitution of the kingdom of the Netherlands, the return of the eldest branch of the Bourbons to the throne of France. Thus there were divers interests at stake. England, who had refused, after 1815, to enter into the combination of the Holy Alliance, could not join it after 1830, and especially not under Whig administration.

There were, in fact, two very distinct ideas : the

two principal friends of the Belgian kingdom, King Louis Philippe and Lord Palmerston, had not the same programme. Louis Philippe loyally desired a neutral and independent Belgium, established as a moral barrier between France and the northern powers; but Lord Palmerston feared that she might be so under French influence as to become in some sort a French province. And yet Palmerston, disquieted and displeased by France, persisted in his desire for the marriage of King Leopold with one of the daughters of Louis Philippe. He had this idea not only in January, 1831, but he also returned to it still more earnestly in September, when the French army stood in Belgian territory as a liberator.

From Stockmar's Memoirs we learn that the affairs of Belgium, in the year 1831, were singularly complicated, and the peace of Europe hung on a thread. A false step might destroy all. By force of saying to King Leopold: "Courage! Do not grow weary; do not lose confidence in your cause!" By force of saying to him: "The English abandon you, France alone will defend you, continue to treat her as if she were in good faith"—Stockmar was on the point of crushing the courage he invoked! King Leopold I therefore conceived at this date the idea of abdicating!

But it was Stockmar who dissuaded him from such a step. He repeated the opinion of Lord Grey, a good judge as to political dignity and Parliamentary correctness. "I see nothing," said Lord Grey, "in the personal situation of the King, nothing in the oath he has taken, nothing in the Belgian

Constitution to prevent him immediately signing the Treaty of October 15th." Stockmar made good use of the authority of this speech. Lord Grey was a master of constitutional casuistry, and in questions of honour was as scrupulous as the King himself; and scrupulous and experienced as he was, he saw in the abdication of the King of Belgium the greatest danger for Europe, the most harmful prejudice to the character and position of the King. And Leopold gave way. It requires some courage to renounce a crown and a throne. The King of the Belgians accepted the Treaty of 15th October, grievous though it was to the country, and forced the Belgian Parliament to accept it by threatening to dissolve the Chamber of Representatives if it were rejected. An appeal to the electors, and in case the electors returned the same majority the immediate abdication of the King, such was Leopold's plan. This fatal crisis was spared Belgium. On November 1st the Chamber of Representatives, by fifty-nine votes against thirty-eight, accepted the treaty; and on the following day the Senate confirmed the vote by thirty-five votes against eight.

Thus the Belgian kingdom had at last been established. Belgium was declared neutral, was compelled to give up one portion of Luxemburg and retain the other only in exchange for a part of Limburg. In paying the common debts, her part was arbitrarily fixed at 8,400,000 florins.

Leopold, however, was not quite serious in his threats of abdication. Kings do not so quickly abdicate even in positions much more critical than that of

the first King of the Belgians. One need only think of the anecdote told of Alexander I of Russia, as well as of Leopold II. "Sire," some one said to the Tsar, "I am a Republican." "So am I, but my profession is against it."

Leopold I remained on the Belgian throne. Holland, it is true, had not yet signed the Treaty of 15th November, 1831. Even after the ratification of this treaty by Austria, by Prussia, by Russia, even after the marriage of King Leopold I and the Princess Louise, even after the siege and capture of Antwerp in December, 1832, William I, alone against all the powers, persisted in his refusal. As he could have been compelled to yield and yet was humoured, he thought fortune might return to his side. He adopted what his courtiers named "the plan of perseverance." He stuck to it for more than six years. Finally, conquered by the ever-increasing urgency of the London Conference, but conquered above all by the opinion of the country, weary of this senseless resistance, he gave way in 1838, and submitted to conditions that were objectionable in quite a different way from those of 1831. He gave way, the old King, weary, harassed, longing for repose, and two years later, having curiously enough married a beautiful Belgian countess, a Catholic, whom he could not make Queen of Holland, he abdicated, retired into Prussia, and died there (1840-3).

CHAPTER V

THE PARENTS OF LEOPOLD II—MARRIAGE OF KING LEOPOLD I

LEOPOLD I's position, however, was still a very difficult one. Belgium was a rising state, and the chief magistrate's duty was to watch continually and assiduously over its welfare. Leopold had to be careful and avoid either offending the susceptibilities of France or awakening the jealousy of England. The Duke of Wellington and the Court of the Tuileries had both to be flattered and their friendship maintained. It was not sufficient to have had the independence of Belgium recognised by the European powers. This independence should also be respected—and this was no easy task.

The question of a marriage between Leopold I and a daughter of Louis Philippe had for some time been discussed by Belgian politicians, and the King's confidential agent, Stockmar, had pointed out its necessity in one of his dispatches dated September 2nd. "I am of opinion," writes Stockmar in his Memoirs, "that to oppose the French intrigues which are being put into play against us here, in Belgium and even at the French Court, we have only one way, and that is the immediate promise of Louis Philippe to consent to a marriage."¹ Gande-

¹ Stockmar, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, p. 186.

bien, the Belgian envoy, had endeavoured to ascertain the real views of the King of France on this matter, but the latter only replied evasively: "I have known Prince Leopold for a considerable time; he is a handsome cavalier and a perfect gentleman, very well educated and learned. The Queen, too, is aware of his qualities and merits, which she highly appreciates, but there are, perhaps, some prejudices which stand in the way of this proposed union." In reality the French royal pair were afraid of the dangers which still surrounded the Belgian throne. The party of the Orangists was still powerful, and the political situation seemed full of intricacies. Moreover, King Leopold was a Protestant, and the Queen of France, as a devout Catholic, could scarcely look with equanimity upon a union of her daughter with a Prince who was not a son of the Church. To obviate the difficulties and overcome the obstacles, King Leopold promised to educate his children in the Catholic faith and to allow his wife frequent visits to the Court of France. The obstacles had gradually been overcome, and in May, 1832, the *Temps* at last announced that the marriage between the King of the Belgians and the eldest daughter of their French Majesties had been decided upon. This union, added the paper, will be almost a love match, on the side of King Leopold at least, for he had already loved this Princess before he had ascended the Belgian throne.

Leopold paid a visit to the French Court at Compiègne, and the 9th of August—being the anniversary of the accession of Louis Philippe to



LOUIS PHILIPPE
KING OF THE FRENCH



BARON STOCKMAR

the throne of France—was fixed as the date of the marriage.

Twice already Leopold had been a guest of the Orléans family. In June, 1826, when leaving his residence at Claremont to go to Germany on a visit to his mother, he passed through France, and on that occasion went to Neuilly to see the Duc d'Orléans who, in consequence of the July revolution four years later, became King of France. Then, three years later, in 1829, when England, France and Russia had offered Prince Leopold the throne of Greece, he again visited France so as to ascertain for himself the sentiments of the Court of the Tuileries on the matter. On this occasion he was again hospitably received by the family of Louis Philippe—whose acquaintance he had made as early as 1816 at Twickenham and with whom he had many ideas in common. This community of sentiments had established and cemented a sincere and long-lasting friendship between the two princes. It was during this second visit that the Prince had cast his eyes upon Princess Louise, who was then eighteen years old. The sentiments of his illustrious visitor were not unknown to Louis Philippe, and already the marriage of the royal pair was contemplated.

When Leopold ascended the throne of Belgium his marriage with a daughter of the King of France was an event devoutly desired by the entire nation. The people were quick in understanding that the bonds uniting the two royal families who had emerged from the commotions of July ought to be made closer and strengthened by family ties.

On the 6th of August the King of the Belgians arrived at Compiègne. He was in an open carriage in which were also the Dukes of Orléans and Nemours, whilst in the other carriages were the Duc de Choiseul and the Marquis de Marmier, who had come to meet Leopold at the frontier, and the other members of his royal suite. Feasts and general rejoicings marked the two days preceding the marriage ceremony, which was solemnised on Thursday, August the 9th.

At half-past eight in the evening the civil marriage was celebrated in the cabinet of the King by Baron Pasquier, President of the Chamber of Paris. The witnesses for the King of the Belgians were Comte d'Aerxuot, Member of the Senate, and Comte Felix de Mérode, Member of the Chamber of Deputies. Four peers and four Members of the Chamber of Deputies were the witnesses for the Princess. When the two contracting parties had pronounced the formula of consent prescribed by the law, Baron Pasquier said, "By order of the King and in the name of the law we declare the mighty and excellent Prince Leopold, King of the Belgians, the first of that name, Duke of Saxony and Prince of Coburg-Gotha, and the mighty and excellent Princess Marie-Louise-Therèse-Caroline-Isabelle, Princesse d'Orléans, united in wedlock."

One of the vast *salons* of the castle was changed for the occasion into a chapel, and the Bishop of Meaux gave the nuptial benediction according to the Catholic rite. Immediately afterwards the royal family proceeded into an adjoining room where the

marriage ceremony was repeated with Lutheran rites. Four days later the King and Queen of the Belgians returned to the land over which they had been destined to rule. And from Compiègne to the castle of Laeken their journey was a triumphal march. The enthusiasm of the people in town and village alike was great, and citizens and villagers vied with the official authorities to give the royal pair a right royal welcome.

The character of the Queen was such as to inspire with unstinted love and affection the nation among whom she had to live. Louise was born in Palermo on April 3rd, 1812, where the Orléans family was dwelling in exile. She had been endowed by nature with a tender heart and religious fervour. All her actions bore the stamp of a nobility of character—and rarely did she omit the opportunity of relieving misery and drying the tears of sufferers. Belgium was happy, the heart of a nation was beating in unison with those of their sovereigns, for the tie which had been consecrated at Compiègne guaranteed the consolidation of European peace and the recognition of Belgian independence.

Comte Felix de Mérode relates in his Memoirs the reception accorded to the new Queen by the Belgian people: "My wife, accompanied by Madame de Massa, had gone as far as Tournay to meet Her Majesty the Queen. The nation was literally transported with joy at seeing their Queen, who was introducing the Catholic religion into the dynasty. I myself, together with my daughter and Mademoiselle de Steinhault, was in an open carriage on the road which traverses the village of Mollenbeek. Their

Majesties were approaching Aucterlicht, when the acclamations of the crowd announced to us their arrival. They soon passed us, and I caught a glimpse of the Queen. Her complexion was white and rosy, and her figure bore a family likeness to the two houses of which she was the issue. She had the features of the Bourbons, whilst her blonde hair and her general deportment reminded me of the Archduchesses."

A picturesque crowd of peasants in their national costumes had gathered in the capital to celebrate the happy event of the royal marriage. The Queen was soon called upon to figure in an imposing ceremony which marked the first days of the establishment of a national monarchy. On the 27th of September, in the Place Royal at Brussels, there took place the distribution of banners of honour accorded by the Government to those communities who had come to the rescue of the capital in the days of September, 1830.

The King, accompanied by the Queen, presided at this ceremony, and on this occasion he pronounced the following words: "These beautiful provinces which are now united for the first time as an independent monarchy will no longer shed their blood nor waste their wealth in the service of a cause foreign to their interests. You will, however, fight, if necessary, with the old courage for that nationality which is dear to you, and thus prove to the whole of Europe that a nation which cherishes its independence is ready to defend it at any cost, any price and any sacrifice—will not easily be subjugated."

Belgium had greeted with outbursts of enthusiasm the arrival of the new Catholic Queen, but the joy of the nation reached the summit, when, on July 24th, 1833, 101 cannon shots announced to the capital, the nation and Europe, that a prince and heir to the throne had been born to the King. This joy, however, was soon afterwards changed into mourning, for the Prince was carried off by death on May 16th, 1834.

A consolation, however, was granted to the royal pair and to the country when the Queen gave birth to another male child on April 9th, 1835, the Duke of Brabant, afterwards King Leopold II. Joy again entered the hearts of the nation, and the happy event was celebrated by peasant and noble alike, in palaces and hamlets. Belgium was prospering and happy, and upon the cradle of the Duke of Brabant were showered the vows of an entire nation and the congratulations and praises of foreign courts.

"The people," wrote the King in a letter to his sister-in-law, "are happy and content." Rarely did one see a country, after a revolution, in such a prosperous condition. In a word, Europe had to admit that she need not regret having granted independence to Belgium—the people and the sovereign proved worthy of it.

CHAPTER VI

LEOPOLD I AS RULER

A NEW, peaceful era had been inaugurated for Belgium, under the rule of a really constitutional monarch. The prosperity of the country increased, industry and commerce flourished, and the liberal institutions established in 1830 triumphed over party differences. Leopold I, by his tact and the faithful observance of the Constitution—of which he considered himself the guardian—gained the confidence of the people, and thus the nation was on his side in the troubled days of 1848, when revolution again swept over Europe and many sovereigns trembled on their thrones. “If it is the will of the people,” said Leopold I, “to change the monarchic form of government into a republic, I shall not oppose them, but if they wish to retain the constitutional throne, I shall defend it to the last extremity.” And the nation showed clearly and unmistakably whither their inclinations tended. The people stood firm to the King whom it had voluntarily chosen in 1831, and not only were Belgian monarchy and independence strengthened in 1848, but European sympathy with the people and the King greatly increased.

The sudden fall of Louis Philippe, King of France, became the signal for twenty other political upheavals.

Throughout Europe the tide of revolution swept over the people, thrones were tottering and dynastic families trembling. From the Pyrenees to the Oder the European Continent was in a state of agitation and fermentation. It seemed as if Belgium alone remained calm in the midst of the storm-tossed waves of revolutionary Europe. Political parties put aside their differences for the moment and united their efforts to defend their common interests and to stand by the Constitution of 1830. This attitude of Belgium, which remained faithful to her King and Constitution, gained her the esteem of Europe.

Holland was the first to give expression to her sympathy for her former foe—and the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out the advantages which would be derived from an amiable understanding between the Government of the Netherlands and that of Belgium. In 1848–9 Metternich came to Brussels, and he too was full of praise for the attitude of Belgium. “Had we known you better in 1831,” he said, “we should have granted you better conditions, but we looked on you as upon people difficult to be ruled! The way, however, in which Belgium is making the best of a Constitution, which is almost impracticable and would be the worst in Europe, had there not been the Constitution of Norway, now proves to me that the Belgians are a people easily ruled.” The bloody days of June, 1848, had produced a profound impression upon King Leopold, but never for a moment did he lose his faith in the Belgian people. And when calm had at last been restored in Europe King Leopold consecrated all his efforts to consolidate

the noble and independent position acquired by his adopted country. He was a firm believer in the union of diverse parties, and he constantly endeavoured to keep out all irritating questions from the political arena.

On September 25th, 1850, were laid in Brussels the foundations of a monument commemorating the National Congress, which in 1831 had fixed the destinies of the nation. In the evening the King entertained in the Palais de la Nation all the remaining members of that august assembly. But there was a sad note in this festive national gathering. The Queen was absent. She had been in indifferent health ever since the 24th of February, 1848. The emotions aroused by the revolutions, her anxiety for her family, the blows which followed in quick succession, had been too much for her.

But the King was still hopeful of seeing her restored—and indeed he was quite convinced that she would survive him. Thus he submitted to the Chambers the question regarding the matrimonial conditions fixed in 1832. He wished them to settle in advance the pension for the Queen, in case of his death. But the Belgian Deputies replied that the King need have no anxiety on that account. The Belgian Government would always take great care in assuring to the mother of their Princes an existence worthy of herself and of the country. If it were ever possible to enhance the sympathy of which Her Majesty the Queen was the object, it was sure to take place if such an event as the King alluded to were to happen. But the exile of her family from the Tuileries and

at last the death of Louis Philippe gave the Queen the final blow. She was one of the indirect innocent victims of the Revolution of 1848.

On the 2nd of December, 1851, the *coup d'état* took place in France which destroyed the republican institutions and concentrated the dictatorship in the hands of Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. King Leopold was not surprised at the issue of the struggle. He had watched with careful attention the strife engaged in between the legislative assembly and Louis Napoleon, President of the French Republic—and had no doubt as to its issue. But the grave event of the *coup d'état* caused a general alarm in Europe. All those who remembered the First Empire and considered the new Dictator as the heir to the aggressive and conquering policy of Napoleon I had cause for uneasiness. The peace of Europe was being threatened. The change of government greatly concerned Belgium—who remembered the days of 1815.

It was, therefore, of paramount importance for the King to know exactly the sentiments of the French Government with regard to Belgium.

Leopold dispatched M. H. de Brouckère, who was on the point of returning to his post of Ambassador at Turin, to Paris. In an audience which Napoleon granted him the Emperor expressed his formal intention to maintain peace abroad and to strengthen the bonds of friendship already existing between France and Belgium. And Leopold himself encouraged and reassured his people. On the 1st of January he pronounced the following words: "Belgium possesses institutions animated by the spirit

of liberty and freedom. She has made use of them with prudence, and never exaggerated the application of these institutions. We are entering upon a new era, and I have no doubt that the same spirit of prudence will guard Belgium and help her to overcome the difficulties which may arise. She will keep her distinguished position which she is now occupying among the nations." And to keep up this position Leopold concentrated all his efforts.

Thus, thanks to the harmonious efforts of King and people, Belgium had consolidated herself and become one of the model states of Europe.

With great wisdom the Government triumphed over internal and external difficulties.

It will be necessary to say something about the character of Leopold I, many of whose characteristic traits had been inherited by his eldest son, Leopold II. He was very economical and parsimonious. Though, on ascending the Belgian throne, he had renounced the yearly pension of £30,000 accorded to him by the English Parliament, his love of money was great. In spite of his gentle nature he was often obstinate and even lacking in consideration. These traits, however, only manifested themselves in small things, in great and important matters he was always the prudent diplomatist, who bowed to *force majeure* in all circumstances. Leopold I was the first monarch who paid due consideration to the logic of fact. After the *coup d'état* in France in 1852, whilst the other sovereigns shook their heads and turned up their royal noses at the *parvenu* on the banks of the Seine, the King of Belgium at once entered into friendly

relations with Napoleon and used his influence with the Queen of England and Lord Palmerston in favour of the new Sovereign of France. This attitude, on the part of Leopold, explains the reason why Napoleon III was so quickly recognised by the English Court. On the other hand, Leopold had thus disarmed the French Emperor and prevailed upon him to acknowledge the incorporation of the French provinces in the Belgian kingdom.

I said that Leopold I, as his son afterwards, loved money and he accumulated and hoarded up treasures. He left a fortune of about 100,000,000 francs (£4,000,000 sterling). In this respect fortune always smiled on him. When he visited Vienna in 1853, to choose a bride for his son, he bought a share in one of the Austrian lotteries which won him 200,000 florins.

Leopold I was a keen observer, firm and moderate in character, prudent and far-seeing. The many difficulties he had encountered during his life, the vicissitudes he had passed through and his knowledge of men had destroyed his illusions of power. He looked upon it only from a philosophical point of view, and wished for it, as he used to say, only in order to be able to do good. His varied experience and his calm reason made him a model constitutional monarch. He had been successful in maintaining peace abroad and in procuring to the nation which had called on him to accept the throne a prosperous reign which lasted thirty-five years. His example also helped a great deal towards the triumph of the constitutional monarchic system which hitherto people

had imagined was suitable only for England. Europe had grown accustomed to look upon him as her Justice of the Peace and did not hesitate to place before him the most difficult and complicated questions, demanding his advice and abiding by his decision.



From a painting

LEOPOLD THE SECOND AT THE AGE OF SIX

CHAPTER VII

BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF LEOPOLD II

ON the 9th of April, 1835, 101 cannon shots announced to the Belgian capital and to the country at large that a Prince, an heir to the throne, had been born. National flags were hoisted on all public buildings and joy entered the hearts of the people. The dynasty which had just been established was assured for the future. Belgium had not only a King for herself, but also a national Prince, born on the national soil, to succeed the present ruler. The happy event produced manifestations of joyous excitement all over the country. The young Prince received in baptism the names of Leopold-Louis-Philippe-Marie-Victor, and in 1840 the King conferred on him the title of Duke of Brabant.

Thanks to the wise guidance of his father and the loving care of his mother, the Heir Apparent to the throne received a thorough and careful education. Both the Duke of Brabant and his brother, the Count of Flanders, as well as their sister, Princess Charlotte, the unhappy Empress of Mexico, *the tragic widow*, as she is called, were brought up in the simplest manner and taught to behave in exactly the same civil way to others, and especially their elders, as if they had been children of simple citizens and not princes and princesses.

Leopold, Duke of Brabant, under the guidance of his father and the latter's friend and adviser, Baron Stockmar, was taught everything that was calculated to make him fit and well prepared for the task of government and to enable him to discharge his duties satisfactorily. No department of knowledge—financial, administrative and military—was left untouched, and the quick intelligence of the Prince mastered them all.

In a letter, addressed to the tutor of the royal Princes and written from Buckingham Palace on July 28th, 1848, the King gave the following instructions regarding the education of his sons :—

“My dear Lieutenant-Colonel,

“Having had little time to give you a few verbal explanations, I hasten to write them to you. It is absolutely necessary that the children, especially Leopold, should manifest concentration, even in small details of ordinary life. As the children are very observant and notice everything that is said in their presence, one must be very prudent, and things they ought not to know should not be mentioned in their presence.”

The King further expressed the wish to develop in the children the sentiment of duty, and not to allow them to have an opinion of their own with regard to their duties or their studies. Whatever may have been said against such an endeavour to crush the individuality of the Princes, the King was, to a certain extent, right. He knew that a throne is always surrounded by people only too eager to flatter



From a photograph

THE EX-EMPRESS CHARLOTTE OF MEXICO

and cringe to the so-called superman on the pinnacle of power. To inculcate into the mind of the Prince, from his early childhood, the idea that he is unlike other children, is to render him the worst possible service—the consequences of which would be felt by himself and the country alike in after years. Leopold II's popularity as king was perhaps due to the educational guidance of his clever father. And the Duke of Brabant, although a royal prince and Heir Apparent to the throne of Belgium, was, after all, a child like other children. He studied and was attentive, but he had his moments of laziness when he preferred play to work. And in a letter written to him by his mother in 1849, that is, when he was fourteen, she gently rebuked him for having been so lazy, as the report of the instructor informed her. Nevertheless, King Leopold as Duke of Brabant made good use of his studies, for he spoke fluently—apart from Dutch and Flemish—German, French and English. He owed his knowledge of French to the teaching of the famous author, Henri Conscience, who was also his professor of Dutch. Among his other teachers were Baron Prisse, General de Lannoy, A. Scheler and de Closset.

The Duke's military education had been entrusted to a sergeant-major of the Grenadiers. The following incident is characteristic of the education which the Duke of Brabant received :—

He was only thirteen when one day he went out alone for a ride on horseback round the palace of Laeken. His horse, for some reason or other, suddenly bolted, and unable to control the animal, the

heir of the Belgian throne was in danger of being thrown out of his saddle and perhaps killed.

Luckily a stable-boy suddenly perceived the danger which His Royal Highness was running, and courageously throwing himself against the horse, succeeded in seizing the bridle and bringing the animal to a stop. Leopold quickly descended, and as soon as he had set foot on the ground he addressed his rescuer :—

“What is your name, my brave man ?”

“Wauters, Your Royal Highness.”

“Good ! I shall not forget you and your brave action.”

And neither as Duke of Brabant nor as king did he forget the humble groom who had saved his life. Until his death, in 1890, the stable groom remained in the service of Leopold II, and when he grew old and could no longer carry out his duties, he was appointed guardian of the left wing of the Royal Palace at Brussels, which is only used for the accommodation of foreign monarchs.

The gratitude of the King as well as of the Queen was extended also to the wife of Wauters and to their orphaned little granddaughter, who was sent to school and educated at the expense of the royal pair.

And yet we shall have occasion to see later on how, in one instance at least, Leopold II proved almost cruelly ungrateful and left a man who had served him well to die in want, misery and obscurity. I am referring to Gautier, but must not anticipate.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH OF QUEEN MARIE LOUISE

THE Duke of Brabant was only fifteen when he lost his mother—that mother who had watched over his early youth and education with loving indulgence and affection, and whom the Belgians had named *L'Ange des Belges*.

For more than two years the Queen of the Belgians, attacked by an incurable malady, had been slowly dying. The February revolution had struck her a mortal blow. That sudden catastrophe, the bad news, the anguish of uncertainty, a father, a mother, brothers, sisters, the whole royal family, from the grandfather to the grandchildren, exposed to such perils—what anguish for the daughter of King Louis Philippe and Queen Amélie! This emotion killed her; she only recovered for instants to relapse into a worse condition. These alternations of amendment and relapse lasted long enough to kindle a little hope. When the King her father died at Claremont on August 26th, 1850, it was an added and terrible shock. However, despite grave symptoms, those who loved her continued to be sanguine. Queen Louise was scarcely thirty-two years old. They believed—compelled themselves to believe—that the patient was only suffering from general weakness, as her health had grown worse immediately after the death

of Louis Philippe, and Leopold installed her at Ostend, hoping that the fresh sea breeze would invigorate her. Alas! it was in vain. The days of the Queen were numbered. Gradually the disease, which for two years had been undermining her health, increased. Hope was dispelled—death was holding the victim in its grip, and soon the sad news spread through the country, shedding gloom over the population.

The fatal disorder finished its work; there remained only a feeble flicker to be extinguished. They had to recognise that there was no hope. The august exiles of Claremont and Twickenham, almost the day after the blow had fallen, assembled at her deathbed. Queen Marie-Amélie, Princess Clémentine, the Duchesse d'Orléans, the Duc de Nemours, the Prince de Joinville, the Duc d'Aumale, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, with King Leopold and the children surrounding the sick-bed, could give to the sorrowing soul ready to depart the final consolations and the last benediction. On Friday, October 11th, at 8.10 in the morning, after a struggle that lasted a little over four hours, the good Queen Louise passed away. She held the King's hand; her mother was at her side, her children, her brothers, her sisters, kneeling by the bedside, wept and prayed. She had expressed the wish to be buried in Laeken, and her request was religiously observed. From Flanders and Brabant crowds had flocked to Ostend to pay homage to the mortal remains and the memory of a noble Queen.

Louise d'Orléans left three children, Prince Leo-



QUEEN LOUISE-MARIE OF BELGIUM
KING LEOPOLD'S MOTHER.

pold, Duke of Brabant (the late King Leopold II), born in Brussels April 9th, 1835; Prince Philip, Count of Flanders, born at the castle of Laeken on March 24th, 1837; and the Princess Charlotte, born at Laeken June 7th, 1840, who became afterwards the Empress of Mexico.

The spontaneous mourning of the country told its own tale. When the funeral procession, leaving Ostend on the morning of October 14th, slowly took its way towards Brussels, everywhere, in the towns and villages, the respectful crowd thronged about its passage.

In the humble chapel of Laeken where she had chosen her tomb, in the imposing ceremony at Saint Gudule, by the messages of great public bodies as well as by popular manifestations, national affliction was singularly eloquent.

The Prince Consort of England, in a letter addressed to Baron Stockmar the day after the fatal news, wrote :—

“The calamity that I feared, and of which I expressed apprehension in my letter dated at Balmoral, has arrived; our poor uncle, for the second time in his life, is alone and desolate in the world. The descriptions of the last moments of our excellent aunt are extremely touching and prove how this noble nature, always ready to forget herself, to sacrifice herself, only to live for others, remained unchanged to her last breath. It would be superfluous to speak to you of the immensity of such a loss, for you will appreciate its consequences better than myself. The resignation of poor Queen Marie-Amélie

is admirable ; the affection and respect shown by Belgium to her who is no longer is a most encouraging spectacle.

“Victoria is profoundly afflicted. Her aunt was her sole *confidante*, her only friend by sex, age, education, sentiments, rank, everything, they were so exactly on the same footing, that a bond of friendship was formed between them spontaneously ; and it was a friendship of which Victoria could rightly be proud.

“I hope that this misfortune has not discouraged you, but will, on the contrary, aid and sustain you in defence of the grave interests that are yet in suspense. Our uncle will require you by his side ; we have need of your presence, your counsels, and your friendship in a thousand things of importance, not only to ourselves, but the whole family, to England and through her to the whole world.”

And Stockmar himself, who disliked Louis Philippe, a few weeks before the Queen’s death, wrote these words :—

“Ever since the entry of Queen Louise into the circle where I have held a place for so many years I have venerated in her, with profound conviction, the model of her sex. We say and we believe that a human being may be noble and good ; we do not say of the Queen that she may be, we know that she is and we know it with a certain knowledge. In her we may see every day a truth of sentiment, a faithfulness to duty which makes of the possible but rare nobility of the human heart a certitude for us. Personalities like that of the Queen of the Belgians are, in my eyes,

the surest guarantee of the perfection of the Being who created human nature."

It was not moral perfection only that people admired in Queen Louise; they had been so often struck by the sagacity of her intelligence and the sureness of her judgment, that politicians had every confidence in her conduct of any political rôle that she might fill.

"If the Belgians," writes an authority on the subject, "had had the misfortune to lose King Leopold I before the heir to the throne had attained his majority, the Queen, with her upright and loyal mind, sustained by the affectionate reverence that her virtues inspired, would have efficiently continued the work so well begun by her illustrious husband." It is to these sentiments that Prince Albert, Consort of Queen Victoria, alluded when he wrote to Stockmar: "It would be superfluous to speak to you of the immensity of such a loss, for you will appreciate its consequence better than myself."¹

The Queen had expressed the wish to be buried at Laeken—and Leopold religiously fulfilled her desire.

"God has glorified her," said Monseigneur De-champs, "and He has loved her so well, that He caused her to die in the other extremity of the kingdom, so that she should be borne across the country on the arms of the population to the last resting-place she had chosen and imprint in passing, on every heart, the impress of her holy life and holy death."

¹ Cf. Taillandier, *Le Roi Leopold I*, Paris, 1878, vol. II, p. 213.

CHAPTER IX

COMING OF AGE OF THE DUKE OF BRABANT

IN the spring of 1853, the Duke of Brabant, afterwards Leopold II, attained, with his eighteenth year, his majority, as fixed by the Constitution, and he was admitted as Heir Apparent to take part in the deliberations of the Senate. This occasion was celebrated with due solemnity—and when he formally took his seat in the august assembly, the Prince de Ligne, President of the Senate, addressed to him the following words: “There has been no more solemn and important day than the present, ever since the memorable epoch when your august father came among us to consecrate his life to the independence and the happiness of our country. From the manifestations throughout the kingdom, and from the attitude of the nation, you will gauge the interest we are taking in the present event. This will once more prove to Europe how deeply attached the Belgian people are to their constitutional monarchy, and to the dynasty which have taken such deep roots in the country. Time has already consecrated them, but to-day’s ceremony adds to their security and is a fresh guarantee for their maintenance in the future. You are the Heir Apparent to the throne, the son of a king who has set a noble example and been a model of faithfulness to his pledged word, and you



From a painting

THE DUKE OF BRABANT, AFTERWARDS
LEOPOLD THE SECOND

will one day be called upon to continue his noble traditions. Guided by his wisdom the way will be smoothed for you. The Senate will now receive the oath which your Royal Highness will take. You are about to be initiated into parliamentary life—our hearts are with you—our wishes accompany you. Your august mother, the late lamented Queen, looks down upon you from above and all Belgium is listening to you.

“Leopold, Duke of Brabant, Prince Royal, do you swear and promise faithfully to observe the Constitution?”

In a firm, loud voice, in the midst of the hushed silence of the assembly, the Prince replied, “I swear to observe the Constitution.”

And then, for the first time in his life, the heir to the Belgian throne publicly addressed the nation, as follows:

“It is with a feeling of deep emotion, gentlemen, caused by the speech of your honourable President, that I am taking my seat in your august assembly as prescribed by the Constitution. Called upon henceforth to take part in your deliberations, I shall work hand in hand with the Senate and support my colleagues in their endeavours. I have not yet been able to address the nation directly, but never shall I speak to the Belgians with more gratitude and devotion than at the present moment. The acclamations with which the Belgian people is greeting my entry into this Assembly prove once more that it is satisfied with its past, and that it is desirous of continuing on the same lines in the future. Such is the path, gentlemen, along which we ought to strive

with united efforts. As for myself, you know the sentiments which animate me. You know that I am sincerely devoted to the existence of the country and identify it with my own. You will always find in me a compatriot, happy and proud of his ability to contribute to the prosperity and to the strengthening of the independence of our country.

“Such has always been my ardent desire.

“May Heaven, which for the last twenty-two years has granted its support and protection to Belgium, listen to my prayers to-day.”

Leopold was proclaimed Senator, and the sitting was adjourned. The members of the Senate went in a body to offer their congratulations to the King on this solemn occasion, and the President pronounced the following words:—

“Sire, the Senate, happy to count to-day among its members His Royal Highness the Duke of Brabant, begs to offer you congratulations on this momentous occasion. Sire, never has a more solemn day, never a more national holiday been celebrated with such unanimous joy.

“There is no town and no hamlet which will not take part in the festivities. From the churches, the houses of the rich and of the poor alike, the same prayers will go up and the same expressions of homage are offered to your Majesty.

“These heartfelt expressions of a nation, this real *vox populi*, are the voice of God, who, we hope, will grant your Majesty many long years of happiness as King and as father.”¹

¹ *Moniteur Belge*, April 10th, 1853.

And M. Delfosse, President of the Chamber of Deputies, in addressing the King, said: "By becoming a member of the august assembly, composed of men full of enlightenment and patriotism, His Royal Highness will have an opportunity of seeing the Government at work, and will thus not only complete his political education, but also strengthen his love for our institutions."

"The entry of the Duke of Brabant into political life," wrote the *Indépendance Belge* on April 9th, 1853, "marks another consecration of the constitution established in 1830."

The Belgians still remembered that the absence of a national dynasty had been the cause of trouble in the past and of the vicissitudes and miseries through which the Catholic Netherlands had passed. Their joy was now great, for they possessed that which their fathers had so ardently desired, a royal house. They had seen the birth of the Prince and watched over his growth and education, and their hopes were centred in him as the guarantee of Belgium's independence and nationality. Hence the rejoicings with which the coming of age of the Heir Apparent was being celebrated throughout the country by all classes of the population. Patriotism and devotion to the dynasty made all hearts beat faster, and gave rise to manifestations of exuberant joy. The Duke of Brabant, to whom the people were transferring the gratitude they felt for the father—which, by the way, is the basis of all hereditary monarchy—was being honoured as the continuer of the policy of Leopold I. His people greeted him with enthusiasm, because

they looked upon him as the future pillar and support of a free and independent Belgium.

“The Prince, who is to-day the object of such a cordial affection on the part of the nation, has thus contracted a serious debt towards the nation. We are convinced,” writes the *Indépendance Belge*, “that he will never fail in his duties and that the noble confidence which the public has placed in him will never be deceived. The Duke of Brabant will give proof of the same spirit of loyalty which distinguishes so eminently his august father ; like the latter, he will manifest his profound attachment to the institutions which make the glory and the strength of this country. He will know how to defend them against everything and everybody, and as it is his duty to give us an example, he will, when the occasion arises, be the most valiant defender of a free and independent Belgium.”

“It is this conviction and certitude which lend to this day’s ceremony a really impressive and patriotic character.”

We shall see how far King Leopold realised the hopes centred round the Duke of Brabant.

Leopold, Duke of Brabant, did not take any active part in the discussions and deliberations of the Senate for the next two years, and only in 1855, on his return from the East, did he make his maiden speech, and henceforth take an active part in the affairs of the Government.

CHAPTER X

MARRIAGE OF THE DUKE OF BRABANT—HIS TRAVELS

IN the same year Leopold married Marie Henriette, a granddaughter of the Empress Maria Theresa, and a daughter of Archduke Joseph, Palatine of Hungary, and Marie Dorothea, Princess of Wurtemberg. In May, 1853, Leopold I had taken his eldest son on a tour through Germany, partly with a view to introducing him to the Courts of Europe and partly with the intention of making the acquaintance of some marriageable Princess, who would be willing one day to share with Duke Leopold the throne of Belgium.

The choice fell upon Marie Henriette. She was a beautiful and accomplished girl, barely seventeen, and whatever was to happen in the future, there is no reason to doubt the fact that at the time of his visit to the Austrian Court, Leopold, Duke of Brabant, fell in love with his beautiful bride. The young Princess, whose father had died in 1847, had lived very quietly and been brought up very simply. The Emperor Francis Joseph, as head of the Imperial family, gave his consent, and when the news of the engagement was made known great rejoicings were manifested in all quarters concerned. When the King first left Brussels people imagined that the sole purpose of his journey was the strengthening

of the ties of friendship existing between the two countries, Austria and Belgium, but as the object of the royal visit became known, and the news was officially announced to the Legislative Chambers, the country and the people were full of joy.

On the 13th of July, the Town Council of Ghent decided that the town should offer a robe of Ghent lace to the Duchess as a wedding present. The dress was made by the girls of the orphanage. On the 7th and 14th of August, the burgomaster of Brussels made a public announcement of the ducal marriage—for it was on the 14th that the Archduchess, accompanied by several members of her family and a numerous suite, left Vienna for her adopted country, the country over which she was one day to reign.

Marie Henriette was an Austrian Princess, and many were the formalities which had to be gone through before the marriage could be celebrated. By a solemn act, the Archduchess was obliged to renounce all her rights upon the succession to which she was entitled by her birth. This act accomplished, the marriage ceremony was celebrated by proxy at Schönbrunn on August 10th.

The Duke of Brabant was represented by the Archduke Charles Louis. On the 14th, the new Duchess of Brabant left Austria for her new home.

Marie Henriette travelled through Prague, Dresden, Leipsic, Weimar, Erfurt, Gotha, Eisenach, Giessen, Frankfort, Mainz—proceeding by boat as far as Cologne, and thence by train to Aix-la-Chapelle. On the 20th she arrived at Verviers.

The *Messenger de Bruxelles* relates the arrival of the



MARIE HENRIETTE, QUEEN OF THE BELGIANS

Duchess on Belgian soil, her reception and the ceremony accompanying it.

"It was half-past ten in the morning when the special train, consisting of nine carriages, arriving from Aix-la-Chapelle stopped at the Hotel Biolley. Lieutenant-Colonel Goethals was there to receive the Duchess and conduct her to her apartments. She was in a travelling costume, but the suite had already donned their brilliant uniforms, and the people of Verviers, who were crowding the streets, roofs and balconies, greeted the brilliant cavaliers as they passed with shouts of admiration.

"Scarcely had this splendid cortège disappeared in the left aisle of the Hotel Biolley, when another train stopped at the gardens of the hotel. It brought King Leopold, the Duke of Brabant, the Count of Flanders, and the Princess Charlotte."

The civil marriage was celebrated at Brussels on the 21st of August, and the religious ceremony took place the next day.

The religious ceremony was celebrated at the Church of St. Gudule by the Archbishop of Mechlin, assisted by many bishops and several members of the high clergy.

Festivities and historical pageants were held all over the country in honour of the happy event. Alas, in spite of all good wishes and blessings showered upon the royal pair, the marriage did not turn out so prosperous and happy as the Belgian people had anticipated, as the future was to show. Neither Leopold's nor Marie Henriette's wedded life was one of unclouded happiness.

At first the Duchess of Brabant suffered keenly and bitterly at being separated from her mother, but the hearty welcome and the affection she met in her newly adopted country soon made her feel at home. For a while the Duchess of Brabant was happy, but the blows of fate soon shattered her peace, and the conduct of her husband dispelled her illusions. But of this we shall treat in a subsequent chapter.

King Leopold II had been a great traveller, and had perhaps travelled more extensively than any other European sovereign of his time. It would be unjust to say that his travels were undertaken simply for his own personal benefit and pleasures. Leopold travelled for Belgium, as a smart commercial employé travels for his firm. The firm is benefiting, whilst he himself comes in for a portion of the profits.

The knowledge and experience which the Royal traveller derived from his visits to foreign lands, and his acquaintance with foreign nations, their customs and civilisations, their politics and commercial and industrial prosperity, he made use of in the service of his country. And Belgium had little reason to complain, for whatever the detractors of the late King may say, whatever dirt Socialists and puritans may throw at the memory of Leopold II—who certainly deserved a good deal of blame—Belgium prospered under his rule, and gradually strengthened her independent position among the European nations.

Immediately after his marriage, the Duke of Brabant undertook an extensive tour, which lasted nine months.

MARRIAGE OF DUKE OF BRABANT 75

Under the title of the Viscount and Viscountess of Ardennes, the Heir of the Belgian throne and his wife visited Italy and Austria, Innsbruck, Vienna, Milan, Venice and Trieste, where they paid a visit to the painter Fiedler in his studio. They left Trieste for Egypt on January 28th, 1855. Alexandria and Cairo, where they were received by the Khedive, were full of interest for them ; thence they proceeded to Upper Egypt.

The ruins of ancient Thebes, Karnak and Luxor were visited, and the tombs of the Pharaohs seen by torchlight greatly impressed the royal couple.

Since the accession of Said Pasha as Viceroy of Egypt, the question of the Suez Canal had been frequently discussed, and the French engineer Lesseps was ultimately entrusted with the enterprise. As it may be imagined, the future sovereign of the Independent Congo State was greatly interested in the plan. On March 30th the ducal pair arrived in Jerusalem, where they remained for ten days. Damascus, Tripoli, Cyprus and the Asiatic coast were then visited, and they also paid a flying visit to Athens. There they were received with all due pomp by the King of Greece. It is interesting to reflect that the Prince was entertained in a town which narrowly missed being the capital of the realm over which he would one day have been called upon to rule had Leopold I accepted the crown of Greece. The royal couple then proceeded to Sicily, and in Palermo they visited the Palace, where the first Queen of Belgium, Louise Marie, was born. They sojourned in Naples, Turin and at the Italian lakes,

and returned to Laeken on August the 28th, having been absent since November, 1854—more than nine months.

As we are on the subject of Leopold's travels, let us finish their description, so as to avoid interrupting the thread of the narrative.

In March, 1860, the Duke of Brabant, alone this time, undertook another tour through Germany and Austria, on his way to Constantinople. He visited Vienna, Pesth, Bucharest, Belgrade and Galatz, and then proceeded to Beyrout and Constantinople.

Leopold went on a third voyage in March, 1862. This time he visited Spain and Morocco. Spain, at that time, still possessed fine colonies, and the future coloniser of the Congo was greatly interested in the study of the commercial relations existing between them. It was also natural that Leopold, the future King of the Belgians, should wish to make himself acquainted with the country which had played such a prominent part in the history of Belgium. He visited Barcelona, Valencia, Malaga, Gibraltar, crossed the sea for Tangiers and Morocco, and then returned to Spain.

Queen Isabella was at that time in Aranjuez, and the Duke of Brabant paid her a visit at her summer residence. He had scarcely returned to Madrid when he was suddenly summoned to Brussels on account of his father's illness. Towards the end of October, 1862, Leopold undertook another journey to Egypt, and in 1864 he went on his longest tour, for the purpose of visiting the Indies and even China. At Ceylon he had the gratifying pleasure of

being saluted by the guns of an Antwerp ship. He took a keen interest in all that concerned the industrial resources of the island and learned all that there was to be learned about the growing of coffee, cane-sugar and oil. In the English Indies he evinced special interest in the growing of tea. Having visited China, he returned to Belgium after an absence of six months.

When at home the Duke of Brabant continued his political education, taking an active part in the deliberations of the Senate and benefiting by the attitude and example of his father. The events of 1856 and 1857 gave him ample food for reflection, and contributed not a little to his later policy.

CHAPTER XI

JUBILEE OF LEOPOLD I—THE CRISIS OF 1857

IN 1856 the Duke of Brabant witnessed the triumph of his father, a triumph which was a reward laboriously and painfully won, loyally and conscientiously deserved, the harvest which was to ripen some day for himself and the country. Leopold I had not failed, as he knew, to fulfil the duties of his mission, and Leopold II must have already promised himself to follow the policy of his father.

Belgium celebrated with unexampled energy and affection the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the kingdom. "The history of modern times," writes a Belgian historian, "contains no such triumph. It was not one of those enthusiastic demonstrations that celebrate a particular event, however great and glorious it may be, as for instance, a national victory, the conclusion of an advantageous peace, the beginning of a desired new order, in short, an aurora, a sunrise, a promise of concord and prosperity, soon to be followed, perhaps, by disillusion and strife. No, it was not a day's celebration this time, and it was not a chance hope that excited transports. The same men who, in July, 1831, had received, in the name of the people, the oath of a freely elected King, came in July, 1856, to say to him before Europe and

the world, 'You have loyally kept your promise. The nation is proud and happy, after a quarter of a century, to express its gratitude to the King of the Belgians.'

Towards noon, on the 21st July, 1856, King Leopold rode out of Laeken Castle with his two sons, the Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders; accompanied on either side by a brilliant staff of officers. Enthusiastic cheering was raised the moment the royal procession showed itself in the avenue. An immense crowd lined the route from the castle to the town. Slowly, simply, royally, like a shepherd of nations in the midst of his flock, like the first citizen, like a president of a republic, like a father among his sons, the King, saluted with endless acclamations, traversed the friendly multitude and passed on to the triumphal arch where the representatives of the city awaited him.

It was here, in this place, that the keys of Brussels had been given to him on the day of the foundation of the kingdom. To-day again, as twenty-five years ago, the burgomaster, assisted by the aldermen and the communal council, was at his post to receive the sovereign magistrate. Then he bade him welcome, now he expressed the public gratitude. Then they saluted a hope, now they saluted both present and past, sure guarantees of the future. They saluted not only the present but also the future King. The King replied to the cordial words of the burgomaster in a voice of emotion; then he entered the city. What memories were magnificently evoked in the mind of the King, and what thoughts crowded the active brain

of the Duke of Brabant! He saw how attached the people were to his royal father, and it was natural that he should on the one hand promise himself to benefit by his example and on the other think of some deed by which he too would gain the hearts of his people. The crowd, the banners, the cries of joy, this triumph from which all dissentients were absent—it was the enlarged picture of what had happened a quarter of a century before along the same route. But the public delight seemed still more radiant and the sun more dazzling.

Finally, at one o'clock, the royal procession arrived at the square where Leopold I, in 1831, had taken his oath to the constitution. There was the Church of St. Jacques before which the platform had been raised. One thing in the ceremony has undergone a change. Here, in this square, the entire National Congress had been present at the baptism of the Belgian royalty. During these twenty-five years in this grand *mortalis ævi spatium*, many men have disappeared! As soon as the King perceived the men who had been here twenty-five years before, fewer in numbers but still faithful and the representatives of those who were no more, a profound emotion seized him. He stood bareheaded, the tears in his eyes, as if he saluted the country itself. "All the eye-witnesses affirm that there was something antique in the simplicity of this picture." The group of burghers were literally the *patres patriæ*. At the head of the veterans of the national cause appeared Gerlache, he, who on 21st July, 1831, had received the King's oath and had said to him, in the name of the Congress: "Your Majesty,

ascend the throne !” It was he again who was to greet the Sovereign and express the signification of this great scene. The King approached the steps of the church. There was a profound silence, and then Gerlache pronounced these words :—

“Your Majesty, it is twenty-five years since, in this very place, on this very day, the Belgian Congress received, in the name of the nation, Your Majesty’s oath ‘to observe the constitution and laws of the Belgian people, and to maintain the national independence.’ Those who were then witnesses of this solemn engagement have just affirmed to-day before Heaven that Your Majesty has fulfilled all these promises and exceeded all our hopes. And the whole nation, Your Majesty, has just affirmed it with us. It has just attested that during this reign of twenty-five years its King has violated none of its laws and given no legitimate cause of complaint to a single citizen. Here all disagreements disappear ; we are all in harmony, we have all but one heart to join together in a common love for our King and fatherland ! In the midst of disturbances that have upset so many Governments, Belgium has remained faithfully attached to her Prince and to the institutions that she has chosen. This fact, rare in our century, can only be explained by the good understanding between the King and the people, cemented by their mutual respect for their oaths and for the national constitution. A constitution that suffices for a people thirsting for liberty ; a people who love this constitution sufficiently to put up with its inevitable drawbacks ; a sensible, religious, moral people who remember their past and who only



demand to live in repose under the protection of their laws ; a prince so wise, so skilled, so diplomatic, who in the midst of diverging opinions has been able to gain the esteem and respect of everybody, in Belgium and abroad. Such have been, Your Majesty, the truly providential circumstances that have concurred to maintain and consolidate this new State, that have rendered it peaceable, prosperous and, we dare to hope, it is our final wish, of lasting stability !

“ It only remains, Your Majesty, to thank Heaven in the name of the country, and pray for the long continuance of your precious life and glorious reign, so as still further to assure the future of our country and to serve as counsel, example and guide to these young princes, the true children of Belgium, who will one day be called upon to continue the wise and noble traditions of the great reign of Leopold I.”

The Duke of Brabant, soon to be Leopold II, was thus greeted as the true child of Belgium, and whatever his faults—and they were many, if we view him as man, father and husband—he endeavoured to make true the epithet, “ Child of Belgium.”

Leopold I, suppressing his emotion, replied to this patriotic speech. This celebration was that of the National Congress of 1831. To glorify the National Congress was to glorify the country itself, so largely represented in that illustrious assembly.

Cleverly, diplomatically did the Sovereign extol the ancient and lasting moral feeling of the Belgian population, their profound sentiment of duty, their good sense, their practical intellect, their deference for

the paternal wishes of their King. Thanks to all these combined qualities, he said, the Belgians have instinctively comprehended the conditions of their political existence. With the cordial eulogy must not be forgotten the counsels and warnings. Union had been the strength to Belgium in triumphs as in misfortunes ; let her keep to this tradition, let her maintain and strengthen it ! “ Let us seal anew the alliance between the Nation and the dynasty of her choice. Let us strengthen the union of all the members of the great Belgian family in a common sentiment of devotion to our fair country. Let us bow down to the divine Providence that holds in its hands the destinies of nations, and that, in its impenetrable designs, has called to itself a beloved Queen whose absence alone renders incomplete the joy of this memorable day ! ”

This speech produced its effect upon the Duke of Brabant, who had thus ample opportunity to notice the modesty with which his father effaced himself when addressing the nation. Not a word of his personal efforts, no mention of what he had done gradually to disarm the distrust of a part of Europe. The President of the Council, Decker, who had aided Leopold in drawing up this speech, had inserted a passage in which the patriotic services of the liberal Monarch were worthily related. This is what the King would have said if he had accepted his Minister's draft : “ I dare to be witness to myself that I have had the good fortune to understand my people. I have respected their beliefs and traditions, I have defended their rights and

interests. Mediator between Belgium and Europe, I have succeeded in obtaining for my Government an honourable place in the counsels of the nations and in surrounding the Belgian name with universal and legitimate sympathy. Mediator between all classes, I have allowed the nation to develop freely all its vital forces, only constantly seeking, in the midst of its peaceful contests, to discover the true national tendency. In a word, I have loyally observed the engagements that I made in 1831: a Belgian by your adoption, I have made it my law to be always so in policy."

Assuredly nothing was truer, and neither in Belgium nor in Europe would any serious opinion have contested these words; the King thanked the Minister, but refused to speak them. The whole passage was suppressed.

The agitation which again broke out in Belgium in 1857, and the tumultuous scenes in the Parliament and Cabinet, gave the future King food for reflection, and did not a little influence his future policy and his attitude towards the Government. He learned how to favour in turn the Liberal and Catholic parties and avail himself of them for his own purposes.

It was May 27th, 1857. A hostile crowd occupied the approaches to the *Palais de la Nation*. The Chamber of Representatives was discussing a Bill that divided the Catholics and Liberals. The debate had lasted for four weeks, and initial disagreement had become bitter passion. The majority, favourable to the Catholics, had already passed three articles, and it was probable that the whole Bill would

pass. Then a part of the population rose. There was disorder outside as well as within the Chamber. The sanctuary of the legislature, hitherto so respected, was stained by acts of violence that recalled the stormiest times of revolutionary countries. While the greater number of the malcontents, in a menacing attitude, besieged and blockaded the *Palais*, the rest penetrated into the tribunes, where the tumult hourly grew greater. When the Deputies came out, the principal Catholic members were hooted by the crowd. The next day the same and even worse violences were committed; the Ministers were greeted with murmurs, the Papal Nuncio was insulted. The rebels were masters of the city and the agitation spread rapidly throughout the provinces. Leopold I had imagined that the scenes of the 27th were an outbreak that the police could easily put down; but the persistence and boldness of the manifestations on the 28th showed him that the danger was serious. At nine o'clock in the evening he left the castle of Laeken and came to Brussels to preside over a council of the Ministry. The same crowd who had hooted the majority of the Chamber in vain gave an ovation to the King, who was, however, profoundly annoyed. It was no longer a question of his person; it was a question of the honour of Belgium. At the Council he declared that they must first occupy themselves with the re-establishment of order, whatever effort they had to make. He would stop at nothing. If a state of siege was necessary, he would declare a state of siege. If he had to pay with his life, he would tread down the movement. "I shall take horse," he said.

“I will not let the national representation be oppressed. I will not let the majority be outraged.”

No one could have remained unmoved at hearing this King, always complete master of himself, so grave and so dignified, express himself in such vigorous terms. As he spoke his voice, his gesture, his look all revealed profound indignation. “It was a noble indignation, a noble and holy rage, for there had been no slight to himself, there was no egotistical sentiment, there was only the grief of a noble soul attacked in its confidence, humiliated in its work.” Then, suddenly, as if the idea of his personal intervention might seem opposed to true constitutional principles, meeting in advance the objection that he read in the eyes of his counsellors, he cried: “There is no longer any parliamentary system here, gentlemen, the parliamentary system is dead. You understand this, gentlemen, you understand that to-day, the 28th of May, an end has been put to the parliamentary system, the constitution has been violated?” And he continued more forcibly: “Yes, the constitution has been violated. I have kept my oath for twenty-six years. I have now been set free. Let them not forget it.”

Such were the attitude and the policy of Leopold I in critical moments, and such were the education and advice he gave to his son and heir, Leopold II. Leopold II was brought up in the political school of his father, he benefited by the lessons of his paternal teacher, and, as far as possible, he followed the policy of his father. Already, as Duke of Brabant, he manifested his political and diplomatic ability, and showed that he had the interests of Belgium at heart.

CHAPTER XII

THE DUKE OF BRABANT IN THE SENATE

THESE political occurrences, as has been pointed out, did not transpire without leaving an impression upon the mind of the future King. Leopold II was preparing himself for his reign by a profound study of the institutions, manners and needs of the country; he had insisted on closely and personally examining everything; no Belgian knew Belgium better than the young Prince for whom was reserved the task of one day guiding her destinies. He soon astonished the Senate, where he distinguished himself by the keenness of his intelligence, a tact that is given to few, affability, and an eloquence that would have made him one of the most remarkable speakers in the Parliament.

The speeches which the Duke of Brabant now made in the Senate, when he sat in that assembly as Prince Royal and heir to the throne, attested the maturity of his judgment as well as the ardour of his patriotism. They also testified that he was fully aware of the peculiar situation of Belgium. He knew that his father was the first king of a new dynasty and that it was his task, as the second king, to confirm that dynasty and, putting it on a surer footing, identify it with the country. What he desired above all things was progress, progress in arts, in letters, in industry, in com-

merce. He stimulated the first and gave encouragement to the last. In everything he kept in view the honour and prestige of Belgium, and never forgot the lessons of his father.

In the sitting of 29th December, 1855, after a rapid sketch of his journey to the East, he showed the advantages that would result from the establishment of a regular steamer service between Antwerp and the principal towns of the Levant. "The numerous observations that I have made during my last journey," he said, "permit me to affirm that the enterprise in behalf of which I speak is of a kind, if wisely directed, to make an epoch in the annals of commerce and consequently of the industry of our country. This result we all have at heart, and the Senate, as I remark with pleasure, has constantly endeavoured to attain it. For several months I have been travelling with particular care and attention first through Egypt, then along the coast of Syria and Asia Minor, through the Isles and Greece. I sought on the spot to determine what benefits could be derived from more frequent communication with those countries. All my information established this point: Such relations would present real and mutual advantages which the Egyptian Government recognises as well as myself. The Levant offers an excellent market for sugar, cloth, arms, nails, glass, etc. Unfortunately few efforts have been hitherto made to obtain possession of it. Our manufactures are not sent there directly, if they arrive at all. Far from competing with other nations we rely on their navies. Our products, often mixed with foreign cargoes, have lost, before arriving at

their destination, all stamp of nationality. Thus the Belgian name, it is necessary to confess, is completely unknown in the harbours of the East. The first step to take, therefore, is the establishment of a service of steam navigation such as England, France, Austria, Turkey and, I believe, Sardinia already possess. It is evidently the right thing to begin, as we have done, to establish routes of communication and show our flag. But it is no less urgent to increase the number of our consular agents and especially to pay them better. I do not hesitate to congratulate the Government on the agreement that it has concluded with the Antwerp merchants. The excellence of our products and the reasonableness of our prices give us the right to claim a large place in the markets of the world. A young nationality like ours should be bold, always progressing and self-confident. Our resources are immense. I do not fear to say that we can turn them to incalculable profit. *To succeed it is only necessary to dare.* That is one of the secrets of the power and splendour enjoyed for more than a century by our northern neighbours, the United Provinces. We undoubtedly possess as many of the elements of success: why is our ambition lower?"

This virile and patriotic eloquence burst forth again in the speech made by the Duke of Brabant, on March 11th, 1856, in honour of arts and letters. He expressed himself in these terms:—

"I have, gentlemen, several times had occasion to support, on this spot, Bills, sometimes for projects of national defence, that is to say, to assure the existence

of the nation in times of crisis and storm, sometimes to facilitate certain great commercial enterprises that will serve, I do not doubt, as a new stimulant to industry, and will even develop that very important source of national riches. But, gentlemen, a nation ought to desire more than an entirely material prosperity, and I fear no contradiction in saying that, to shine in the great European family, it is needful to give active and intelligent encouragement to the arts. Such an end deserves the attention of the delegates of the people. Its accomplishment is particularly dear to the Belgians. Few artistic schools have remained like ours, always worthy of admiration ; for centuries we have seen Belgian art keep its place in the front rank, and at this present moment it is still, for us all, a source of legitimate pride.

“If Providence has lavished on us remarkable composers, sculptors and painters, our provinces possess also distinguished writers who have produced both in French and Flemish, during the twenty-five years that have elapsed since our emancipation, more than one great work. This result is important because politics teach us that a people which is jealous of its independence ought to strive to possess original ideas and to clothe them with a form of its own ; in a word, literary glory is the crown of every national edifice. The difficult times through which we have passed have forced the legislature to be careful in its expense and to economise the public money. I hope, however, that circumstances will soon permit the Chambers to increase our credit. I know and take pleasure in insisting that in any condition of affairs

to protect art and letters is a task especially incumbent on princes. It is, in my eyes, one of their greatest privileges, and, if God lends me life, I shall not want occasions to manifest, in an efficacious way, my lively sympathies."

In 1857 the Prince Royal recommended the construction of works to improve the port of Ostend, and indirectly took the initiative in the creation of the monumental avenue which connects Brussels with the *Bois de la Cambre*. Full of solicitude for the labouring classes, he also expressed the desire that, in the extended capital, workmen's families should have healthy dwellings which should become their own property by means of a rent to be transformed into a system of purchase.

After having, on another occasion, spoken in favour of increase of the salaries of the lower clergy, subaltern officers of the army and the lower civil servants, he demonstrated, 4th March, 1858, the urgent necessity for increasing the pay of diplomatic agents.

"The ambassador," he said, "is, as it were, the embodiment of the whole country. On the rank that he succeeds in obtaining often depends that of the State which he represents. To leave him to vegetate in a mean and difficult position is voluntarily to lower the status of our nationality that we all wish, on the contrary, to raise as high as possible. In a word, there is between the agent and the State that sends him so intimate a relationship that the two must be treated on the same footing. The Minister for Foreign Affairs knows that the question of our diplomatic service is that of the national

honour, and I am convinced that he will propose means of assuring to the agents of our material and moral power a position worthy of ourselves and correspondent with the rôle that we have the right and duty to play in the world."

Returning to a question that was never absent from his thoughts, he laid down on the 25th December following the steps it was necessary to take with regard to the commerce and industry of Belgium in view of permanent relations with China and Japan.

Leopold always returned to a question that he considered vital for Belgium, namely Belgium's colonial expansion. On 17th February, 1860, in a speech that gave proof of his conscientious researches, he addressed the Senate on the Ostend Company which had been established in the eighteenth century to strengthen the relationship between Belgium and distant countries. Finally, on 21st March, 1861, he again recommended the extension of Belgium's commercial connection with the Far East.

The Duke of Brabant took, as is seen, an active and prominent part in the work of the Parliament. His speeches are monuments of patriotic sentiments, of parliamentary and diplomatic wisdom. They are a testimony of great solicitude for his country, and rare far-sightedness. What the orator hoped for and the Prince strove for, was the prosperity, the glory of the nation. On every occasion he showed an unchanging desire to merit the confidence and affection of the Belgians.

He called the attention of the Senate to the efforts made by foreign nations to augment their

wealth and prosperity ; and he again insisted upon the necessity for Belgium to find new outlets so as to meet the great competition of other countries. "If for various reasons," he said, "certain nearly situated and convenient markets become less accessible to us, we see other markets opening. They are more distantly situated, it is true, but they are much vaster, and in a few years, thanks to the various means of communication, railways, steamers, etc., will prove a great resource to those who have taken the precaution to obtain a firm footing in them. Henceforth we must augment the number of our markets. It is the only possible means of averting an industrial crisis. We must stimulate our commercial activity and enable the Belgian producer to transport and sell his own goods, thereby vastly increasing the traffic along our Belgian railways and our sea routes. At the present this transport of our goods is exclusively in the hands of foreigners. It is our duty to find means to enable Belgians to reap the benefit and earn the money we are at present paying to our agents in Havre, Hamburg, Rotterdam and London. Belgium possesses," said the Duke of Brabant, "a unique port, and she ought to have a share in the dominion of the seas. Navigation to the principal markets of the world ought to be encouraged. Germany and England derive incalculable profits and wealth from their colonies, and the products of Switzerland are flooding the markets of Turkey, Asia and the Far East."

The Duke of Brabant therefore urged the Government to encourage young Belgians to establish

themselves in such commercial centres as Smyrna, Constantinople, Alexandria and St. Petersburg. He also found it necessary that the Government should seriously occupy itself with the question of the port of Antwerp.

"I am profoundly convinced," he said, "of our vast resources, and I passionately wish that my beautiful country would show the necessary pluck to derive all the benefit which, in my opinion, it can derive. I think that the moment for our expansion abroad has arrived. We must not lose time; otherwise the best positions and markets, which are becoming more rare every day, will be occupied by nations more enterprising than ourselves."

Leopold then went on to show the power and influence gained by those who had ruled over Belgium from colonial and commercial expansion. "Charles V and Philip II carried out their vast plans, equipped fleets and fought battles with the treasures acquired in America. Spain and Portugal gained a preponderating influence, thanks to their vast colonies. And as for Holland, her prosperous position was due entirely to her colonies. The rulers of France—Francis I, Henry IV, Louis XIV and Napoleon I—her best statesmen—Coligny, Richelieu, Colbert and Choiseul—all endeavoured to found colonies, and when France had lost her colonial possessions in Africa and America Algiers became one of her most beautiful provinces. And as for England, she has never ceased to develop her trade and to perfect her colonial system. She has waged numerous wars and spent millions to assure for herself supremacy on the markets of the uni-

verse. The motherland covers a comparatively small area, but, thanks to her colonies, England is at home almost all over the globe."

The Duke of Brabant appealed to all parties, to all politicians and statesmen, to all classes of society, to work with united efforts on this great work. He appealed to them to help to raise this great national edifice, and expressed the hope that the day will come when "a grateful posterity and an appreciating country will engrave the names of the workers on marble tablets."

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH OF KING LEOPOLD I—ACCESSION OF LEOPOLD II—
FIRST YEARS OF HIS REIGN

THE visitor to Windsor Castle may admire the marvels of the Chapel of St. George, the Gothic nave, the choir, the fifty-four sculptured stalls of the Knights of the Garter : among all those royal and noble tombs, among so many memories extending from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, he will also stop before the cenotaph of Princess Charlotte ; and quite close to it he will see the monument erected by Queen Victoria to the Prince who, before becoming King of the Belgians, was the husband of the young English Princess, and who, if destiny had permitted it, would have been as Prince Consort the *alter ego* of Queen Charlotte. The Belgian lion supports the effigy of the King. Beneath are fixed two plaques of white marble. On one is the inscription : “Leopold, Prince of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, elected first King of Belgium. Married first to Princess Charlotte of Wales, secondly to Princess Louise of Orléans at whose side he reposes at Laeken in Belgium. Born 16th December, 1790, died 10th December, 1865, after a prosperous reign of 35 years.” The second bears these words : “This monument has been erected by Queen Victoria to the memory of



From a painting

KING LEOPOLD THE FIRST

the uncle who held the place of a father in her affections."

After a reign of thirty-five years, he left behind him more than the record of an inscription: he left deeds, and the greatest of all deeds, the foundation of a state, the regeneration of a people assured henceforward of its own vitality and of its independence. Thus, when on 2nd December, 1865, the *Moniteur Belge* officially announced the King's illness, although grief was deep, patriotism felt no disquietude.

Before leaving the scene of his activity, the royal founder could enjoy this supreme victory. Since the terrible crisis of 1857, he had gone through more than one great danger; he showed himself always the same. He had unceasingly deferred to the wishes of the country, without ever allowing a departure from the constitution or any disregard for the prerogatives of the sovereign. His beneficent initiative had increased the public wealth; in all questions touching agriculture, commerce or navigation, he had always sought to take the leading part. "He had a tremendous intellect," wrote one of his former Ministers, "and I may repeat what has often been said, that he was always cleverer than the cleverest of his counselors. He never wronged anyone, he has never in his life wounded or offended. Do not think, however, that it was a characterless goodness, a passionless gentleness. Certainly he did not love all those that served him, and he did not reign thirty-five years without experiencing resentment or wrath; I may even say that his anger was terrible, and then his eye, subtle, deep, slightly veiled, filled with a penetrating

flash ; but he soon recovered himself and he never thought of revenge. He was naturally indulgent, and loved to exercise his right of pardon. He would never allow prosecutions of writers of the lower kind who dared to outrage him. He felt himself too well loved and too strong to obtain legal reparation from them ; he was sure to be sufficiently revenged on insolent pamphleteers by the judgment of the country."

This judgment, which had already been passed in the King's lifetime, was confirmed after his death and repeated by all Europe. All sovereigns did themselves honour by paying him tribute. On the very day that Leopold passed away (in the midst of his kneeling children, in presence of the Ministers and of the Presidents of the two Chambers), as soon as the sad news arrived at Compiègne, the Emperor Napoleon III wrote to the Duke of Brabant a letter of condolence in which were these words : "It is with a feeling of deep regret that the Empress and I have just heard of the death of the King, your father. By his wisdom and high intelligence he placed himself in the highest rank of European sovereigns."

Some months after Leopold's death, on the tribune of the Legislative Assembly, Thiers, speaking of these words of the Emperor and applying them to his own political sentiments, drew therefrom this eloquent lesson : "It has sometimes been said that a prince of capacity cannot support the simple rôle of constitutional monarch. I bring to your minds very recent and very striking memories. There was for thirty-five years at our side a Prince of incontestable capacity,

who was able, with a firm character and a very decided mind, to fill worthily the rôle assigned him by the constitutional institutions of his country, and nobody will venture to say that anybody in Europe to-day enjoys greater consideration than did this Prince, head of a nation of four million men."

The greatest compliment I can pay to the memory of Leopold I is to say that to some extent he was possessed of the same intelligence, political and diplomatic tact, as our own late lamented King, Edward VII. It is interesting to reflect that it was in England, above all, that the grief and admiration were particularly touching. While the liberal aristocracy regarded the death of Leopold I as a European misfortune, Queen Victoria mourned for an uncle and teacher, the instructor of her early years and the instructor and master of Prince Albert. One need only read the correspondence of the late Queen to understand what interest he took in his royal niece, and how ready he was always to guide and instruct her. She remembered that England had been the cradle of his political destiny; she remembered those letters of her cousin, the Princess Charlotte, that she preserved like relics; she thought of those former days of which the King of the Belgians had traced her a living picture in his *Early Years*, and with the same sentiment of domestic piety she wished to have these memories gathered together under her eyes.

History will guard for Leopold I that prominent place which his contemporaries have assigned for him, not only in the annals of Belgium, but also

among the contemporary sovereigns of Europe. His popularity was due to his marvellous tact in refraining from any interference in the internal policy of the country whilst playing an important part in intervening in foreign policy. He possessed all the qualities necessary for the first monarch of a constitutional kingdom. He was prudent and perspicacious, able to discern and to appreciate the capacities and characters of his collaborators, and knew admirably well how to avail himself of circumstances—always ready to make use of opportunities. He was a *lucky accident in the Belgian monarchy*, for he at once united in his person the traditions and institutions of France, Germany and England. For Leopold was a German by birth, allied to France by marriage and to Great Britain by his past and his sympathies. He was entitled to the love, the veneration and gratitude of young Belgium. But he had been so popular at home and his reputation had been such abroad, that his death was looked upon as a crisis which might prove fatal to the country and be an event of paramount importance in European history. Europe was therefore on the *qui vive* when the change took place on the Belgian throne, for Europe had grown accustomed to identify the new kingdom with the personality of its monarch. She was anxious to know how *Leopold II* was going to develop. The feeling and curiosity of Europe and Belgium at the moment of Leopold I's death were in some ways akin to those experienced at the present moment in England, where the mortal remains of the beloved King are being carried to their last resting-

place. Europe is anxious to know what kind of ruler George V will make, and England expresses the hope that he will follow in the footsteps of his clever father.

The new reign in Belgium began on December 17, 1865. Leopold II left the castle of Laeken and, amid the acclamations of the people, followed on horseback the route taken by his father on July 21, 1831. He soon arrived at the capital and, replying to the congratulations of the burgomaster, thus addressed himself to the magistrates of Brussels :—

“Gentlemen, I thank you for your homage, for the funeral ceremonies that you yesterday performed for the King, my beloved father, and for the welcome that you give me to-day. The King, who thirty-four years ago entered Brussels by the same gate, then expressed one wish. He desired to see the progress and embellishment of the capital. This wish you, gentlemen, and your predecessors realised.

“I hope that long before the entry of my successor the capital will receive new embellishments, and, above all, that it will no longer suffer from the overflow of an unhealthy river.

“It is almost superfluous for me to express to you my feeling for Brussels. I am, like you, a child of the capital.”

Then he added with emotion : “Another word, gentlemen. The people have acted admirably. I thank them for their conduct from the bottom of my heart.”

Leopold II entered Brussels and directed his steps towards the *Palais de la Nation*, welcomed all the way

by signs of the popular affection. The hall of the Chamber of Representatives where the inauguration of the second King of Belgium was about to be held presented an imposing spectacle. The members of the two Chambers were assembled under the presidency of the Prince de Ligne. The Queen entered first with her children, the Count of Hainault and the Princess Louise-Marie-Emelie. Then came the King of Portugal, the Count of Flanders, the Prince of Wales, the Prince Royal of Prussia, Prince Arthur of England, the Duke of Cambridge, the Archduke Joseph of Austria, Prince George of Saxe, Prince William of Baden, Prince Nicholas of Nassau, Prince Louis of Hesse, Prince Augustus, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, who took their places in the tribune. In the assembly were the representatives and special envoys of the powers, members of all great public bodies and the chief ecclesiastics. Half an hour after noon the King was announced. He entered the Chamber, followed by his staff officers. After bowing to the assembly amidst their acclamations, he mounted the steps of the throne, and pronounced, standing, in a very impressive voice, and extending his hand, the formula of the constitutional oath: "I swear to observe the Constitution and laws of the Belgian people, to maintain the independence of the nation and the integrity of its territory."

Then the King sat down and, still uncovered, made the following speech:—



From a photograph

KING LEOPOLD

ABOUT THE TIME OF HIS ACCESSION

“Gentlemen,—Belgium, like myself, has lost a father. The unanimous tribute paid by the nation to his memory corresponds worthily with the sentiments that she expressed for him during his lifetime. I am as much touched by it as grateful for it. Europe itself has not been indifferent to our loss: foreign sovereigns and princes have been pleased to take part in the last honours paid to one whom they had placed so high in their confidence and friendship. In our name and the name of all Belgium I thank them.” The King rose to utter these last words, and bowed to the foreign princes, who, from the Queen’s tribune, inclined themselves respectfully; the assembly applauded.

“To-day, succeeding a father so honoured in his lifetime, so regretted after his death, my first promise to the representatives of the people is to observe religiously the precepts and examples left me by his wisdom and never to forget the duties imposed upon me by this precious heritage.

“If I promise Belgium neither a glorious reign like his who founded her independence nor a great king like him we mourn, I promise her at least a king who is Belgian in heart and soul and whose entire life will belong to her.” Here applause, bravos, enthusiastic cries of “*Vive le Roi!*” burst from all the benches and all the tribunes. The Senators and Deputies waved their hats in the air.

“First King of Belgium to be born in Belgium, I have been from my childhood moved by all the patriotic emotions of my country. Like it, I have followed with rejoicing the national development that

nourishes in its bosom all the sources of strength and prosperity. Like it, I love the great institutions which guarantee both order and liberty and are the most solid foundations of the throne.

“In my thoughts the future of Belgium is always identified with my own; and I have always thought of her with the confidence that the constitution of a free, honest and courageous nation inspires when it wishes for independence, has succeeded in gaining it, shown itself worthy of it and will succeed in keeping it.” The King rose to pronounce these words, which, impressively and majestically uttered, electrified the assembly and the public. With a unanimous movement the members of the Chamber and Senate rose with the King, as if more clearly to identify themselves with his noble sentiments. In the public part and in the reserved tribunes the men waved their hats or caps, the ladies their handkerchiefs. The scene was indescribable.

“I have not forgotten, gentlemen, the marks of goodwill I received at my majority when I came to associate myself with your legislative work, and again, a few months later, on the occasion of my marriage with a Princess who shares all my patriotic feelings, with which she inspires our children.” Repeated cries of “*Vive la Reine!*”

“It is very pleasing to me to see in these spontaneous manifestations the unanimous agreement of the people. For my part, I have never made any distinction among Belgians. All devoted to their country, I regard with a common affection. My constitutional task places me outside the strife of

parties, and I leave it to the country itself to decide between them.

“I ardently hope that their differences will always be tempered by that spirit of national fraternity that now unites under the same flag all the children of the Belgian family.

“Gentlemen, during the last thirty-five years Belgium has seen the accomplishment of things which, in a country of the extent of ours, are rarely realised by one generation. But the edifice of which the Congress has laid the foundations can and will be raised.

“My sympathetic help is assured to all those who will devote their intelligence and labour to this work.

“It is by persevering in this path of active and wise progress that Belgium will more and more strengthen her internal institutions and abroad will keep the esteem that the powers, who are guarantors of her independence, and other foreign states have always rendered her, to-day again giving evidence of their goodwill.

“When ascending the throne, my father said to the Belgians: ‘My heart knows no other ambition than that of seeing you happy.’

“These words, justified by his reign, I do not fear to repeat in my own name.

“God deigned to hear the wish that they expressed. May He hear it again to-day and render me a worthy successor to my father; and I ask Him from the bottom of my heart to continue to protect our dear Belgium.”

Leopold II descended from the throne and retired,

while the entire hall again rose and manifested its enthusiasm by prolonged acclamations. With masterful eloquence Leopold II had cleverly traced the programme of his reign; he had revealed a kingly and patriotic heart. Whether he was going to keep all his promises is another question. But the representatives of Belgium, hearing his noble words, were able to welcome in the new Sovereign the worthy continuer of the work which had immortalised the founder of the dynasty.

This speech of the young King reassured Europe and Belgium. Leopold II gave proof of wisdom and tact. "It were impossible," wrote the *Journal Historique*, January, 1866, "to express with more eloquence and filial and patriotic dignity his respect for his father and for the institutions of his country; it were impossible to manifest more firmly his consciousness of the duties of a constitutional king and at the same time touch the chords of national sentiment." And, indeed, the speech was met with unanimous praise, admiration and sympathy. The Belgian nation was proud of its young King, it applauded his wisdom and moderation. For he said briefly all that he ought to have said.

Thus the 17th December, 1865, was a memorable day for Belgium, for on that day the Belgians were for the first time, since the establishment of constitutional monarchy, drawing their number in the lottery of hereditary monarchy, and they had been anxious to know whether they would chance to lay hand on a winner. They were lucky, or at least they thought so at the moment, for fate and fortune favoured

them. A Belgian paper, commenting on the speech from the throne, exclaimed: "It was not the ordinary traditional speech from the throne, it was the personal speech of the first citizen of the country, a speech full of sentiment, powerful and sincere."

The most sceptic and the most *blasé* Belgian parliamentarians were moved by the breath of emotion and candour wafted from the inspiring and eloquent words spoken by the young ruler. Leopold II was a revelation, a pleasant revelation to his people and to Europe. And yet his people ought to have known what to expect of the young King—for he had already as Duke of Brabant manifested his intelligence and wisdom.

A reception of the members of the two Chambers took place in the evening, and the two Presidents read the addresses of the legislative Assemblies. "Thus," wrote the *Moniteur Belge*, "the sacred pact had been sealed between King and people, in the midst of popular rejoicings."

The King, having entered the palace, soon appeared on the balcony with the Queen and his children. After the municipal guards and the army had defiled before them, the Queen, by a happy inspiration, presented the Count of Hainault, the heir to the throne, to the people who crowded the square.

"The former sovereigns of Belgium, Kings of Spain or Emperors of Germany," writes a Belgian historian, "were only inaugurated after having sworn to maintain and respect the privileges of the nation. This was a guarantee, but an insufficient one, as bitter experience more than once proved. Thus our ancestors were

distrustful. But at the accession of Leopold II, what noble faith in the loyal word of the King! The King and the nation were to be seen hand in hand, as has been said, asserting their union and their mutual confidence."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHARACTER AND PRIVATE LIFE OF LEOPOLD II

LEOPOLD II was rather aristocratic in his appearance, and not only intellectually but also physically one of the most stirring and imposing monarchs of his time. Indeed, compared to the pigmies of puny appearance seated on some of the thrones of contemporary Europe, he was a king every inch of him. An erect figure, a military carriage, an eagle nose, penetrating eyes, and in later life, a snow-white beard, such were the external characteristics of Leopold II.

His features and the expression of his countenance resembled more those of his mother Marie Louise, the daughter of Louis Philippe, than those of his father. Like his mother, Leopold had blue eyes, and his veiled glance, ordinarily dreamy and benevolent, could express great energetic power and an indomitable will. His were the eye and look of a man who calculates and reflects before he acts. And, indeed, in Leopold the head predominated over the heart; his reason always had the control over his feelings. This is the keynote to Leopold as a man, a father and a husband. There was no hastiness, no rushing, no impulsiveness in him, and no regret. He reflected before he made up his mind, and once his

decision taken, he patiently and assiduously worked against everything and everybody, overcoming all the obstacles that he encountered. It was the result of his education, the education which had been influenced by his father, the descendant of the feudal Coburgs, and by his mother, the Princess of the house of Orléans. Speaking of his early education, it is worthy of note that the late King never had any comrades or playmates; his childhood was passed among his teachers and tutors, and the disciplinarian father had made even the relationship with his brother and sister a very formal one. Frank childish gaiety and brotherly expansion and confidence were banished. The Prince's thoughts became thus concentrated upon himself, and his natural activity and vitality—his exuberant strength—were expended on work and study.

One of his biographers attributes to this severe and formal life of his early childhood the King's love for travel and his passion for geographical studies.¹

The life which the late King led, both before and after his accession, was remarkable for its simplicity. He always loved a quiet life, in spite of the rumours to the contrary and the many caricatures representing him as the central figure of some gay Parisian dissipation. In any case, it was only when he was advanced in age, when he had separated from his wife and quarrelled with his daughters, that he sought his distractions in the whirl of pleasures. And if Leopold resembled in this respect many of

¹ Cf. *Figaro*, April 9th, 1885.

his royal colleagues, he at least acted upon the principle: Business before pleasure.

At the beginning of his reign the King devoted a great deal of his time to scientific work. He used to sleep in a camp-bed, and had a general horror of everything that could enervate and render him effeminate. An early riser, he was up at six o'clock, partook of an early light repast, went to his study, and there sat down at once to work, examining minutely all the papers and documents relating to State business. Leopold II used to read everything himself, making notes with his own hands. He never signed anything without the necessary consideration.

An ardent pedestrian in his early days, he generally took long walks, all the while discussing business and the programme of the day with his staff officer, and often tired out the members of his suite. His simple tastes—which, by the way, only kings and those belonging to the upper strata of society can afford to indulge in—manifested themselves in his meals and in his general mode of living. His fare was very frugal, and sumptuous banquets little appealed to the hardy Coburg. Wine he drank as rarely as possible.

During his early light repast he was accustomed to read the morning papers, attaching great weight and importance to the articles and polemics published in the local Press.

The following anecdote is related by a writer in the *Figaro*.¹ A notary of Brussels, having been

¹ April 9th, 1885.

decorated by the King, requested an audience in order to thank the Sovereign, in accordance with custom, for the gracious gift. After the exchange of official compliments prescribed by the occasion, the King, talking familiarly to his visitor, said: "You still possess, I suppose, Monsieur, that beautiful estate which joins the forest of Soignes? I look at it with great pleasure whenever I am out for a ride in the neighbourhood." The notary, having replied in the affirmative, thought it a fit opportunity to point out to His Majesty how badly kept the roads were leading to the estate, adding: "Your Majesty must have noticed it yourself, and if your Majesty would only say a word . . ." "Oh," interrupted Leopold, "I have no authority to change the roads. You ought to address yourself to the Press, especially to the small papers; the Municipality and the Government will do anything they ask."

Whilst the King was reading the papers, an officer came to receive the orders for the day, and the menu for the dinner was presented. The latter consisted of about thirty dishes. The King usually crossed out those dishes which he did not care for. Although he enjoyed a good appetite, Leopold II was not at all fastidious as regarded the pleasures of the table, although some maintain that he could on occasions prove himself a veritable gourmet. The following anecdote has often been told with regard to his culinary tastes: it happened at a fashionable restaurant in Paris. A gentleman had ordered a dish of vegetables, but not considering it up to the mark had sent it back. The waiter

placed the dish on a sideboard with the intention of sending it down to the kitchen later on. In the meantime another visitor, who was none other than the King of the Belgians, ordered a similar vegetable, and the audacious waiter, without any hesitation, presented to His Majesty the discarded dish. The King was quite aware of its defects, but ate what was put before him without making any observation. He was a king, and he felt that his approval or disapproval would be made a great fuss of. He had to pay the penalty of his greatness.

On his return from his daily walk, which he regularly undertook when the weather was fine, Leopold again went to work in his study. His room was situated on the ground floor; it was an immense and lofty room, full of family souvenirs, the portraits of the late King and Queen, his parents, and the members of the royal family. The furniture was in the Empire style, many pieces dating back to Napoleon I, who had furnished the Castle for Josephine.

The King went from the Castle of Laeken every day to Brussels, where he gave audiences almost to everybody who solicited one.

After his audiences he again worked in his study in Brussels until his return to Laeken for dinner. The dinner, too, was very simple and never lasted more than an hour. He then was in the habit of reading the most recent literature till bedtime, between nine and ten. His simplicity of taste also manifested itself in his dress. This trait of parsimony he had perhaps inherited from his mother.

One day he asked his mother for a silk *casquette de salon*. The Queen replied in a letter: "You may have one, but not a silk one; a cloth casquette will do just as well." Except on official occasions, he always did his best, as regarded his dress, to look like one of the crowd. When at the Castle of Balincourt or at Laeken, he used to wear an ancient kepi of the civic guard with its lining and badges gone. And his straw hat in which he used to stroll about—the straw hat which had done duty for years—will, as a writer in the *Matin*¹ suggested, perhaps in the future become legendary. One day the Baroness de Vaughan bought His Majesty a new hat, which she substituted for the old one. The millionaire sovereign of the Congo flew into a rage, and could only be pacified when the lady explained that it was a bargain she had made, as she had procured the hat for a quarter of its real value. A bargain always appealed to the late King.

His pocket-handkerchief was only renewed on Sunday mornings when going to Mass, and on no account would he take another in the interval. If his valets changed his towels more than once a week, they were sure to receive a good scolding from His Majesty. At a distribution of prizes at which he presided, the King had to hand over to one of the prize-winners, a small boy, a rather heavy book. "Take care, my friend," said Leopold, "it is rather heavy." The boy, who had a dash of the courtier's blood in him, readily replied, "Oh, no, your Majesty; nothing that comes from your Majesty's hands can be heavy." The

¹ Dec. 19th, 1909.

King's suite smiled. And yet Leopold could be generous at times. In any case, he was so to the Baroness de Vaughan, to whom he made a present of the Castle of Balincourt with all the furniture it contained, and gave her over a million francs as a birthday present and a million francs as a New Year's present, besides leaving her many millions after his death. I have spoken of Leopold's unostentatiousness, and the following story illustrates this trait of his character: He was once staying in Paris, where he had been enjoying one of his early morning walks. On returning to his hotel he found quite a small crowd waiting in the street. Calling a young urchin, he asked him what the people were waiting for. "To see the King of the Belgians," replied the boy. "Oh, that is not a very interesting sight," replied His Belgian Majesty, and went indoors. His life was that of a strenuous business man, intent upon accumulating millions, rather than that of a sovereign. He was a quick worker, and expected his secretaries and assistants to be equally quick. He had the gift of royalty, a marvellous memory for faces, remembering not only the persons, but also the circumstances under which he had met them. The following anecdote is related to this effect: His Majesty had been promenading on the pier at Ostend, mixing with the crowd of his subjects like a simple citizen. Suddenly he noticed a Brussels burgher, and accosted him. "*Eh bien,*" said Leopold, "and how are your orchids?" "My orchids, sire?" asked the astonished burgher. "Yes, your orchids," replied the King, "which you exhibited two years ago." The King remembered

the circumstances, although the Brussels flower amateur, the owner of the orchids, had forgotten all about them. He was clever at finding the right word at the right moment, and he could easily adapt himself to the circumstances and the milieu in which he found himself. Leopold II may have been a hard-hearted man, indeed he was a selfish man as we shall have occasion to see, but he had nothing of the parvenu in him, as is so often the case with Democrats and Republicans, when arriving at power. Many who knew the late King intimately, however, maintain that although a perfect gentleman in his manners, a charming talker, he was devoid of enthusiasm himself, and was quite incapable of arousing any in others. He lacked that personal magnetism and charm which so greatly characterised his cousin Edward VII, our own late King.

King Leopold II was one of the best read monarchs of contemporary Europe. He was *au courant* of everything, was a brilliant mathematician, and knew a great deal about gardening, architecture and engineering. He used to spend several hours a day reading the principal European and American reviews. He spoke, as has been already mentioned, French, German, English and Flemish.

Royal personages usually have their hobbies and eccentricities, their freaks and fancies. Although, generally speaking, Leopold II was one of the most level-headed monarchs of his time, he too indulged in some hobbies.

He disliked music, hunting, tobacco, and had no taste for physical exercises except walking. Although

a frequent visitor at Ostend, he never learned to swim. He was seen yawning at a gala performance of *Faust*. A correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, however, relates that the late King rarely missed the most Parisian plays of Paris.¹ And he remembers one occasion when Leopold met the late King Edward at a tiny playhouse on the Boulevard des Capucins. King Edward was in Paris semi-incognito, but no one knew of the presence of the King of the Belgians in Paris. The two kings met on entering the theatre, smiled and shook hands. The manager of the theatre was full of pride at this incident, for was he not giving a performance to a parterre of kings? Another of Leopold's hobbies was his dislike for gloves, and, although he often wore uniform, he is reported never to have put on gloves. It may have been a hatred of restraint, but more probably it was a pardonable vanity on the part of the late King, for he possessed the shapely and beautiful hand of the Orléans family.

In later life he developed a passion for automobilism, and in the early days of automobiles he became an ardent supporter of this industry. He was to be seen regularly at the Annual Exhibition of Automobiles in the Grand Palais, visiting all the stands and talking familiarly not only to the owners and agents, but also to the chauffeurs and machinists. He visited the exhibition for the last time in 1907, but being unwell he found it difficult to make the round on foot from stand to stand. A special arrangement was therefore made by which his motor-car,

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, December 18th, 1909.

entering by a side door, could drive slowly through the centre of the great hall, and the King, whilst remaining in his motor-car, could contemplate the exhibits. The King used to drive his car on the Belgian roads at express speed. It is related that one day—the King's chauffeur was driving—the car turned round a curve, when King and chauffeur suddenly saw in front of them a woman wheeling a perambulator with a baby in it and leading another child by the hand. The woman was so frightened that she lost her head and stood still. There was no room to turn, no time to stop, ditches bordering the road on both sides. "Run into the ditch," commanded the King; the chauffeur obeyed, and into the ditch the car with the Belgian King flew. The car turned over and its occupants were flung on to the bank near, but luckily escaped with a few bruises; the woman and the babies were saved.

It was said in Belgium that Leopold II had been born with a brick in his stomach—so great was his passion for building, but more than half the houses of Laeken were demolished to make room for a beautiful park. Some of Leopold's biographers rightly observed that had he not been a king he would undoubtedly have been an architect.

One of his favourite hobbies, indeed, was the improvement and beautifying of Brussels. Boulevards and parks were not only suggested by him, but he also drew up the plans himself, and, thanks to his efforts, Brussels became one of the most beautiful European cities, and is generally referred to as *Paris en miniature*. But was it only the delight in architec-

tural aesthetics which made Belgium's royal master-builder embellish the towns, build boulevards, plant parks and avenues, and construct castles? Leopold's aim was to create a patriotic centre, which would be instrumental in fostering the national soul, for national psychology is often the outcome of climatic and architectural environment and surroundings. The embellishment of the towns was a matter dear to him already when Duke of Brabant, and the improvement of the dwellings of the poor was a subject to which he often referred in his speeches in the Senate. During the brilliant pageant which marked the entry of Leopold into his capital on the day of his accession, he referred to the improvements of Brussels effected during the reign of his father, adding these closing words: "I hope that long before the entry of my successor the capital will receive more embellishments, and especially that the city will not suffer from the emanations of an unwholesome river." And, indeed, one might say of Leopold, as of that Roman Emperor, that he found a city of brick and left it of marble. Laeken especially, where Napoleon I often used to sojourn, and where Josephine had dwelt, and which had become the principal residence of the Coburg dynasty, was greatly improved. Leopold I had extended the domain, Leopold II spent enormous sums on the embellishment of the castle. He constructed the famous Japanese tower suggested to him by a similar structure at the Paris Exhibition in 1900, and which is considered a *chef d'œuvre* of architecture. The Socialists of Belgium reproached the King with having squandered the money he squeezed from the Congo

concessions on palaces and villas for himself and the members of his family, but as the late King has left all his domains to the nation, the Belgians in general do not complain.

If one recalls the many sovereigns of Europe, past and present, who had they been born in some humble station of life instead of a palace would, with the amount of intelligence they possessed, assuredly have sold matches or kept a sweet-shop in their respective capitals, we must take off our hats to the clever, although unscrupulous Coburg. History has known generals, statesmen and scholars playing the part of kings; Leopold II inaugurated the line of business men and financiers on European thrones, and, *ma foi!* I do not think that the innovation is so bad after all. He was called the best business man and the keenest financier in Europe, and Americans used to say that he ought to have been a Yankee. And, indeed, Leopold II applied business methods to all Belgian affairs, political and military.

With all his faults—and no one is perfect, even the anointed of the Lord—Leopold II would undoubtedly have become a remarkable man—had he not been a king.

CHAPTER XV

LEOPOLD II AS KING OF THE BELGIANS—HIS INTERNAL POLICY

I HAVE spoken of Leopold as a man—and as such he strikes us as a hard and strenuous worker, simple and unostentatious, with an iron will, a sense of economy even to parsimony, generous at times, but calm and despotic in his general attitude. These characteristic traits may often be objectionable in the man, but in a ruler, even in a constitutional monarch, they are excellent assets. As King of the Belgians, Leopold's rule was not only explicitly constitutional, but very prosperous. He did more for his country than any other contemporary sovereign of Europe. If he did not neglect his own private affairs, he also showed a keen interest in the welfare of the country. What Belgium is now, what the Belgians are, their state of prosperity, commercial and industrial, they owe to the late King. The autocrats of Europe have constantly used their power either for the purpose of oppressing the nation whose welfare and comfort they ought to have guarded, or for their own gratification, intent upon grudging privileges to their subjects and jealous of the diminution of their own power. They have constantly looked upon the nation as their enemy, and refused the people not only freedom, but the most elementary rights of man.

To increase the power of their royal house to the detriment of the country has been their constant aim. On the other hand, the constitutional monarchs of Europe have been mostly figure-heads. Leopold II belonged to neither class. His was not an easy task between the various parties and factions which obstructed his way. The Socialists attacked him, openly fought him; the aristocracy kept away from him; the clergy opposed his schemes; whilst the public, making no distinction between the monarch, the father, and the husband, blackguarded him indiscriminately. And yet, if Leopold II has often appeared selfish and hard as a father—and I admit that he has behaved abominably—it may be said in his justification that his hardness was perhaps dictated by political reasons. In order to be able to accomplish his task and fulfil his duty, a king must know his country and his people. Leopold knew his country and knew his people. Belgium is a conglomeration, geographically and ethnically. Flemings and Walloons are two entirely dissimilar races. They speak different languages, have different religions and political views, and also different economic interests. They are as varied as the rocky Ardennes, the soft valleys of Brabant, and the immense plain of Flanders. Through the intricate jungle of the history of the Belgian people, which for centuries had served many masters, until it had emancipated itself and become independent, the late King found his way. England and France, Germany and Spain, Austria and Holland, had in succession controlled the destinies of Belgium,

over which Leopold II of Saxe-Coburg was called to rule. As Duke of Brabant, he had recognised Belgium's destiny and planned her future. One need only read his speeches in the Senate to be convinced that already at that period he knew what Belgium required; that he conceived the policy which he pursued with energy and ability throughout his life. By his business methods he developed Belgian commerce at home and abroad, and made the Belgians one of the most successful manufacturing nations in Europe, creating an outlet for its industry in the Congo and endowing the country with one of the cheapest and best railway systems in the world.

The Belgians often took offence at the King's private conduct, and they frequently failed to understand him. But in him the brain was the heart, and this fact very few have grasped. Instinctively however, the nation followed the King along the path that he prepared for it, and only when the people realised the results they forgave their sovereign his calm and despotic attitude, his utter disregard for sentimentality and conventions. For was he not the gardener who, by his patience, methodic system and perseverance, made the soil bring forth blossoms and bear fruit? The Belgians were and indeed still are a new people, and as such they possess an abundant store of energy and will; the King did his best to develop these latent forces, inherent in the nation, without being always understood.

And yet it is difficult to forget Leopold's avarice

his hardness, his pride and egotism, and remember only his keen intelligence, his iron will, his business capacities, his tenacity of purpose, his feverish activity, his hard work and his deep understanding of men and events. And hence the feeling of contempt and even disgust with which many—especially foreigners—considered and still consider the conduct of the late King of the Belgians.

A year after the accession of Leopold II a plot against Belgian independence was mysteriously formed. It had its seat in the palace of the Tuileries, and was planned for the purpose of destroying the independence of Belgium. Jealous of the aggrandisement of Prussia that he had not been able to prevent, and in presence of the outspoken discontent in France, Napoleon III sought to revenge the defeat of Sadowa. He would have recognised the recent acquisitions of Prussia, he would even have aided her to establish her supremacy over all Germany, in return for a compensation to France, that is to say, the cession of the territory between the Rhine and the Moselle. Not having succeeded, however, in obtaining from William I and Bismarck even a single German village, Napoleon III turned his covetousness towards Belgium. Jealous of Belgium's prosperity he attempted to violate the rights of neutrality. He trampled underfoot engagements that ought to have been sacred; he no longer remembered that he had formerly promised eternal friendship to the heir of Leopold I. With the assent of the French Emperor and in accordance with formal instructions, Count Benedetti went

secretly to Bismarck to propose an agreement. Napoleon III would admit and recognise the acquisitions made by Prussia after her late war against Austria and her allies; he would not oppose the federal union of the Northern Confederation with the southern states of Germany, if Luxemburg and Belgium were ceded to France. "On his part," ran the draft of the treaty presented to Bismarck, "H.M. the King of Prussia, in case H.M. the Emperor of France should be led by circumstances to send his troops into Belgium or to conquer it, would aid France with his army, and help her to the utmost of his power by land and sea, against every power that, in that event, would declare war on her." This bargain was rejected by the King of Prussia. England and Prussia were both on the side of Belgium, and assisted the young King in energetically resisting the French aggressions. They were trying circumstances for Leopold II, but he came out triumphant. With a firm hand he held the reins of government; he saw that everything should be ready for war in the case of emergency. And yet he did his best to avoid friction if possible. He sought peace, but was ready for war. In a word, the young King proved a match for Napoleon III.

Leopold II opposed to the manœuvres of his neighbour the affection of his people and the goodwill he had succeeded in acquiring beyond the sea. In 1867 this goodwill was shown in a distinguished way in a fête given at Windsor, by order of the Queen, to the Belgian Municipal Guards.

Napoleon, however, was not at all discouraged. When he saw that Belgium did not surrender herself to him, and that force or ruse would be in vain, he pretended that he would be satisfied with Luxemburg, and suggested taking possession of it; but Prussia again defeated his design.

In 1869 the Emperor of the French made a third attempt. He tried to obtain possession of one of the great Belgian strategic lines of the Luxemburg railway, as a means towards the realisation of his unchangeable purpose. The Belgian Government, or rather Leopold II, supported by England and Prussia, resisted energetically, and caused Napoleon III's attempt to recoil on himself.

In these grave circumstances the King of Belgium, in spite of the most sad and grievous private affairs—for on the 22nd of January his only son, the Duke of Brabant, had died at Laeken—held the helm of government with a firm hand. A clever diplomatist, a wise and far-sighted pilot, he tried to avoid the rocks of international complications, but was also ready to brave the tempest if it should burst.

Finally a decisive crisis came. The acceptance of the Spanish crown by a Prince of Hohenzollern became the pretext waited for by the war party in France to try to humiliate Prussia. Napoleon III, stirred up by opposition, allowed his old covetousness to dominate him, and lead him into the combat in which he lost his throne.

Napoleon had engaged in the fatal war with Prussia. The day following that on which the Emperor had irrevocably resolved on attacking his

enemy, he addressed the following letter to the King of Belgium, 16th July, 1870:—

“My dear Brother,

“In the grave circumstances that are now expected, I ought formally to declare to Your Majesty that my intention, in accordance with my international duties, is to respect the neutrality of Belgium.

“I hope that Your Majesty will receive the same assurance on the part of Prussia, and I hope that you will consent to confirm me in my opinion that Belgium will cause her neutrality to be respected by all the means in her power.”

Leopold immediately replied:—

“My dear Brother,

“I have just received the letter addressed to me by Your Majesty at Saint-Cloud yesterday.

“I thank you for the formal and categorical declaration that you have made me.

“For my part, I do not hesitate to assure you that Belgium, faithful to her duty, will cause her neutrality to be respected by all the means in her power.

“I have already taken the most energetic means towards this end.”

In fact, the army had been set upon a war-footing to defend the neutrality of the country against the world.

Napoleon III was evidently afraid of the compromising revelations that might come from Berlin. And, indeed, they soon came, and fell like a thunderbolt. On July 25th the *Times* published the text

of the disgraceful project for a treaty that three or four years before Count Benedetti, Ambassador of Napoleon III, had proposed to Bismarck. It was then certain that the French Emperor had conspired against the independence of Belgium and only decided to make war on Prussia because he was finally convinced of the impossibility of obtaining an augmentation of French territory by her connivance.

The divulgation of the "secret treaty" moved England profoundly. On August 1st the Cabinet of St. James, with a view to the defence of Belgium, demanded from Parliament an additional grant of £2,000,000 sterling to maintain during the European war an additional force of 20,000 men.

This proposition, carried by a large majority, gave the most eminent orators in the two Houses an opportunity of manifesting more strongly their solicitude for Belgium.

But the English Government had already put its task in hand, and had proposed to France and Prussia a treaty that should be a new safeguard for the security of the Belgian provinces. On August 9th the Ambassador of the North German Confederation signed, and the French Ambassador was authorised to sign, the treaty by which Great Britain assumed the obligation of going to war with either of the belligerents that violated Belgian soil. The adhesion of Prussia had been immediate; Napoleon III, still hoping for a turn of fortune, had hesitated before acquiescing.

Leopold II very soon made a solemn and just acknowledgment to England. When opening the



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special session of the Legislative Chambers of Belgium on August 8th he uttered these words: "Among the evidence of goodwill that I have received from foreign powers, I am glad to mention, with a gratitude that the whole country will share, the solicitude shown by the Government of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain for the interest of the Belgian nationality and the generous support that these sentiments have met with in the Parliament and also in public opinion in England." He added: "Belgium has already been through more than one perilous trial. None have been so grave as that she is undergoing to-day. By her prudence, by her loyalty, by her steady patriotism, she will show herself worthy of herself, worthy of the esteem that other nations accord her, worthy of the prosperity assured her by her free institutions."

Belgium, in the dangerous crisis that she was facing, was determined to fulfil strictly the duties imposed on her by neutrality. And, in fact, as in 1848, Belgium stood the trial and came out with honours. The Government was often in a painful predicament. It was indisputable that the country owed to Prussia the maintenance of her independence; for what would have happened if William I had accepted the agreement proposed by Napoleon III? Germany also, therefore, had a right to the gratitude of the Belgians. The latter knew this and did not show themselves ungrateful. Unfortunately Germany confounded the Belgians with the French political writers established among them who compromised the national cause.

The Government, with the greatest impartiality

with regard to the two belligerents, carried out the measures prescribed by the law of nations. But whatever it did, great irritation was shown in Germany against Belgium, and the situation, according to official expressions, even became to a certain point dangerous. The principal organs of the German Press, ill-informed as to the true disposition of Belgium, became menacing, and their attacks doubled in intensity every day. By agreement with the King, the chief Minister, Baron d'Anethan, explained the state of affairs, and from his seat in the House gave public utterance to serious warnings:—

“The irritation that is shown in Germany in public opinion, the Press and elsewhere,” he said to the Senate, December 21st, 1870, “is principally due—no attempt at mystery is made—to the attitude of certain newspapers published in Belgium.

“The direction of these newspapers is in foreign hands, and the same is true in the majority of cases of the editorship.

“By their language, which does not properly represent public opinion, these newspapers cause feelings and preferences to be attributed to us abroad that are not ours.

“Far from serving the Belgian cause they thus gravely compromise it.

“I have, under my hand, the recent message of the Swiss Federal Council, and I ask permission to read you some passages from it which are extremely applicable to the situation of Belgium.

“‘The position of neutrals has always been difficult. The neutral has to defend his rights and hold an

equal balance between two adversaries who are mortally enraged against each other. This task almost exceeds human power. From of old to the present time combatants have tried to draw into the fight and attract to their side even the immortal gods. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should try to place in their interest neutral states, spectators of the battle, and assure themselves of what is called their "friendly neutrality," which by the other side is labelled "unfriendly neutrality." The present war has again showed that neutrals, without exception, win little gratitude.'

"This is the very position of Belgium at the present time. We have the right to expect that the task, so difficult and so hard to perform by neutral states and governments, shall not be made more difficult still by those who receive our hospitality and live under the direction of our liberal laws. It is the duty of a minister responsible for our foreign security, it is the duty, I say, of this minister to make known to the Chambers, and to the country, the gravity of this situation.

"Gentlemen, the Government and all the citizens are bound to respect the laws of neutrality; the Press alone cannot have the pretension and has not the privilege of being free from them; I think it my duty, in the interest of the country, to recall it to obedience to these laws; I hope the patriotic appeal that I have made from the national tribunal will be heard by those to whom I think it necessary to address counsels of moderation, prudence and impartiality."



As for the army, it had justified the expectation of the Sovereign and done its duty. In his deposition before the Commission of Enquiry of the National Assembly, the Maréchal de MacMahon said that if he had kept the command at Sedan, he would have been able, in case of reverse, to fall back on Belgium; other leaders declared the same idea of seeking a refuge within her frontiers, but at the risk of being followed by the Germans and making Belgium a new battlefield. The national army thus served as a rampart for Belgian independence.

“It is the army,” writes a Belgian author, “that has prevented us from foreign invasion, and that has prevented our free and prosperous Belgium from being the theatre of bloody fights: it has, therefore, rendered a service that, if translated into money, would be above what the army has cost during thirty years.”

At last the Franco-German War was over—France was again a republic—Napoleon had been dethroned. As for Belgium, she had come out with honour from this trying ordeal. She had religiously fulfilled the duties imposed upon her by her neutrality. She had strengthened her position and won the esteem and goodwill of other nations. Leopold II had also made a name for himself: as head of independent and neutral Belgium he had had splendid opportunity of manifesting impartiality and prudence above praise; as a constitutional sovereign he had, in a moment of internal crisis, calmed the tempest by his firmness and loyalty. Foreign nations also rendered homage to the exceptional qualities that distinguished

the King of Belgium. Among these manifestations one of the most imposing was the banquet of the "Literary Fund." Leopold had on May 8th, 1872, accepted the presidency of this celebration at which assembled princes of the English Royal House, members of the Government, representatives of foreign powers—the cream of English society. After dinner the King of Belgium made the following speech :—

"My Lords and Gentlemen,—I now propose the special toast of the evening : 'To the prosperity of the Literary Fund.' At the same time I think it is the moment for me to thank you for the honour you have done me in calling me to the chair that I occupy.

"In England, where everything is stamped with the seal of greatness, in politics, in commerce, in industry, in the arts, that is to say, in every domain of human activity, the field of literature also is one of the vastest. Those who cultivate this magnificent field are numberless ; rivalry is active and energetic, the profits often uncertain and precarious.

"It is a glorious battlefield where even the most courageous and the most fortunate frequently come out of the struggle wounded. It is to succour the valiant soldiers of the pen, to dress their wounds, to restore them to health and activity, to hold out to them a friendly and sympathetic hand in their adverse and difficult fortunes that this noble institution has been founded, an institution without rival in the world. Having had, in my quality of your President, the privilege of inspecting your work, your interest-

ing and touching archives, I can attest with what tender and fraternal delicacy, with what secrecy you dispense your precious aid in these unknown misfortunes so frequent in the life of a man of letters, which even those do not escape who have gathered a glorious harvest of immortality. Without your opportune and thoughtful assistance, how many great productions would have remained unfinished, how much inspiration full of promise would have perished before bearing fruit!

“And when I reflect that your vivifying influence, that your assistance is not confined to English authors, that every citizen of the republic of letters has a right to your wise aid in days of need and difficulty, I can safely affirm that I know no institution founded on such liberal bases. Gentlemen, I am proud of occupying the presidential chair here, and it is with a sentiment of profound admiration that I propose this toast, ‘To the prosperity of the Literary Fund.’ I join in this toast the name of your excellent President, Earl Stanhope. It is with great pleasure that I have read the interesting historical works of Lord Stanhope, and I am glad to profit by this occasion to propose the health of the eminent historian who is at the head of your institution.”

It was Lord Beaconsfield, then Prime Minister, who proposed the King's health.

“Your Majesty,—Forty years ago,” he said, “there was a European country, and it was not one of the least important countries of Europe, that seemed

condemned to the inexorable fate of permanent dependence and periodical devastation, and yet this country was in circumstances favourable to the civilisation and comfort of humanity; it possessed a fertile and well-cultivated soil, land covered by magnificent towns and inhabited by a race that was friendly to liberty and religion, and among whom the fine arts had always excelled.

“Amidst a European convulsion a great statesman, inspired by the resolution of ending the deplorable destiny to which this country was subject, conceived the idea of establishing the independence of Belgium on the principle of political neutrality.

“This idea at first only met with sceptical disdain. But we who have succeeded the generation of 1830 can attest the triumphant success of this principle, and we seize the occasion to-day offered us of congratulating the noble policy to which Europe owes it that she sees peace reigning on her ancient battle-fields.

“This happy result is undoubtedly due, in great part, to the qualities of the people that inhabit that country, for this people has shown, on more than one occasion, and in the most critical moments, that it possesses the two qualities that alone give a nation power to maintain the principle of neutrality, energy and prudence.

“But we must not forget that it had the good fortune to have as its first monarch the most eminent statesman of the nineteenth century.

“Endowed with consummate prudence, sure judgment, vast and varied experience, he also possessed

the qualities that conquer and keep popular affection. At this moment, especially, we can remember with pride that he was virtually an English prince, not only because he was doubly allied to our Royal Family, but because he had become accustomed—and this circumstance had an incalculable value for an observant nature like his—because he had become accustomed, I say, for years, in this country to the practice of constitutional liberty.

“And when he ascended the throne he immediately showed that he had decided to be, not the leader of a party, but the monarch of a nation.

“When he left us Europe was disheartened. The times were troubled and menacing and everybody felt the importance that attached to the character of his successor.

“Now that we have this successor among us it would not be good manners to eulogise him. But if I may be permitted to use the language of critical appreciation about a public career, I think everybody will agree with me in declaring that the King of Belgium, from the first moment of his entry into public life, has shown himself as advanced as the spirit of our age; has shown that he understands that authority, and that he wishes it to be respected, and that there is no throne more sure than that of the monarch who has confidence in his subjects.

“The King of Belgium, our President to-day, has inherited from his royal father something more than the beautiful country of Belgium, he has inherited his affection for the English people. He has proved it on many occasions, but never more frankly than in

crossing the sea in acceptance of our invitation and to accept the Presidency of the Royal Literary Society.

“We are all witnesses of the joy with which he fulfils the duties of president. I have belonged to the Society for a great many years, others of my name have preceded me, and I think I may say that the annals of the Society recall no president who who has fulfilled his functions in a more admirable way.

“It is charming, although at first sight contradictory, to see a monarch presiding over the republic of letters ; but if there is, in this circumstance, a charming contradiction, let us reply by a special manifestation, and wish, to-day, to our king-president a royal welcome. It is with these sentiments, gentlemen, that I propose to you the health of the King of the Belgians.”

This speech was acclaimed with great enthusiasm.

The King again spoke and said :—

“I sincerely thank Mr. Disraeli for his toast and the terms in which he has proposed it. I am equally grateful to you, Your Royal Highness [the Prince of Wales], and to you, my lords and gentlemen, for the kind way in which you received his eloquent speech.

“What the right honourable gentleman has said of my dear and regretted father has profoundly moved me. I remember how often my father spoke in terms of the highest admiration of the skill and talent of the right honourable gentleman, and public opinion has long since unanimously confirmed my father’s words.

“I was not less touched by what the right honourable gentleman said about my dear country, and I am proud to say that Belgium merits the eulogy that the great orator and statesman has made.

“As for myself, I frankly confess that I cannot recognise myself in the flattering portrait made of me by Mr. Disraeli in such brilliant and striking colours. Mr. Disraeli has, I fear, considered my good intentions as accomplished facts.

“In accepting the invitation to take the presidential chair at this banquet, I counted on your kind indulgence. To this indulgence you have added the most cordial reception. I shall always keep a grateful memory of this evening, during which, thanks to your kindness, I have been associated with your useful and highly meritorious work.”

When, the following year, Gladstone was called upon to preside over the banquet of the “Literary Fund,” he made eloquent mention of his royal predecessor:—

“My Lords and Gentlemen,—If this institution enjoys less influence than it merits, it is not because it lacks the most distinguished and useful patronage. This chair has for a long series of years been occupied by persons who have brought to the cause of this institution every support that position, character, influence, talent and literary fame could give.

“I must specially recall the event of last year, when His Majesty the King of the Belgians occupied this place and raised its dignity to a height from which, I fear, it will descend heavily to-day.

“But I wish to give expression to the feeling in all

your hearts, the sentiment of gratitude that you experience to His Majesty for the service he rendered you on that occasion.

“This service is not only the result of the King’s high position and his true condescension in accepting the post of presiding over this assembly—a post rendered difficult by the difference of language—but it was a pleasure and satisfaction to us all to be united in a sentiment of respect, almost of loyalty, to this distinguished Sovereign, whom I will call without vanity a king of the English pattern.

“The King is one of those sovereigns from whom we should not be ashamed, if need were, to receive those lessons in constitutional government that we sometimes claim to teach ; and we consider his visits to England not only as gracious and amiable acts, which leave an indelible impression on our minds, but also as solemn acts of national friendship that tend to confirm and consolidate the affectionate sentiments that unite the Belgian people to ours.”

Some days after the banquet of the “Literary Fund,” the *Académie Royale* of Belgium celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of its foundation. Leopold II desired also to preside over these commemorative festivities, and on this occasion again moved his listeners. Addressing the members of the *Académie*, he said :—

“Gentlemen,—I beg the *Académie* to accept the congratulations that I was anxious to offer in person on the one hundredth anniversary of its foundation. I take the most sincere part in this celebration. The *Académie* has worthily answered the end for

which it was established. In our country, henceforth free and independent, mental activity must have no obstacles. The field that you cultivate is neutral ground, where we found, hand in hand, those whom active life draws in directions often very different. When I see this communion of so many people distinguished in the sciences and arts, I pay tribute to the beneficent influence of the *Académie* on the moral and intellectual development of my country. It is not only in Belgium, gentlemen, that your work is valued; foreigners appreciate your remarkable publications as they admire the masterpieces of Belgian art; and if any proof is needed of the interest taken abroad in our *Académie*, it may be found in the presence amongst us of those renowned scholars and artists who have consented to be associated with this celebration. They will permit me to thank them for the mark of esteem and sympathy they give us. Let the *Académie* receive my warmest wishes. Follow your mission, gentlemen; strive perseveringly for our scientific, artistic and literary glory. Trace the way, give sure examples to all this honest, industrious, intelligent and patriotic youth that follows you and only desires to work for the good and glory of Belgium. Remind yourselves, remind Belgium unceasingly, what elements of greatness a country obtains from the activity of its intelligence even when its territorial limits are circumscribed. May our *Académie* continue to form a noble bond between Belgium and the rest of the world of culture; may your works be always one of the titles of this country to that goodwill with which foreigners unanimously regard

her, and of which, under all circumstances, I am proud and happy to receive proof."

The Socialistic organs were compelled to admit that he possessed a vast intelligence, but naturally looked upon him as their enemy. "Leopold was the conscientious head," said M. Vandervelde, leader of Belgian Socialism, "of the Conservative and capitalist party, which is in reality the Catholic party."

Personally I think that as a monarch, as a staunch defender of hereditary monarchy, Leopold was simply consistent, and one cannot expect him to have been anything but Conservative—otherwise he would have abdicated.

During the first fifteen years of his reign Leopold endeavoured to keep the balance between the two great parties, the Liberal and the Clerical—both, of course, branded as *bourgeois* by Social Democracy. But when the latter, organised at last among the ranks of the working men, sent its representatives to the Legislative Assembly in 1893, Leopold gradually leaned more towards the Clerical party and supported the clericalisation of Belgium. He saw in this policy a sure means towards consolidating the monarchic régime. For the hydra-head of Social Democracy threatened to swallow monarchy, and Socialistic mobs were singing under the windows of the Sovereign :—

"Vive la République Démocratique!
A bas le roi de carton!"

I have elsewhere clearly exposed my views on monarchy in general and hereditary monarchy in

particular,¹ but I maintain that as a king, even as a constitutional king, Leopold was consistent. He could not side and work hand in hand with Socialism, which *ab ovo* denied his *raison d'être*. Some time ago Europe applauded the Autocrat of Russia, who, in a moment of supreme generosity, granted a Constitution to his country. We have seen how much this Constitution was worth. It was a mockery. It could not have been otherwise. The interests of the reigning dynasty of the Romanovs are diametrically opposed to those of the Russian nation, and the Tsar's interests could not fail to clash with those of the people. It is absurd to imagine that a Romanov, an autocrat, could inaugurate an era of Liberalism and thus undermine his own existence. And just as absurd as it is for the Tsar to become a constitutional monarch, just as absurd is it to imagine a king supporting Socialism. The German Emperor, I think, *pretends* that he is a Socialist, but then the German Emperor can do impossible things.

It is true that the Belgian throne is in no danger whatever, and remains firm in the midst of the storm-tossed waves of Socialism ; but the virulent attacks of the Republicans in the Chamber annoyed the descendant of the feudal Coburgs, and after the entrance of the Socialists into the Belgian Parliament the late King never pronounced a single speech from the throne. He became an irrepressible opponent of Socialism and the proletarian movement. He opposed the introduction of universal suffrage, and was instrumental in at least mitigating it by the establish-

¹ Cf. *Mad Majesties*.

ment of the plural vote—a “plutocratic falsification of universal suffrage,” as a social-democratic organ termed the measure. When the Belgian Labour party arranged a general strike in 1902, the King manifested a pitiless attitude in the repression of the strike and the maintenance of order. On April 18th the mob was fired upon by the municipal guards, and eight working men were killed. The assassination of working men was to serve as an example, to frighten the Socialists. “Leopold II,” wrote Camille Hysmans,¹ “incarnated the *bourgeoisie* over which he ruled; he is worthy of it and it of him.” This is perfectly true. But Leopold knew that monarchy bases its existence upon the *bourgeoisie*, and he therefore zealously watched over the rights and privileges of this very *bourgeoisie*, and he, by doing his best to protect its interests, political and economic, guarded not a little his own.

At no period, however, of Leopold’s rule was the Belgian throne in danger. There had often been talk of Belgium falling back upon Republican institutions like France, but even some of the adherents of republicanism upheld the throne of Leopold II and praised the monarch. One of their most eloquent speakers, addressing the Brussels electorate, said: “It costs nothing to a Republican, who has sincere convictions, to say that he does not regret the Republic when he has the good fortune to live under a monarchy at the head of which is placed a monarch

¹ 75 *années de domination Bourgeoise*, 1830–1905, p. 116. Gand, 1905.

who, like Leopold II, sincerely and loyally observes the Constitution. The King himself is too magnanimous to believe that there is a Republican in Belgium who wishes for his overthrow . . . ” Paul Janson, when he became a member of the Lower Chamber, added : “ I have said before the electorate of the district of Brussels, and I repeat in this Chamber, that republicanism is neither unjust nor intolerant. When it meets with a King, Belgian in heart and soul, who does not disdain the title of first citizen of the country, with a King, faithful to his oath, who dreams of raising still higher the edifice of the Congress, it has no difficulty in respecting and honouring him, because in respecting and honouring him it respects and honours itself.” This eulogy was not only disinterested, but also true of the late monarch, who, as the head of a constitutional country, knew his place and his position. And Belgium could scarcely have enjoyed more freedom under a Republican Government.

At the agricultural competition of the two Flanders, in 1876, a former minister of Napoleon III expressed himself as follows : “ It is by simultaneously making an energetic appeal to all the resources of its commerce, of its industry, and above all of its agriculture, that Belgium has been able to procure not only the means of subsistence, but of prosperity for her exuberant population.” Then, addressing himself directly to his listeners, he added :—

“ Long enough and too long your fields have been watered by the blood of battles ; long enough and too long your land, an arena open to rival ambitions, has been trampled by foreign armies !

“International European law assures you henceforward the advantages of a perpetual peace. May you ever, under the ægis of neutrality, under the direction of wisely liberal institutions, under the banner of a popular and respected dynasty, freely develop the riches of your soil and the noble qualities of your national character !”

A learned economist also commented in eloquent terms on the gradual transformation of Belgium: “When we study the work of the legislator and of the Government, we are soon,” he says, “struck with admiration by such a methodical array of economic reforms, worthy of a true statesman, and which have so much increased the circulation of commodities: postal reform, abolition of local import duties, suppression of tolls, construction of railways, telegraphs, canals, roads, laws of free exchange, suppression of the duty on salt, etc. etc.” These improvements were due to the initiative of the King.

After 1870 the Government appropriated to all sorts of public works, beside the ordinary resources of the budgets, a capital of 329,000,000 francs. It strove to complete the admirable system of railways that were to intersect the entire country. It aided industry and commerce. It pushed forward the immense works that were to make Antwerp the invulnerable bulwark of the Belgian nation and the first commercial centre of the Continent. And it was always Leopold who encouraged these innovations and reforms.

The progress made by Belgium since 1865 is undeniable. By the importance of her affairs, Belgium

surpasses greater countries, Italy, Austria, Russia. The Duke of Brabant, as related, after visiting the principal countries of the globe and having sadly remarked almost everywhere the absence of commercial relations with Belgium, proclaimed, at the meeting of the Senate, that the industrial and commercial future of the country depended on its foreign relations. Since then the Belgians have obtained a considerable position in Europe through their industries, and all thanks to their King.

In 1843 the expenses of every kind for primary instruction scarcely exceeded $2\frac{1}{2}$ millions; in 1874 they rose to more than 19 millions. In 1840 the number of children that attended the primary schools was about 450,000; in 1876 it rose to 650,000.

Leopold II showed an unceasing and active solicitude for the needy classes, the people. He desired social progress, the progress of humanity, under reasonable conditions. When the Belgian Premier announced to the Chamber the death of Leopold II, he recalled the late monarch's statement that he was a Belgian heart and soul. "This promise," added the Minister, "had been kept and surpassed, for His Majesty had devoted himself entirely to the greatness and prosperity of the country. He had aggrandised Belgium, and given her a high position among the nations, and endowed her with a vast and admirable colony."

On May 20th, 1877, the Royal Family went to the chief town of Hainault to be present at the inauguration of the statue to King Leopold I, erected here in

memory of the founder of the dynasty. The burgo-master of Mons pronounced a speech in which he gave a portrait of the first King's reign and paid a tribute to the patriotic devotion of his successor.

To which the King replied as follows :—

“The tribute that you pay to so dear a memory touches me profoundly. That we may march with sure step towards a prosperous future, let us always keep fresh in our minds the wise counsels of him who for thirty-five years watched with success over the destinies of this country.

“Under the ægis of this memory may our patriotic union grow closer every day. Often did he recommend this to the members of the large family by whom he loved to hear himself called father. May our redoubled efforts develop both the intellectual greatness and the public wealth of the country; that they may assure us a more and more respected place among the nations, and remember with me that the constant study of my father was to establish the material and moral strength of Belgium.

“In the midst of this family festivity let me again remind you of it: to attain this end all must energetically exert themselves. In a free country, where the work of the individual citizen is so important, his responsibility so grave, each person helps in the general work, each one adds his stone to the great monument of its history. Allow me, inspired by the sentiments that I have inherited, animated by the desire of being one of the most zealous servants of my country, to ask you

to neglect nothing by which you may unceasingly strengthen the noble edifice of 1830."

And Leopold was too clever a diplomatist, too tactful a ruler, not to understand what Belgium expected him to do. He knew how to gain popularity; and, indeed, were it not for his private life, his domestic affairs and his avarice, he would have retained his popularity to the very last. Belgium, as a nation, with the exception of the Socialists, would have forgiven him the Congo atrocities—indeed, she has forgiven him, for, after all, she is destined to benefit by them—and she will not grudge her King the royal commission he pocketed on the enterprise.

The Socialists of course maintain that had Leopold II never existed Belgium would anyhow have become what she now is. Situated as she is in the centre of Europe, occupying an admirable geographical position, she was destined to reach an economic development which made her the most industrial country in Europe. It must, however, not be forgotten that it was the King who took the initiative and who called Belgium's attention to the forces and capacities she possessed. It was the King who called the attention of the Belgian nation to the importance of colonisation. In 1889 he wrote to the Belgian Chamber: "I have constantly urged upon my compatriots to turn their attention to the countries across the ocean. Historical events teach us that nations with restricted territories have a moral and material interest in extending their narrow frontiers. Belgium being a manufacturing and

commercial nation, she must, more than any other, endeavour to secure outlets for her workers. We were the first to construct railways; let us prolong them by lines of navigation." He taught his people to profit by the sea. The stimulus came from him; in spite of her geographical position, the past of the country and the placidity of the inhabitants had almost condemned Belgium to a restricted prosperity at home. In less than half a century she has become one of the principal centres of maritime commerce—has thrown herself into all the great European and international operations, extending her activity to the remotest regions of the Far East. To make the ruler of a country irresponsible for the crimes and atrocities committed in his name is an inexcusable error, but it is equally unjust not to allow some reflection of the splendour and prosperity of the country during his reign to fall on him. The sovereign identifies himself equally with the shame and the glory of his country. It was Leopold II who called Belgium's attention to the sea. "A people," he said, "who possesses a river and the sea can never be small, for it possesses immensity." He availed himself of the supreme power he was invested with in a business-like manner on behalf of Belgium, for he was a business man on the throne.

I have said that Leopold, whilst loving Belgium, had in view the strengthening of the dynasty. And who can tell whether he did not secretly harbour the thought of changing the constitutional monarchy, not in name but in fact, into an absolute one? And he succeeded, partly at least, for not only was he the

autocrat of the Congo but also the ruler of Belgium. And towards the end of his rule he manifested his influence in Belgian politics in a more active manner.

And indeed, although many people were not aware of the fact, the late King of the Belgians played a prominent part in the politics of Europe. His counsels were listened to and respected, as his father's had been, in settling not only family disputes, but political differences.

The father had constantly impressed upon his son and heir—and instructed the tutors, Colonel Allard and General de Launoy, to do the same—the necessity of identifying himself with the Belgian national spirit. He had made it his first duty to follow the Constitution blindly, and as the pious Mohammedan with the Koran, to read it, re-read it, and study it. And Leopold religiously followed the paternal precepts. He was, perhaps, the only constitutional monarch of contemporary Europe who played the rôle to the letter as it was assigned to him by the Constitution.

Had Leopold II occupied a vaster throne than that of Belgium, say that of Russia or Germany, he would doubtless have succeeded in controlling European policy. He certainly had the desire to go beyond the limits ascribed by the Constitution, but he did not do so.

Leopold I had accepted the throne of Belgium at a moment when Europe was in the throes of revolution, when kings of to-day were liable to be exiles to-morrow. Part of the instruction therefore with which he inculcated his son and heir was to

be prepared for all emergencies. He impressed upon him that he had to stick to his bargain and to carry out the will of the people. "Carry out the will of the people," Leopold I said to his son, "even if it should take you into exile. If you are what you ought to be, the loss will be theirs, and if you are not, the gain will be yours. In any case, this is your best policy."

Apparently Leopold II left his Government to manage the affairs of the country, and assimilated his views to those of his Ministers in power in strict obedience to the Constitution. With regard to his self-control in politics, he once said: "It is my part of the contract, I have engaged to act in this manner. Argument is useless, for the world gets its political ideas by suggestion, holds on to them from custom, and is pleased in the spirit of vanity to hear them applauded by friends and respected by opponents. Politicians are clever enough to see the right thing before it is too late." Leopold therefore left his subjects to their own experience, and very rarely put forward any suggestions. And thus it happened that, although a sceptic in religious matters and perhaps a Liberal in his heart of hearts, he supported the Clerical party in power. He did not oppose the anti-clerical measures of the Cabinet of Frère-Orban, but when the Catholic reaction took place he gave the Government his entire support. In reality, however, he was master of the situation, and the Cabinet Ministers were only his creatures—puppets whom he inspired, and who acted according to his will.

It has become the policy of the Press to make the royal entourage responsible for the faults and follies committed by the monarch. Thus Tsar Nicholas II and Alfonso, King of Spain, are supposed to be influenced by their entourage, in their oppression of the Liberal movements in their respective countries. This same theory and explanation have been applied to Leopold II. But one can scarcely compare the scion of the Romanovs and the descendant of the Spanish Bourbons with the strong Coburg. That the Tsar and the King of Spain are mere puppets in the hands of their advisers is quite comprehensible—although this fact does not make them less responsible for the atrocities committed in their names, but Leopold II was never influenced by his entourage. He was never ill advised, for it was he who influenced his Ministers instead of being influenced by them. All the great ideas he conceived and all the faults he committed, he alone was responsible for them.

He was a first-rate diplomatist, and he showed it, not only in home but in foreign policy. He had learned a great deal from his father, and his natural intelligence helped him to steer safely between the complications abroad and the friction and party strife at home. He was *droit et adroit*.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CONGO—THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONFERENCE AT BRUSSELS AND THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN ASSOCIATION

THE late King of the Belgians, however, did not limit his work to the interior development of the country. As Duke of Brabant, he had recognised the necessity for Belgium to take part in international affairs. If Belgium did not wish to lose the fruits of the Revolution of 1830, she ought to follow the example of England, Scotland, Germany and Switzerland, and find, as long as there was time, outlets for her markets which sooner or later would extend. During the travels which he undertook as Duke of Brabant in Egypt, India and China, new perspectives had opened before him, and he never ceased to think of and occupy himself with the future, which he foresaw for Belgian and European industry. It was especially Africa which attracted his attention. The Dark Continent, which extends over an area three times as large as Europe, the central region of which is about seven times as big as France, and the probable destiny in store for it, was a subject in which Leopold II took a very keen and constantly growing interest. He followed the careers of the intrepid travellers who were endeavouring to penetrate into

that dark and mysterious world, and watched with a keen eye their failures and successes.

Whatever may be said of the late King, to him belongs the honour of having been the initiator of an enterprise which will for ever occupy a prominent place in the annals of last century. Nothing more nor less than the civilisation of the dark African continent, the introduction of a civilising element among the African tribes and the opening of a rich and fertile country for European commerce, was the gigantic plan which the King of Belgium had conceived. From various parts endeavours were already being made to introduce European civilisation on the African soil, but the efforts were separate, the travellers and explorers belonging to different nations, and as such not combining or working in unison. Often unforeseen circumstances putting obstacles in their way prevented them from continuing their route, and thus they were obliged to return and not only give up further exploration but lose the fruits of their labour.

Scientific exploration in the basin of the Congo began at the end of the eighteenth century with the expedition of Dr. Lacerda, who, starting from Tété on the Zambesi in 1798, reached the district of the Shambezi, the principal tributary of Lake Bangwelo. Lacerda was the first white man to penetrate into the basin of the upper stream. Two other Portuguese, Monteiro and Gamitto, in 1832, followed the same route. In 1843 a fourth Portuguese traveller, Graca, starting from the west coast, penetrated into the basin of the Upper Kasai and learned the existence of

the empire of the Lunda and of its chief, Muato-Yamvo. These three expeditions deserve to be mentioned, but it is to British travellers, to Tuckey, Livingstone, Burton, Speke and Cameron, that the honour is due of having made the first great geographical discoveries in the Congo basin during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

The expedition led by Captain Tuckey along the Congo in 1816, from Banana to Isangila, was the only one, until the arrival of Stanley in 1878, which made a scientific report on the lower stream and the district of the Falls. With the expedition of Burton and Speke the great series of travels from the east coast begins. To these two travellers belongs the discovery of the Tanganyika in 1858.

Livingstone's work was still more considerable. Already, in crossing the continent in 1854, he had discovered parts of the upper basin of the Kasai. Later, during the expedition on which he died, he discovered Lakes Moero (1867) and Bangweolo (1868), the southern part of the Tanganyika (1869) and the course of the Congo at Nyangwe (1871).

Finally Cameron, starting from Zanzibar to the aid of Livingstone, would not abandon his mission until he met at Tabora the mortal remains of the illustrious traveller which his faithful black followers were carrying to the coast; he proceeded towards the west, again explored the Tanganyika, arrived at the Congo stream, which he was unable to descend, penetrated into the unknown country beyond Nyangwe, ascended the valley of the Upper Lomami, saw Lake Kasale and explored the Urua and the Lunda.

The publicity given to the sensational discoveries made during the course of these great expeditions, to which were added those conducted with no less courage and success in other parts of the central continent by Nachtigal, Rohlfs, Grant, Baker, van der Deken and others, quickly produced in European public opinion great curiosity and interest in African affairs. On hearing of the noble and touching death of Livingstone by the Bangweolo in 1873, and of the African barbarities of which every traveller made a harrowing picture, Europe seemed unable to remain any longer indifferent to the fate of the Dark Continent. Everywhere assistance was proffered.

Nothing was wanting, it seemed, but a powerful bond to unite all efforts, to leave none of this sympathy sterile. It was the merit of Leopold II, that he perceived this necessity.

Leopold, having held several conversations with various members of the Royal Geographical Society of London, came to the conclusion that united efforts in civilising Africa were sure to be crowned with success. He therefore took the initiative of convening an International Conference, to which were invited the Presidents of the Geographical Societies of London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna and Rome, as well as the most prominent travellers and explorers, and many others who had for some time been taking an interest in the civilisation of Dark Africa. The aim of the Conference, which met at Brussels on September 12th, 1876, was at once scientific, commercial and humanitarian.

The meeting took place at the King's palace in

Brussels. Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia were there represented. Among the thirty-seven notabilities who accepted the invitation to be present were the celebrated African travellers: Doctors Nachtigal, Rohlf's and Schweinfurth, Lieutenant Lux, Duveyrier, the Marquis de Compiègne, Sir Bartle Frere, Grant, Cameron and Sir William Mackinnon; among the Belgian delegates were Baron Lambermont, Couvreur, Emile de Laveleye and Emile Banning, the last named being secretary of the Conference, of which he was also historiographer.

Leopold presided over the assembly, and in his remarkable opening speech set forth the programme of proceedings which he intended to follow and the questions that must be considered and settled in order that this crusade of science, humanity and progress, a crusade worthy of the nineteenth century, might be brought to a successful issue.

"Gentlemen," said the future Sovereign of the Independent State of the Congo, "allow me to thank you warmly for the willingness with which you have accepted my invitation. Besides the satisfaction I shall have in hearing the discussion of problems in the solution of which we are interested, I feel the greatest pleasure in meeting the distinguished men whose work and valorous services to civilisation I have followed for so many years.

"The subject that calls us together to-day is one that demands a first place in the attention of friends of humanity. To open to civilisation the only part of our globe where she has not yet penetrated, to pierce

the darkness that envelops entire populations, is, I may venture to say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress, and I am glad to observe how very favourable public feeling is to its accomplishment : the current is with us.

“Gentlemen, among those who have the greatest knowledge of Africa, a great number have been led to think that it would be better for the common end that they pursue to join together and deliberate with a view to regulating proceedings, uniting efforts, using every resource and avoiding double outlay.

“It has seemed to me that Belgium, a central and neutral state, would be an excellent spot for such a meeting, and this has emboldened me to call you all here to the conference that I have the great satisfaction to open to-day. Need I tell you that in calling you to Brussels I have not been guided by selfish views? No, gentlemen, if Belgium is small, she is happy and satisfied with her lot ; I have no other ambition than to serve her well. But I will not go so far as to say that I should be insensible of the honour that would result to my country if an important step forward, in a question that will be of note in our epoch, was dated from Brussels. I should be happy if Brussels became in some sort the general quarters of this civilising movement.

“I therefore allow myself to believe that you could find it convenient to come and discuss and, with the authority that you have, decide in common on the ways to follow and the means to employ to plant finally the standard of civilisation on the soil of Central Africa ; to agree on the steps to take to interest the

public in your noble enterprise and bring it to give its mite. For, gentlemen, in works of this kind it is the support of the great majority that causes success: the sympathy of the masses must be solicited and obtained.

“Of what great resources, in fact, should we not dispose if all those to whom a franc is nothing or little consented to drop it into the cash-box intended to suppress the slave-trade in the interior of Africa?”

“Great progress has already been made, the unknown has been attacked on many sides; and if those here present who have enriched science with such important discoveries will speak to us about the principal points, their exposition will be a powerful encouragement to us.

“Among the questions yet to be examined, the following have been mentioned:—

* “1. The precise determination of the bases of operation to be acquired, among others, on the coast of Zanzibar and near the mouth of the Congo, either by treaties with the chiefs or by purchase or settlements to be agreed on with individuals.

* “2. Determination of the routes to be opened successively into the interior, and the medical, scientific and civilising stations to be organised as means of abolishing slavery, of establishing concord among the chiefs, of procuring just and disinterested arbitrament for them.

* “3. Creation, the work having been well defined, of a central international committee and of national sub-committees to carry on the work, each in the sphere that concerns it, explaining the aim to the

public of every country and making an appeal that has never been addressed in vain to charitable feeling.

“Such, gentlemen, are the different points that call for your attention; if there are others, they will appear during your discussions, and you will not fail to throw light on them.”

The deliberations lasted for three days, the 12th, 13th and 14th of September. The resolutions and declarations voted by the assembly before its separation gave an account of the project and served for its programme. Such was the origin of the International African Association. In less than a year its principal organs were established. Before breaking up, an International Commission was elected, composed of King Leopold as President, Dr. Nachtigal, De Quatrefages and Sir Bartle Frere, who was soon replaced by Sandford, formerly American Ambassador at Brussels. Baron Greindl was the General Secretary.

The first meeting of the International Commission was in the palace at Brussels on the 20th and 21st June, 1877. The assembly decided that the trade route from the east coast, opposite Zanzibar and going to the Tanganyika, should be taken as the base of the first enterprises, and that a station should be established on the shore of the lake. As the Belgian Committee was the only national committee which had been constituted long enough to be able to play an active part, it was entrusted with the organisation of the first expedition. Finally, before separating, the Commission adopted for the Inter-

national African Association the blue flag with the star of gold in the centre.

Thus constituted, the Association carried on its work from 1876 to 1884. The Belgian Committee sent six expeditions: those of Cambier, who founded the station at Karema (1879); of Popelin (1880); of Carter and Cadenhead, who made an unhappy attempt to introduce elephants from Asia into Africa for the improvement and domestication of the indigenous elephant; of Ramaeckers and Becker (1881); of Storms, who established the station at Mpala (1885); and of Becker and Dhanis.

To the German Committee is due the expedition of Kaizer, Böhm and Reichard, by which the station at Kakoma was founded and Katanga reached (1881-4). The French Committee organised two expeditions: those of Bloyet (1880), who founded a station at Kondoa, and of De Brazza (1880), who took the route of the Ogowe.

Brazza's expedition had for final result the foundation and development of the colony of Gabon and the French Congo; that of Böhm and Reichard was the prelude to Germany's taking possession of East Africa. As to the Belgian expeditions, the results obtained during nine laborious years corresponded neither to the generous idea that inspired the work nor to the sacrifices that its application demanded. Of the twenty-five travellers that the Committee sent to the lake only nine reached it. The tale of their fruitless journeys from Zanzibar to Karema, reached at the cost of the most praiseworthy devotion and most laborious efforts, makes, in many ways, a

martyrology. It was a dark beginning to the brilliant exploits which were soon to take place on the opposite coast.

Even after the great explorations of Burton, Speke, Livingstone, Schweinfurth, Cameron and Junker, the immense basin of the Upper Congo from Isangila to Nyangwe, from the district of the Muata Yamvo to the Uele, still remained completely unknown. As for the great river whose mouth had been visited by Diego Cam in 1485 and whose course Tuckey had followed as far as Isangila in 1816, where was its source? How far did it penetrate into the heart of the continent? The region of the great lakes had, it is true, been visited; but travellers and geographers were still forming hypotheses about the basin to which these vast reservoirs belonged, and among their tributaries Livingstone believed that he had discovered in the Lualaba the first waters of the Nile, and in Lake Bangweolo the head source of the great river of Egypt.

Commissioned by the two important newspapers the *New York Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, H. M. Stanley left Bagamoyo on the east coast on 17th November, 1874, and proceeded by the route Speke had taken to Lake Victoria, round which he sailed. Next he discovered Lake Albert Edward (January, 1876) and completely explored the banks of the Tanganyika (11th June to 31st July).

At Kasongo he found Tippo-Tip, the Arabian merchant from Zanzibar, established, and questioned him on methods practicable for exploring the lower course of the Congo, and prevailed on him to accom-

pany him in his bold attempt. On the 5th of November, 1876, the two expeditions, together composed of four hundred men, left Nyangwe and penetrated into the great equatorial forest. After the most painful struggle during fourteen days against the giant vegetation which impeded their march, they arrived at the river, decimated by fatigue and sickness. Tippo-Tip hesitated, but Stanley stood firm. Partly by water and partly on foot by the side of the stream the expedition held on its way. But on all sides the natives rose in arms. To proceed numerous conflicts were necessary, and, moreover, smallpox and dysentery broke out, with their attendant miseries. They arrived at the tributary of the River Kasuka. For fifty days the difficulties and dangers of their route had been increasing, and Tippo-Tip declared that they must give up a task which was above human strength. Stanley, however, never for an instant thought of giving up his aim; he would tear its secret from the great river. His men, devoted, confident and inspired by his ardour, managed to get together the boats necessary for the journey, and on the 20th of December took leave of the Arabs. The expedition, still composed of one hundred and fifty persons, entered their twenty-three boats and started their memorable journey into a mysterious and unknown country.

The first natural obstacle that arrested their flotilla was the series of rapids to which the explorer gave his name, Stanley Falls. It took twenty days to cross them or make the detour (6th to 25th January, 1877).

On the 12th of March they arrived at Stanley Pool and encamped at the village of Namo, which five years later changed its name for that of Leopoldville.

The inhabitants of this region were less warlike than those previously met with; but beyond the Pool nature was preparing for Stanley obstacles of another kind. He had then to conquer the rage of the river, a furious torrent flowing in a deep bed, traversing winding gorges, falling in foam from terrace to terrace. Thus it took the explorer five months to pass the succession of cataracts which for a hundred and fifty-five miles separate the Pool from Boma, where the expedition, decimated and at the end of its resources, finally arrived on 9th April, 1877. It was almost three years since it had left Zanzibar and nine months since it started from Nyangwe. Of the 356 negro companions that Stanley had at his departure, only 115 arrived with him at the other side of the continent. His three English companions, Barker and the two brothers Pocock, had one by one died at his side. But the end of the great journey was attained: a vast curve was described in the heart of equatorial Africa, one of the greatest problems of contemporary geography was solved. "A prodigious exploit," writes Elisée Reclus, "which shows the courage and marvellous energy of its author, his unconquerable perseverance, extraordinary moral ascendancy and a military genius of the first order."

The description of this new journey across the mysterious continent appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* of 12th November, 1877, and produced a legitimate

emotion in the geographical and political world. The clear-sighted saw at once that the route so long sought for to open Central Africa to the civilising influence and commercial exploitation of Europe was finally discovered.

Across those immense regions, where there was yet no other passage, the Congo opened a road leading into the heart of the continent. Compared with this giant stream, all the others that empty themselves on the two coasts of equatorial Africa are rivulets without importance, which can only be navigated by steamships for a few miles. But it was the steamer that was to be the agent of the peaceful and rapid conquest of Central Africa. A small flotilla taken to Stanley Pool and set afloat on the waters of the Upper Congo was to achieve more for her in a few years than three centuries of laborious, costly and heroic efforts of land exploration.

Leopold II, with his remarkable intelligence, was quick in perceiving all this. A radical change was at once made in the base of Belgian operations; it was decided that Bagamoyo and Zanzibar should be abandoned for Banana and Boma. The whole plan of future operations was so quickly drawn up that when in January, 1878, Stanley, returning from Africa, arrived at Marseilles, he found there two delegates of King Leopold, Baron Greindl and General Sandford, who informed him that his discoveries had given rise to a great project, for carrying out which his experience and active aid were solicited.

Stanley soon learned that it was no longer a question

of a purely scientific expedition, but of an economical and political enterprise which would make its leader a conqueror as well as an explorer. Practical methods of reaching the Upper Congo must be found out, friendly commercial relations established with the tribes on its banks, stations established among them and right obtained from their chiefs to occupy the country, with the aim of carrying out a political scheme as surprising as original, as immense as noble, which should, if realised, transform the basin of the Congo, till then unknown, into a European dependency. In a word, the great stream was to be conquered and on its banks the blue flag with the golden star erected.

This project was too audacious and new to be indifferently received by those whom their exploits had placed in the first rank of African explorers. At the beginning of August, in the second interview, at Paris, with the delegates of King Leopold, Stanley approved of the main scheme and promised to come to Brussels when the King desired.

Thus the enterprise that seven years later was to give birth to the Congo Free State, and of which Leopold was to be the sovereign, was now formed, and every one of the questions relative to its organisation discussed. Finally it was decided that a society for the exploration of the upper stream should be formed.

A meeting took place on November 25th, 1878, where George Brugmann, Delloye-Mathieu, Goffin, Kerdyck and Pencoffs, Léon Lambert, Lemmé and Baron Greindl joined in the constitution of a joint association with a capital of 1,000,000 francs to be

called the Comité d'études of the Upper Congo. After the signature of the contract, the honorary presidency was given to King Leopold ; and the three Vice-Presidents of the Belgian Committee of the International African Association, Dolez, Baron d'Anethan and Beernaert, were made honorary members. Some weeks later the Executive Council chose from its members, as President, Colonel Strauch, who had just been appointed General Secretary of the International African Association, in place of Baron Greindl named Belgian Ambassador at Mexico.

The enterprise was carried on with the most feverish activity and the utmost secrecy. If anything could astonish after this ambitious and original conception it is the rapidity, discretion and skill with which it was carried out.

In February, 1879, Stanley, on board the *Albion*, left Europe for Zanzibar, where he intended to get workers and baggage men. In May the first expedition, composed of thirteen agents, four Belgians, three English, three Americans, two Danes and one Frenchman, with all necessaries, embarked at Antwerp on board the steamer *Barga*, and on 14th August arrived at the mouth of the Congo. Already the *En Avant*, the *Royal*, the *Belgique*, the *Espérance* and the *Jeune Africaine*, that is, the first vessels of the little fleet of steamers called to conquer the mighty Congo, were in harbour in the creek of Banana. On the 21st, escorted by their smaller boats, they weighed anchor for the ascent of the great stream. The conquest had begun.

In September Stanley, passing Noki, the limit of

European occupation, stopped at Belgique-Crique and laid the foundation of the station of Vivi; then the explorers undertook the transport of the steamers across the unconquered region of the cataracts which for four hundred years had stopped all attempts at penetration. It was a terrible experience, that of marching under the African sun in the deadly atmosphere of humid valleys. It was a year of frightful labour during which they climbed up an interminable series of ascents of abrupt and desolate slopes succeeded by the descent of slippery declivities.

The expedition went slowly through this pathless country, by marshes, by flooded ravines, cutting a way with a pick through the rock, with an axe across the forest. They needed more arms to drag the vehicles with the steamers, tents, tools, provisions, merchandise. Stanley's colleagues fell one after the other and he himself nearly broke down. At Brussels letters were anxiously opened. But the valiant band still advanced. On February 21st, 1880, it reached Isangila, on May 1st founded Manyanga and in December arrived at Stanley Pool.

The greatness of the fight alone sustained the energy of all these modest pioneers, none of whom knew that he was working at the foundation of a new state, of an empire! Those only who have been intimately and actively mixed with the events of this commencement will be able one day to recount the succession of hopes and joys, of disillusion and discouragement, that was undergone at Brussels in the course of those two years. At one time everything would seem lost; with the next courier hope was born again.

Moreover, individual covetousness was to be feared. The road was certainly free since the Congo was not yet under the rule of any European power ; but a flag might suddenly rise up and bar the route. On the north bank, De Brazza, starting from Gabon, was advancing with forced marches with the Pool for objective. On the south bank, Capello and Ivens, starting from St. Paul de Loanda, were exploring the Kwango. If the French explorer, after taking possession of the north shore of the Pool, proceeded to the south shore, Stanley, agent of a private society, would have to retreat before the flag of France ; or, if Capello and Ivens, after arriving at the Kwango, descended that river as far as the Congo and established themselves at Kwamouth or at Kinshasa, Stanley would be forced to retire before the Portuguese colours.

But De Brazza, arriving at the Pool in September, 1880, stopped on the north bank ; Capello and Ivens did not undertake the descent of the Kwango ; and Stanley, still dragging his fleet after him, passed between his rivals and founded Leopoldville. In December, 1881, he launched on the waters of the upper stream the *En Avant*, and, soon afterwards, the *Royal* and the *A.I.A.* (Association Internationale Africaine). The path of the Upper Congo belonged to him. The first part of the fight was won.

While the Belgians, or rather their King, thus precluded the conquest of the Congo basin by the occupation of the region of the Falls and the banks of the upper stream as far as the Stanley Falls, explorers of different nations continued to make important

contributions to geographical knowledge of portions of the interior which had remained so long unknown.

At the same period, Emin Bey, governor of the Egyptian province of the Meridian, and Captain Casati went to the country of the Mombutu. The storm that growled in the north after the revolt of the Mahdi (1881), the taking of Khartoum and the tragic death of Gordon (January 26th, 1885) stopped their adventurous courses and soon united them, first at Lado, then at Wadelai, where they were cut off from communication with the civilised world. The results obtained by the agents of the King of the Belgians during the first three years of operations were decisive and fulfilled the hopes of the Committee at Brussels. This Committee then took new resolutions that were to have a most important result.

So as to establish firmly the work it had begun in the Congo, the Committee perceived that the bases must be solid and regular, so as to prevent political difficulties subsequently arising that might impede its progress or endanger the result. Undoubtedly the fertile and populous territories which were being revealed to the world and about to be opened to its activity would arouse much covetousness. Moreover, the arrival of numerous Europeans was foreseen, and it became indispensable to establish administration and police—on the one hand to confirm the occupation, on the other to prevent disorders. In a word, the infant organism must be protected from assault and its rights over the Congo territory rendered incontestable, these rights having been acquired by treaties with independent native chiefs.

It was the conclusion of these treaties and the importance that the Committee for Exploration attached to their regularity that gave rise, at the close of 1883, to the special mission which was entrusted to General Sir Frederic Goldsmith, formerly a high official in the Indian Government.

The Comité d'études had become the founder of an empire, and it now took the title of "Association internationale du Congo" (A.I.C.) and redoubled its activity and daring.

New agents—Delcommune, Major Parminter, Lieutenant Daundeldt (1883), the Marquis de Pourtales and Count Posse (1884)—joined the organisers in the Lower Congo; new expeditions, having for their principal officers Van Kerckhoven, Liebrechts, Wester and others, left Belgium, while at the Congo Stanley and his colleagues pursued their conquests, not only in the upper basin, but also in the basin of the little neighbouring river Niadi-Kwilu.

The action of the A.I.C. in this region was inspired by the territorial pretensions of Portugal. In face of the Belgian establishment in the Lower Congo, Portugal had, indeed, again affirmed her "historic rights" to the sovereignty of the two banks of the lower stream and the coast at its mouth from 8° to 5° 12' southern latitude. In case of the recognition of these pretensions by the powers, it was indispensable for the future state to make sure of another issue from the upper regions towards the ocean.

It is this that inspired the conquest of the secondary valley of the Kwilu. Captain Grant Elliott was

commissioned to undertake this in December, 1882. He took possession of the country and connected Manyanga and Vivi by a chain of stations to the coast at Sette-Cama and Massabe.

The mouths of the stream and the central region of the basin were not, at this moment, the sole objects of the attention of the Committee at Brussels. The first explorations of German travellers across the basin of the Upper Kasai had also called its attention to those fertile and populous territories. It formed the ambition of obtaining them, and while Grant Elliott and Vande Velde operated in the Niadi-Kwilu (1883-4), while Delcommune placed the port of Boma under the protectorate of the A.I.C. (April, 1884), while Coquilhat established himself among the same Bangala who, seven years earlier, had received Stanley so ill (May, 1884), the Committee secretly organised a military expedition to conquer the Lunda, the kingdom of Muata Yamvo.

Five years had thus sufficed to penetrate to the heart of the continent, to make the most brilliant discoveries, to visit peaceably a hundred new peoples, to obtain from native chiefs more than five hundred treaties of suzerainty, to found forty stations, to launch on the upper stream, beyond the cataracts, five steamers, to occupy the country from the coast to Stanley Falls, from Bangala to Luluabourg! Diplomatic Europe could not remain an indifferent spectator of an enterprise so daring and crowned with such success.

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE AND THE PROCLAMATION OF
THE CONGO FREE STATE

And now we approach the moment which was to see Leopold's secret hopes realised. The work of his life was to be crowned with success.

The general plan of the conquest of the Congo basin by the Committee at Brussels had been clearly formed at the commencement of the enterprise ; it was executed with remarkable consistency and promptitude. Meanwhile, in Europe, the political end pursued by Leopold in the Congo was no longer a secret to the powers ; diplomatic negotiations had gone side by side with occupation and effective possession. The recognition of the sovereignty of the Association by the Government of the United States of America on the 22nd April, 1884, was the first success in this difficult field.

With France, which had espoused the secret projects of De Brazza, and with Portugal, which abandoned none of its historic intentions, relations were strained. At this very moment a treaty cleverly obtained from England by Portuguese diplomacy nearly compromised everything (26th February, 1884) : in exchange for certain trading privileges England recognised the sovereignty of Portugal on the estuary and two banks of the Lower Congo up to Noki. This was to deprive the territories of the Association of all issue to the ocean by the Congo estuary ; nay, of all communication with the ocean, since, on his side, De Brazza raised claims to the basin of the Kwilu.



Before this peril, which could, if not quickly met, ruin all its projects, the Association, abandoned by England, turned towards France, its neighbour in Africa, and the Agreement of 23rd April, 1884, was concluded ; the Government of the Republic engaged to respect the stations and territories of the Association and to put no obstacle in the way of the exercise of its rights ; the Association on its side declared that it would cede its possessions to none, and that if, through unforeseen circumstances, she should ever be forced to realise them, she engaged herself to give France the preference.

At the same time the Chambers of Commerce of London, Rotterdam and Hamburg rose against the treaty, but their protestations were of no avail. It seemed as if the treaty would soon be ratified by the English Parliament and at Lisbon. Lucien Cordeiro placed before the Cortes a Bill for establishing the Portuguese province of the Congo, divided into the districts of Cabinda, Landana, Banana, Boma and Noki. It was at this moment that Bismarck, who then presided—or at least pretended to—over the destinies of Europe, intervened as a protector. Prince Bismarck declared himself the champion of the original scheme of the King of the Belgians. In April, at the same time that he transmitted to Lisbon and London the protestations of his Government against the treaty of 26th February, he addressed himself to France, inviting her to join him and regulate the African question by a general agreement. Then on the 23rd June, when the German Budget was being debated, he publicly announced that Belgian

enterprise in the Congo had for aim the foundation of an independent state, and that the Imperial Government favoured this project. Three days later in the House of Commons the Secretary for Foreign Affairs denounced the Portuguese treaty. One of the greatest dangers to the Congo scheme was conjured away. Leopold II was triumphant.

The overtures of Prince Bismarck to France had been sympathetically received in Paris, and having previously signalised its intention to all the powers, the German Empire officially recognised on 3rd November, 1884, the International Association as a sovereign power, and invited representatives of the powers to meet at Berlin to establish an international understanding on these principles :—

1. Free commerce in the basin and estuary of the Congo.

2. Application on the Congo and Niger of the principles of free navigation.

3. Definition of the formalities to be observed for new occupations on the African coasts to be effective.

No mention was made in these resolutions of the political difficulties. Although there was an intimate connection between the economic legislation established by the Conference and the political idea which was the cause of its being summoned, territorial questions were not touched in its deliberations.

The Conference was inaugurated on November 15th, under the presidency of Prince Bismarck. Fourteen powers were represented there—Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, the United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Low Coun-

tries, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Norway and Turkey. Each of them had one or two plenipotentiaries. Each delegation had also its technical advisers, among whom were—for the United States, Stanley; for Belgium, Emile Banning; for Germany, Woermann; for Spain, Francesco Coello; for the Low Countries, De Bloeme; for France, Dr. Ballay; for Great Britain, Sir Travers Twiss; for Portugal, Lucien Cordeiro. Baron de Courcel, representative of France, and Baron Lambert, representative of Belgium, were at the first meeting designated respectively as President and referendary of the central section.

The Belgian representatives, and especially E. Banning, played a prominent part in the work of the Congress. They were well acquainted with all questions and possessed a superior knowledge of facts. Thus Bismarck had apparently been the moving spirit and the chief originator of the Congress. In reality, however, it was due to the clever machinations of Belgium's King, who even outwitted the Iron Chancellor. Leopold had availed himself of a secret agent, Victor, who was sent to Berlin for the special purpose, and there he cleverly knew how to arouse Bismarck's interest in the African question.

The deliberations of the Conference lasted for three months. Its resolutions are recorded in a document known as the General Act of Berlin, and constitute a treaty of seven chapters and thirty-eight articles. The ten protocols and five reports that accompany it form an explicit and authentic commentary. The following is a succinct analysis :—

GENERAL ACT OF BERLIN

CHAPTER I. *Declaration as to freedom of commerce.*—

After stating the bounds of the Congo basin, the first chapter establishes the principle of free commerce in the most absolute sense. No monopoly might be granted, no commercial privilege of any kind. For twenty years no import duty should be paid. For- eigners were to receive the same treatment as subjects. Liberty of worship and conscience, religious tolerance, was guaranteed to all. The native populations were to be protected and measures taken for the amelioration of their moral and material condition.

CHAPTER II. *Declaration as to traffic in slaves.*—This chapter lays down special measures to put down by sea and land traffic in negroes. The holding of slave markets and transport of slaves were forbidden.

CHAPTER III. *Declaration on the neutrality of the Congo basin.*—The powers that had a right of sovereignty or protectorate might, under certain conditions, proclaim their neutrality. In case of strife about the Congo or in the limits of its basin the powers that signed engaged to submit the affair to mediation or arbitration before having recourse to arms.

CHAPTER IV. *Act of Navigation of the Congo.*—The navigation of the Congo and its tributaries was free. The road, railway or canal that ran where the course of the stream was obstructed was considered as the stream itself. No toll might be established at entry or on its banks. The navigation of the Congo was to remain free, even in time of war, for the vessels of

all nations, belligerent or not, and private property might not be seized even when under the enemy's colours or in any of the waters referred to in this Act. An international commission was specially charged to see that the Act was carried out.

CHAPTER V. *Niger Navigation Act.*—Liberty of navigating this stream was established under exactly similar conditions to those for the Congo, except that the administration of the river was exclusively reserved to the powers concerned acting separately.

CHAPTER VI. *Declaration relative to the conditions necessary to be fulfilled in territorial occupations on the African coasts.*—Every occupation should be notified and only held good if effective.

CHAPTER VII. *General enactments.*—The powers that signed reserved the power to introduce into the Act what modifications should be judged useful. Other powers might join: their adhesion would subject them to the same obligations and advantages as those of the other subscribers.

While at Berlin diplomatists were deliberating and taking general measures, the Congo Association pursued their negotiations for obtaining the recognition of the Association and the settlement of its boundaries.

The historic day of the 23rd of February, 1885, had at last arrived; it was the day of the real foundation of the Congo State. At this day's meeting the Conference received notification from Colonel Strauch, President of the International Association of the Congo, of the recognition of the Association

as a sovereign state by all the powers represented at Berlin; and this was also the day on which they agreed to the General Act of the Conference. Then each member of the distinguished assembly rose in turn and made a congratulatory speech to the new State that had just been publicly received into the concert of nations, and paid warm compliments to its founder.

Three days afterwards, in closing the Conference, Prince Bismarck pronounced these significant words, the last spoken before the signature: "The new State of the Congo is called upon to become one of the principal guardians of the work that we have in view. I wish it prosperous development and the accomplishment of the noble aspirations of its illustrious founder."

The end proposed by the Comité d'études and pursued by the Congo Association was now attained. For long it had been believed that the work was above the resources and power of the workers, that it was too great, too vast for success. Thanks to its elevated character, to the efforts accomplished, to the sacrifices and devotion by means of which it had been accomplished, it had nevertheless only taken five years to triumph over all obstacles and to obtain its entry under specially flattering conditions into the public law of Europe.

Undoubtedly the country that was most surprised at the result of the Berlin Conference was Belgium herself. For long she had ceased to take any interest in far-away and daring enterprises; moreover, events had so rapidly succeeded each other, that no one yet

knew what to think about the Congo question. But Belgium's King was *au courant*; he knew what he was doing, and he was sure of the issue. There had been a series of manifestations in honour of the King by municipal councils, and commercial, industrial and maritime associations; but public opinion still remained indifferent and incredulous.

Thus it was with growing astonishment that the Belgians learnt that the King was about to become the sovereign of a new State, and that, pursuing his gigantic task, he was about to solicit with this aim the assent of the legislature, according to Article 62 of the Belgian Constitution; in fact, by a letter dated 15th April, 1885, Leopold II prayed his ministers to ask the necessary authorisation from Parliament. It was granted him on the 28th by the Chamber and on the 30th by the Senate. After this twofold vote the King notified on the 1st August, and at later dates, to the heads of the Governments represented at Berlin, the foundation of the State and his accession to the throne. Here is the text of the document that constituted the birth certificate of the Congo Free State. The final title of the new African realm is found, the title adopted by its ruler is met with here for the first time:—

“Your Majesty's Government has consented to recognise the flag of the International Association of the Congo as that of a friendly State.

“After the signature of the General Act of the Berlin Conference, the President and Members of that Assembly, on receiving the adhesion of the Association to the work of the Conference, have

manifested their sympathy with the enterprise. Now that the position of the Association is fixed from the international point of view, that its territorial constitution is established and that its mission has received most highly valued encouragement, I am able to inform Your Majesty and your Government that the possessions of the International Association of the Congo will henceforth form the Congo Free State. I have the honour at the same time to inform Your Majesty and your Government that, authorised by the Belgian legislature to become the head of the new State, I have, with the consent of the Association, taken the title of King of the Congo Free State. The connection between Belgium and this State will be entirely personal.

“The new State, I am firmly convinced, will answer the expectations of the Powers who have, in a manner, greeted its entry into the family of nations before the event. I am firmly convinced that the new State will show itself worthy of the goodwill of all the Powers. I will try to guide it so that it may, and I venture to hope that Your Majesty and your Government will consent to help me by your favourable reception of the present notification.

“I am, etc.,

“LEOPOLD.”

On August 1st M. Van Etvelde, appointed administrator of foreign affairs, informed the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the powers represented at the Conference that the Congo Free State “declared itself perpetually neutral and claimed the advantages

guaranteed by the General Act at the same time that it assumed the duties imposed by neutrality." This document completes the royal notification by defining the limits of the State conformably to the treaties successively concluded by the Association with Germany, England, France and Portugal.

Previously, on July 1st, Sir Francis de Winton, who had succeeded Stanley, had written to the heads of missions and commercial houses announcing the foundation of the State ; and on the 19th, at Banana, he had publicly proclaimed its constitution under the sovereignty of King Leopold.

On September 29th M. Camille Janssen embarked for the Congo with the title of Administrator-General, and at the beginning of the following year the seat of the local administration, until then established at Vivi, was transported to Boma.

CHAPTER XVII

LEOPOLD II, SOVEREIGN OF THE CONGO FREE STATE

LEOPOLD I, who, during a long stay in England, had been initiated into the great economic and colonial questions, never ceased to occupy himself in the search for transatlantic markets for national industry in place of those that Belgium lost by her separation from Holland. In order to establish colonies he sent search embassies, of which he himself defrayed the expense ; he started up, independently of any action of Government, expeditions and attempts at colonisation in Central America, Brazil, the Guinea coast, Abyssinia and the New Hebrides, Salomon Isles, etc. But the time had not yet come : young Belgium was not yet ripe for such enterprises. All failed for lack of experienced leaders, serious assistance and sustained sacrifices.

Leopold II, brought up in the severe and serious school of his father, the inheritor of his patriotic views, early showed himself a sharer in his economic ideas. We have seen how, even before his accession to the throne, he had advised his country to consider colonisation. At his majority, in the Senate on September 29th, 1855, he thus expressed his views on that subject :—

“A young nationality like ours ought to be bold, progressive and self-confident. Our resources are

immense, and I do not fear to say that we could obtain incalculable success from them. To succeed it is only necessary to dare. That is one of the secrets of the power and splendour that our northern neighbours have enjoyed for over a century. We undoubtedly possess as many elements of success : why are not our ambitions as high ?”

The meeting of the Brussels Geographical Conference, the constitution of the African International Association and of the Committee for the Exploration of the Upper Congo, the foundation of the Congo Free State, speak of the boldness, perseverance, and originality with which the aspirations of the Heir Apparent were subsequently applied and realised by the Sovereign.

From the meeting of the Brussels Geographical Conference in 1876 until the end of the Berlin Conference in 1885, that is to say, during nine years, Belgium had no official position with regard to the African work of her King. Indeed, the King had met with little enthusiasm for his plans. The only support he found was among several big bankers and financiers, and especially among the officers of the Belgian army who saw in Belgian expansion a glorious and brilliant future for military exploits. Numerous officers of the army were authorised to engage in the service of the enterprise. Belgium, however, could not remain quite insensible to the sympathetic and encouraging welcome made by the Governments of two worlds to the new State, the messenger of peace among the disinherited races of Central Africa. At length, from 1878 to 1884, Belgian diplomacy lent

zealous aid to the work, and this became permanent in Berlin in 1884-5, as in London and Paris. But the Parliament had not yet been called upon to discuss the personal plans of Leopold II nor to aid the King in the realisation of his vast projects.

Leopold II was a constitutional monarch, and his country had a right to claim his exclusive services. If therefore the legislative and representative Chambers refused to grant him permission to accept the sovereignty of a new State, he would have to submit and abandon African absolutism for Belgian constitutionalism.

On the day after the Berlin Conference this situation was modified. A demand was therefore addressed by His Majesty to the legislative Chambers in a famous letter to his Ministers and their President, M. Beernaert. Its object was to obtain from them, conformably to Article 62 of the Belgian Constitution, authorisation for assuming the sovereignty of the new State. This is the document :—

“Brussels, 16th April, 1885.

“Gentlemen,

“The work done in Africa by the International Association of the Congo has undergone a great development. A new State has been founded, its limits determined and its flag recognised by almost all the Powers. There remains to organise on the banks of the Congo government and administration.

“The plenipotentiaries of the nations represented at the Berlin Conference have shown themselves

favourable to the work that has been undertaken, and since then the two legislative Chambers, the principal towns and a large number of bodies and important associations have expressed the most sympathetic sentiments on the subject.

“In presence of all this encouragement I cannot recede from the pursuit and achievement of a task in which I have taken an important part, and since, gentlemen, you think with me that it may be of advantage to the country, I beg you to ask the legislative Chambers for the assent that I require.

“The terms of Article 62 of the Constitution describe the situation that will be established.

“King of the Belgians, I shall be at the same time sovereign of another State.

“This State will be independent like Belgium, and will enjoy, as she does, the benefits of neutrality. It will have to pay its own way, and experience and the example of neighbouring colonies bear me out in saying that it will dispose of the necessary resources.

“Its defence and police will be carried out by African forces commanded by European volunteers.

“There will, therefore, only be a personal link between Belgium and the new State. I am convinced that this union will be advantageous to Belgium, and can in no case cause her any outlay.

“If my hopes are realised I shall be sufficiently rewarded for my efforts. The welfare of Belgium, as you know, gentlemen, is the object of my whole life.

“LEOPOLD.”

Belgium's first official intervention in the King's African work was far from being an entirely enthusiastic one. Excessive fear of all ambitious foreign enterprise, repugnance for everything that bore the character of strangeness or novelty, neutralised all sympathy for what many called "the King's generous dreams." The dominant sentiments were astonishment, incredulity, distrust and prudence. The respective parties sought to rid themselves of responsibility for an approbation which, however, they never thought of refusing. Reassured by the prudent reservations formulated by the head of the Cabinet himself, the legislature almost unanimously voted as follows, the Chamber on the 28th, the Senate on the 30th :—

"His Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians, is authorised to become the head of the State founded in Africa by the International Association of the Congo.

"The union with the new Congo State will be exclusively personal."

The second official intervention of Belgium in the Congo work dates from 29th April, 1887. It was relative to the loan at a premium of 150,000,000 contracted by the Congo State. As shares could not be bought in Belgium without authorisation from the Government, this authorisation was solicited from the Chambers and accorded by law, 29th April, 1887.

Two years later the Belgian Government showed its interest in the private enterprises of Belgians in the Congo by giving financial aid to the Belgian Society that was about to undertake the construction

of a railway across the region of the Falls. A law of 29th July authorised the Government to grant 10,000,000 to this Society, and this sum was in 1896 increased to 15,000,000, while at the same time the Belgian State granted its endorsement to a subscription of 10,000,000 in bonds.

The intervention of Belgium in this case was of an economic character, the commerce and industry of the country being likely to profit so immensely from the construction of this railway. The subsidy of 30,000,000 francs that the Chambers granted in June, 1890, to the expedition of Captain Delporte was of a scientific nature; the explorer had been charged with the task of tracing the course of the Congo and its principal tributaries.

Belgium thus became gradually familiarised with the colonial idea. The exploits of her sons at the Congo gave her more confidence in herself. She grew bolder, she appreciated the work her second King was doing for her.

Finally, the divers marks of sympathy that Parliament had given to the African enterprise could only be the prelude of a more significant and farther-reaching intervention. For the first time, distinctly and openly, the Belgian treasury was engaged in the King's work, and the country, by the mouth of its representatives, was soon to state that it would henceforth regard without uneasiness an eventual entry into colonial politics. On 2nd August, 1889, two days after the constitution at Brussels of the Congo Railway Company, the King signed the following will bequeathing the Congo to Belgium :—

THE KING'S WILL

“Desirous of assuring to our beloved country the fruits of the work that for long years we have been pursuing in the African continent with the generous and devoted aid of many Belgians; convinced that we thus contribute to assure to Belgium if she wishes it an indispensable outlet for her commerce and industry and to open new routes for the activity of her children,

“We by these presents bequeath and grant, after our death, to Belgium, all our sovereign rights in the Congo Free State as they have been recognised by declarations, conventions and treaties since 1884 between foreign Powers on the one part and the International Association of the Congo and the Congo Free State on the other part, together with all benefits and advantages appurtenant to that sovereignty.

“Until the Belgian legislature has decided as to the acceptance of my said disposition, the sovereignty shall be collectively exercised by the advice of the three administrators of the Congo Free State and by the Governor-General.

“Made at Brussels, 2nd August, 1889.

“LEOPOLD.”

This will was a masterstroke of diplomacy and business capacity.

A year later the Government was led by events to inform the country of this royal gift, and M. Beernaert, Prime Minister, read the deed to the Chamber of Representatives on 9th July, 1890, with the royal

message addressed to himself that had accompanied the document.

“Brussels, *5th August*, 1889.

“Dear Minister,

“I have never ceased to urge on my fellow-countrymen the necessity of giving their attention to the countries beyond the sea.

“History teaches that nations with a restricted territory have material and moral reasons for ranging beyond their narrow frontiers. Greece founded on the shores of the Mediterranean opulent cities, the mothers of arts and civilisation. Venice, later, established its greatness by the development of maritime and commercial relations no less than by political successes. The Netherlands possess thirty million subjects in the Indies who exchange for tropical produce the goods of the mother country.

“It is by serving the cause of humanity and progress that nations of the second rank become useful members of the great family of nations. More than any other, a manufacturing and commercial people like ourselves ought to strive to obtain a market for all its workers, for thinkers, capitalists and workmen.

“These patriotic considerations have dominated my life. It was these that determined the creation of the African work.

“My labours have not been sterile : a young and vast State, directed from Brussels, has peacefully been brought to the light, thanks to the friendliness of the Powers who have applauded its commencement. Belgians administer it, and other compatriots, daily

more numerous, already obtain interest on their capital there.

“The immense fluvial network of the Upper Congo opens to our efforts rapid and economical routes of communication by which we may penetrate directly into the centre of the African continent. The construction of the railway in the region of the cataracts, now, thanks to the recent vote of the legislature, assured, will greatly increase the facilities of access. Under these conditions there is a great future for the Congo, for its immense riches will soon be clear to all.

“The day after this important act I thought it my duty to enable Belgium, when I should die, to profit by my task and by the work of those who aided me to found and direct the State, to whom I here again give thanks. I have therefore, as sovereign of the Congo Free State, made the Will that I send you ; I desire you to communicate it to the Legislative Chambers when it seems fit to you.

“The beginnings of enterprises like those in which I have been so much occupied are difficult and onerous. A king to render a service to his country should not shrink from the conception and execution of a work that appears foolhardy. The wealth of a sovereign consists in public prosperity : that alone in his eyes is a treasure to be envied and he should constantly endeavour to increase it.

“Until my dying day I shall continue, with the same idea of the national interest that has hitherto guided me, to direct and support my African work, but if, without waiting for that term, the nation desired to enter into a closer connection with my Congo posses-

sions, I should not hesitate to place them at its disposal. I should be happy during my lifetime to see it in full possession.

“Meanwhile, let me express my gratitude towards the Chambers and the Government for the aid which they have given me on several occasions in this creation. I do not think I am deceived in saying that Belgium will reap great advantages from it and will see opened before her a new continent with happy and wide horizons.

“ Believe me, dear Minister,

“ Yours very sincerely and affectionately,

“ LEOPOLD.”

But the extraordinarily rapid extension of the work undertaken in Africa, in increasing the expenses of the young State, compelled it to ask for direct financial assistance. Belgium, destined one day to reap the benefit of the patient efforts of its sovereign, could supply it, and the Government did not hesitate to propose necessary measures to this end, at the same time informing the legislature of the King's generous bequest, and asking it to notify the following convention, concluded 3rd July, 1890, with the Congo State :—

CONVENTION

1. The Belgian State agreed to advance as loan to the Congo Free State a sum of 25,000,000 francs, i.e. 5,000,000 francs after the approbation of the legislature and 2,000,000 francs yearly for ten years, beginning with that first instalment. During these

ten years the sums thus lent should pay no interest.

2. Six months after the expiration of the said term of ten years the Belgian State might, if it thought fit, annex the Congo Free State with all the possessions, rights and privileges appurtenant to the sovereignty of that State, as they have been recognised and agreed upon, especially by the General Act at Berlin 26th February, 1885, and the General Act at Brussels and the declaration of 2nd July, 1890, but also undertaking all obligations of the said State, the King expressly refusing all indemnity for the sacrifices he had imposed on himself. A law would regulate the *régime* under which the Congo territories would be then placed.

3. From this time the Belgian State should receive from the Congo Free State such information as it judged desirable on the economic, commercial and financial situation of the latter. It could especially demand communication of budgets, receipt and expenditure, and statements of the Customs officials as to exports and imports. This information should be given only for the purpose of letting the Belgian Government know what was going on, and the latter was to interfere in no way with the administration of the Congo Free State, which would continue to have no bond with Belgium but in the personal union of the two crowns. But the Congo State engaged to contract no loan in future without the assent of the Belgian Government.

4. If at the end of the said term Belgium decided

not to accept the annexation of the Congo State, the sum of 25,000,000 francs lent should not be demandable for a new term of ten years, but it should give an annual interest of $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, payable quarterly, and even before this term the Congo Free State should effect a partial repayment with all sums proceeding from the grant of lands or mines.

On 25th and 30th July, 1890, the representatives of the people voted in favour of the Bill submitted to them. On this great and serious political question the parties were united; even Paul Janson, leader of the Radical opposition in the Chamber, found eloquence to justify the project and voted for it; the agreement was adopted without meeting with serious opposition. There was one dissentient voice in the Chamber; three who did not vote in the Senate. With the exception of two or three newspapers, the Belgian Press unanimously approved and congratulated the delegates of the nation.

As regards the army, it had from the beginning, in 1877, freely offered its devotion, and from its ranks ten volunteers offered themselves whenever a brother-in-arms fell in Africa. Public opinion, too, had gradually turned round. Devoted citizens offered help by pen and word and won warm adherence in all classes of society; a band of up-to-date philanthropists and clear-sighted business men had put private capital at the service of the political idea for the formation of commercial and industrial enterprises in the Congo; and thus inertia was transformed into active and practical collaboration, distrust into keen pride.

The annexation of the Congo to Belgium, sooner or later, became certain. The legislature voted in July, 1894, the revision of Article 1 of the Belgian Constitution, and by introducing a paragraph relative to the acquisition of colonies prepared legal facilities for the time when the country should have to give its final decision. To Article 1 was added :—

“The colonies, over-sea possessions or protectorates that Belgium may acquire are ruled by special laws. European troops sent for their defence can only be recruited by voluntary engagements.”

At one time it was believed that the date fixed by the Agreement of 3rd July, 1890, would by general consent be advanced.

Indeed, the financial intervention of Belgium, the subsidy granted by the King and local receipts would, it was then thought, give the State a regular revenue and assure its normal development during the period before the opening of the right of option stipulated by the Agreement. Events, however, did not correspond to this expectation, and to provide for the situation the Government of the Congo was obliged to solicit the Belgian Government for power to contract new debts, contrary to Article 3 of the Convention of 3rd July, 1890.

In this conjuncture the Belgian Cabinet, presided over by Jules de Burlet, after careful consideration determined that the wisest and most rational way of facing the difficulty, and the course also that was most suited to the interests and dignity of Belgium, would be to settle the past accounts of the Congo State and

at the same time entirely take over its future administration. In short, it decided to annex the Congo. A Bill, signed 9th January, 1895, by which the Sovereign declared that he would immediately cede the Congo to Belgium, was deposited in the Chamber of Representatives on the 12th of the same month by the Count de Merode-Westerloo, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

In spite of explanations and much information the country did not seem to comprehend the motive that had determined the Government to propose immediate annexation. A strong Socialist minority, which, in consequence of the universal suffrage, had been returned to the Chamber, made obstinate opposition, and in some Press organs, the clerical paper *Le Patriote*, the Radical journal *La Reforme*, and the Socialist organ *Le Peuple* at their head, commenced an ardent campaign against it.

No less active was the propaganda on the opposite side which was pursued by the daily more numerous partisans of colonial politics, sustained by the universal sympathy without, in Germany, England, France and Holland, where politicians and the Press manifested in favour of the transformation of the Belgian State into a Belgian colony.

However, the movement that began so rapidly soon became slower. Unexpected hesitations came to light. People who were believed to be favourable to the project suddenly declared themselves its adversaries. The Parliamentary Commission appointed to examine the project did nothing. The information that it demanded came slowly or not

at all; finally the Cabinet no longer showed, from the month of March, the same firm and unanimous opinion that it had at first clearly proclaimed. Nevertheless, the discussion in the Chamber was fixed for June, when—so said the best-informed—a small but certain majority would be found.

Such was the situation on May 18th when, unexpectedly, M. de Lantsheere, formerly President of the Chamber, proposed to the Commission of twenty-one to vote a provisional subsidy to meet the financial embarrassment of the State. The first effect of this motion was to provoke a ministerial crisis: the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count de Merode-Westerloo, morally bound to the country and the Powers to pass the Bill of 9th January, thought that circumstances admitted no weakness and no compromise and resigned. A provisional subsidy of 5,600,000 francs was then proposed by the Government and voted by the Chambers. Adjournment of the question of annexation was the logical consequence of this vote. Much more, it meant the retraction of the scheme that M. de Smet de Naeyer, Prime Minister, had notified to the Chamber 2nd of November, 1895.

The Convention of 3rd July, 1890, thus remained untouched as to its political stipulations, and the discussion of the question was postponed to the date first fixed on: from August, 1900, to January, 1901.

Parliament would then have to examine and to decide if Belgium was to enter without further delay into possession of the Congo colony that her

sons had founded and that she owed to the royal initiative, or if she preferred to abstain for the moment and postpone decision to the date irrevocably fixed by paragraph 3 of the Royal Will—unless it reserved to itself the privilege of replying at the expiration of the term allowed by the Convention of 1890.

CHAPTER XVIII

POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF THE CONGO STATE : SOVEREIGN POWER—TERRITORY—PEOPLE

The Sovereign Power

IN order to understand in how much Leopold II was responsible for the Belgian atrocities, which, however greatly and grossly exaggerated, were a fact, it will be necessary to give a brief description of the political and judicial organisation of the Congo under the autocratic rule of the late King.

The Congo Free State was an absolute monarchy. His Majesty Leopold II, constitutional King in Europe, was in Africa sole arbiter of his subjects' destinies ; no constitution, in the ordinary sense of the word, limited the extent of his rights.

At the same time certain modifications were made to his absolutism by the General Act of Berlin, which gave a list of services and obligations. Moreover, chapter 4 of the General Act provided for the institution at the Congo of an international commission charged with superintending the execution of the measures relating to navigation, and road, railway and canal traffic. This commission was to have almost regal powers. Such an institution therefore would greatly restrain the authority of the State, and in fact would form a small Parlia-

ment and govern the Congo jointly with the King. But in reality the "International Commission on the Congo Navigation" remained a dead letter.

The actual form of the Government was certainly provisional. In fact, in virtue of the Convention of 3rd July, 1890, Belgium had the power of annexing the Congo State in 1900-1; moreover, the King left it to her by will. In case of annexation, a definitive law regulates the Constitution under which the colony will be placed.

The General Act of Berlin declared that the Powers subscribing bound themselves to respect the neutrality of the territories situated in the Congo basin as long as the States that exercise the right of sovereignty there, availing themselves of the privilege of proclaiming themselves neutral, should fulfil the duties that neutrality enjoins. The Congo State was placed under the condition of perpetual neutrality by the declaration of 1st August, 1885, rectified and completed by that of 18th December, 1894. The territories leased to her by Great Britain by the treaty of 12th May, 1894, were not subject to the condition of neutrality.

The flag of the State is blue with a golden star in the centre. It has been stated that it was by a strange coincidence the same flag as that of the "ancient kings" of the Congo; but in reality the negro chiefs knew no emblem of this kind. The blue standard starred with gold was proposed for the flag at the session of 21st June, 1877, of the African International Association, and adopted later by the Committee for the exploration of the Upper Congo, and

did not originate with the Free State. The coat-of-arms and State seal combine the arms of Leopold II, that is to say, of Belgium and Saxony, with the gold star and a representation of the great stream. Its device is *Travail et progrès*.

The Territory

The territory of the Free State is strictly confined to the basin of the Congo with the exception of two small parts, one situated on the Atlantic coast and on the left bank of the River Tshiloango, the other near Lake Albert Edward, which is fed from the basin of the Nile.

The Territories taken on Lease

Since 1890, the period of the organisation of the Vankerckhoven expedition, the Sovereign of the Congo State had increasingly been occupied by the idea of bringing back again into the realms of civilisation the ancient Egyptian provinces of Lupton and Emin which had been deprived of all relation with Europe since the revolt of the Mahdi in 1881.

This idea had been already discussed at the beginning of January, 1884, at Brussels with Gordon Pacha, at the time when the latter was about to set out for Africa as Governor of the Upper Congo; some months later the defender of Khartoum even announced his intention of retreating with his troops and steamers towards the south if he was not quickly relieved, and of placing the provinces of Bahr-el-Gazal and the Equator under the protection of the Congo Association.

Since then the aid given to the Stanley expedition sent to the help of Emin Pasha in 1887; the organisation of the expedition of the Upper Uele in 1890; the re-occupation of the ancient Egyptian positions between Wadelai and Lado in 1893; bold sorties made in the Bahr-el-Gazal and border regions by the officers of the State in 1893-4; the conclusion with Great Britain of the Convention of May 12th, 1894; the victorious conflicts with the Dervishes to prevent their activity towards the south in 1894-6; the organisation of the Dhamis expedition in 1896; finally, the occupation of Redjaf in 1897—are so many proofs of this persistent and dominating idea.

In exchange for certain advantages—among which was the lease of a route fifteen miles broad, along the eastern boundary of the State, from the southern extremity of Lake Albert Edward to the north end of the Tanganyika—Great Britain, which, since the *pronunciamento* of Arabi Pasha in 1880, had undertaken the direction of Egyptian affairs, helped on the schemes of the King of the Congo by signing with him an agreement that deserves notice not only because of its political importance, but also because it introduced for the first time into international law the idea of the lease of territory by one power to another, an idea much criticised at first, but finally appreciated for its practical diplomatic uses, and applied in the cases of China and of Delagoa Bay.

By this agreement, dated 12th May, 1894, Great Britain leased to the Sovereign of the Congo, to be held and administered by him till the close of his reign, the left bank of the Nile from Mahagi on Lake

Albert to the south, to Fashoda on the north, as well as the part of the basin of the Bahr-el-Gazal bounded by the twenty-fifth meridian on the west and the tenth parallel on the north. At the expiration of the reign of Leopold II the left bank of the Nile, as well as the territory between that stream and the thirtieth meridian, was to return to the Lessor State, while the Congo State, or the Belgian colony that has eventually replaced it, keeps its right as Lessee of part of the basin of the Bahr-el-Gazal, situated west of the thirtieth meridian and on a route of fifteen miles broad, starting from the nearest frontier of the State and ending at Mahagi on Lake Albert.

The publication of this agreement had caused the most vehement protestations in France and also in Germany. The German Government refused to sanction the lease to another power of a route running along its own frontier between the two lakes; and succeeded in getting the contracting parties to renounce Article 3 of the agreement which treats of this route; a declaration of 22nd June, 1894, inserted in the *Bulletin Officiel* gave her satisfaction.

The People

The Congolese comprise only the black race. These enjoy no political rights, and it has often been maintained by Belgian politicians that it is difficult to imagine how it could be otherwise in a new colony. The greater number of the native chiefs are, however, supposed to have kept almost the same authority that they held before the arrival of the Belgians: a certain

number of chiefs have been recognised by the State, and have received official investiture.¹

The whites who reside in the Congo are, with one exception, all foreigners, for, although the law provides for naturalisation, this has only once been solicited.

The State periodically takes a census of the non-native population. There were—

31st Dec., 1886,	254,	of whom	46	were Belgians.
1st Jan., 1895,	1076	„	691	„ „
„ 1898,	1678	„	1060	„ „

The 1678 foreigners registered in 1898 were of these nationalities—Belgians, 1060; Portuguese, 102; Italians, 102; Swedes and Norwegians, 91; English and Scotch, 91; Dutch, 61; Americans, 57; Danes, 34; French, 26; Germans, 17; others, 19.

The Legislative Power

And now let us give a description of the Congo State and the manner in which it was ruled during the reign of the late King.

The Congo State being an absolute monarchy, it is evident that the legislative, judicial and administrative powers were not separate and independent.

All authority emanated from the Sovereign, who exercised it himself or by his delegates. Leopold used to consult, if he thought fit, the superior Council sitting at Brussels. He himself regulated the most important measures; but the Governor-General, or the official in his place, could not only give orders,

¹ "Native Chiefs," decree of 6th October, 1891.



POLITICAL ORGANISATION

with penalties for sheer disobedience, but also make ordinances having the force of law; the Governor could even, but only in case of urgency, make an ordinance to suspend the execution of a decision of the Crown, these ordinances expiring at the end of six months if they had not been approved by a decree in the meantime.

The Sovereign expressed his will by decrees, countersigned by the Secretary of State. All the Acts of the Government that were of public interest were inserted in the *Bulletin Officiel*, a monthly organ published in Brussels. They were drawn up in French, which is the official language of the State (Circular of 6th August, 1887). They were affixed for one month in every district to the door of the residence of the district commissary. If the date on which they were to come into execution was not determined, they were to come into force throughout the district on the tenth day after the affixing (Decree of 16th January, 1888).

The legislature was generally inspired by Belgian laws, more or less adapted to meet the special needs of the Congo State. The civil code, which is imperfect, followed the Belgian code word for word, with very few alterations.

The penal code of 7th January, 1886, has been completed by numerous decrees. It reproduced, simplified, the enactments of the Belgian criminal law. It rejected the systematic division into crimes, disobediences and offences, and only employed the general expression "infraction of the law." The following are the penalties provided: death penalty,

penal servitude, fines from 1 to 5000 francs and confiscation.

Numerous decrees regulated certain points of commercial law and judicial organisation and procedure. As for matters which are not yet made the subject of legislation, they are judged by local custom and the general principles of law and equity (Ordinance of 14th May, 1886).

Administrative Power

King Leopold placed the centre of government of his African State at Brussels, and the Congo, although it had the status of a State, was governed like a colony. The central government comprised : (1) the Department of Foreign Affairs ; (2) the Department of Finance ; (3) the Department of the Interior. In the beginning each department had an Administrator-General at its head, but in September, 1891, this title was changed to that of Secretary of State. General Strauch, Hubert van Neuss, Edmond van Eetvelde, Camille Janssen and Count Legrelle-Rogier have filled these offices. Since September 1st, 1894, there has been only one Secretary of State.

During three years the Congo State offered the singular spectacle of a country that had no Order to confer ; but this lack was quickly filled. Better provided for than Belgium herself, which has only one Order, the new State has already four, not counting medals. They are : (1) the Order of the African Star, created in 1888 ; (2) the Star of Service, instituted in 1889 and conferred on those who have honourably accomplished a term of service in the

Congo; (3) the Royal Order of the Lion, which dates from 1891; (4) the Order of the Crown, founded in 1897.

Local Government in the Congo

In 1885 the local government was established at Boma. Before this time, Vivi, which was found to be a little too high, had been for five years the residence of the Head Agent of the International Association of the Congo.

On April 17th, 1887, the local government was placed under the supreme direction of a Governor-General, representing the King, whose authority embraced all the administrative and military services. He assured the execution of measures decided on by the central authority and could make police and administrative regulations enforced by penalties. He made provisional appointment to vacant posts, could charge State officials with any employment that he thought fit and appoint commissioners for a year to inspect certain parts of the territory. Finally, he had the right, under certain restrictions, to make laws.

Before 1887 the representative of the Government in Africa bore the title of Administrator-General. Since the creation of the title of Governor-General only two nominations were made: Camille Janssen, 17th April, 1887, and Colonel Walis, 1st July, 1892. The Governor-General was assisted by a Lieutenant-Governor, one or more *Inspecteurs d'État*, a Secretary-General and several *Directeurs*. In case the Governor could not be present he was replaced by the Lieu-

tenant-Governor, an *Inspecteur d'État*, or by a substitute nominated by the King ; or, if no substitute is designated, by an executive committee composed of the Secretary-General, the Directors, the Commander-in-Chief and, finally, by members chosen by the King.

A consultative committee gave its advice to the Governor-General on all measures of public interest that should be adopted or proposed to the central government. It was composed of the Lieutenant-Governor, the Inspector of State, the Secretary-General, the Directors, the Judge of Appeal, the Curator of Land Titles and a few other members not exceeding five.

The chief services of the State were assured by seven administrative boards :—

1. The Board of Justice, which paid attention to affairs of justice, notification, penance, religious sects and registration in Chancery.

2. Board of transports, marine and public works.

3. The Board of the *Intendance* charged with the verification of accounts and the cultivation of the private demesne.

4. Board of Agriculture and Industry, which occupies itself with the plantations and cattle belonging to the State and with the cultivation of forest products.

5. Board of Fortifications, which has constructed at Shinkakasa (1891-4), under the direction of the commander, Petillon, a strong fort that effectually protects Boma and Matadi.

6. Board of the Army.

7. Board of Finance.

Principal Services

The public force. In the beginning the public force was composed only of foreign elements; soldiers were recruited under onerous conditions, at Zanzibar, Lagos, Sierra Leone, Accra, Elmina, many among the Haoussa tribes, and as far as Abyssinia.

The Government sought to create a native army. Captain Coquilhat was the first, in 1886, to succeed in engaging a certain number of Bangala; of the contingent that he persuaded to come to Leopoldville, ten men consented to descend to Boma, where they were drilled. These ten men were the first native soldiers of the State. Afterwards divers little contingents were raised in other parts of the territory and drilled at Leopoldville. In 1889 Captain Van Dorpe enrolled the Manyanga, who descended to Boma. At the present day the State enlists everywhere in the territory and foreign soldiers become more and more numerous.

The enlistment is partly by voluntary engagement and partly by annual levies made by the *commissaires de district* in agreement with the native chiefs. The active service is for five years; at the expiration of that term the soldiers form part of reserve bodies. The pay is twenty-four centimes a day; moreover, married soldiers receive rations for their wives.

Beside the reserve of the active army, a reserve corps was instituted in 1898, in which the term of service is twelve years.

Volunteers enrolled for a term of less than four years are straight away incorporated in the company

that garrisons their district; militiamen and other volunteers are sent to camps of instruction where they receive their military education. The maximum force of each of these camps is about five hundred men; there are four, at Zambi, Bolobo, Irebu and Umangi.

The supreme command of the public force is exercised by the Governor-General. The district commissioners as representatives of the Governor-General have the direction of the force garrisoned in their district. The army is divided into companies, at the head of which are placed captains, and is administered by a commander-in-chief.

The soldiers, however, were not only used to defend and secure the territory, to compel the slaves to work, but were themselves employed on certain public works, which were thus carried out with abundant, sure and cheap labour.

It is to be noticed that in penal affairs the Congo law is not applied to the army, the discipline of which provides for corporal punishment.

Religious Sects and Public Education. The Conference of Berlin had imposed on states established in the Congo basin the obligation of guaranteeing freedom of conscience and religious toleration to all their inhabitants. The Congo State, faithfully observing this liberal measure, enacted penalties against those who attack religious liberty in its free public exercise or oppose liberty of conscience. Further, to forward the conversion of the natives, it facilitated the acquirement of property by the missions of the different sects.

Missions. The actual religious organisation is the work of private initiative. The Catholic missions are directed by two Bishops, residing, one at Leopoldville, the other at Baudouinville ; and, thanks to the efforts of Mgr. Stillemans, Bishop of Ghent, religious service was provided for at Boma and at Matadi by two curates.

The missions do not pay attention to the moral training only but also to the material improvement of the blacks. They almost all carry out the intellectual and professional education of children.

By decree of 12th July, 1890, the State, on its side, established the agricultural and industrial colonies where are received children ill-used or neglected by their parents and abandoned orphans. They are only for boys, and these leave the colony at the age of fourteen and remain until twenty-five under the guardianship of the State. There are about five hundred children in each colony. These training colonies are, above all things, army schools from which the public forces are easily recruited ; pupils who have no aptitude for military service are, at their departure from the colony, given employment either as artisans on the public works or as clerks in the administrative service. The State sends to Belgium certain picked children to be placed at the Institute at Gyseghem near Termonde.

Public Health. The State from the first has applied itself to measures for enabling the white population of the Congo to support the unhealthiness of the country and rigour of the climate and, so as to arrest the terrible ravages of smallpox among the natives,

has established a vaccination institute at Boma. The practice of vaccination has rapidly spread and the negroes come to be inoculated in great numbers in the centres where the precious remedy is to be found.

The progress of hygiene followed that of medical organisation and a certain comfort began to reign in the stations. In the region of the lower stream wooden houses and iron constructions have been set up, such as the Governor's palace, the church and hotel at Boma, the hotel and railway buildings at Matadi. But wood and iron have been abandoned and to-day brick is with good reason preferred.

The first bricks were made at Nouvelle-Anvers in 1887. Three years later brick houses were built at Boma. The movement was begun: one after the other Basoko, Luluabourg, Bumber, Leopoldville, Banziville, Niangara, Lusambo, Zambézi, Lukungu, Coquilhatville, Kinshasa, Djabir, etc., saw brick dwellings covered with tiles rise in their midst, comfortable and gay-looking.

This satisfactory progress, however, could not have an immediate effect on the death-rate of the non-native population. Indeed, for a few ancient stations where there is an improvement in the conditions of life there are ten, fifteen or twenty new ones where the arrangements and conditions of existence are quite primitive.

Judicial Power

One of the first duties of the Free State was to provide for the administration of justice. It was a

question of the integrity of its sovereign rights, since, in treaties passed with the International Association, foreign powers had reserved the right of organising a consular jurisdiction in the Congo until the administration of justice to foreigners was adequately provided for. Thus, 7th January, 1886, a decree was issued on judicial organisation. The matter was subsequently codified, 22nd April, 1896. It is to be noticed that the magistrates may be removed; not only are they nominated for a fixed term, but may be recalled like other officials.

In civil and commercial matters differences are decided by State tribunals if one person is not a native; the State, or a public administration, is party to the process. If the both parties are natives the difference is judged by the local chief according to custom unless one of the parties appeals to the legally established authority. The last-named may determine on all infractions of the criminal law whether committed by whites or coloured people; but the penal code allows the natives to be left to the jurisdiction of their chief and the application of local customs.

The jurisdictions established by the Congo State are: in the first resort, the tribunal of first instance, the territorial tribunals and courts martial; in appeal, the tribunal of appeal and the court martial of Boma; in the last resort and in reversal of a sentence, the superior Council at Brussels.

The tribunal of the first instance and the territorial tribunals are authorised to sit in any locality in their jurisdiction according to the necessities of the administration of justice. They are composed of a

judge, scrivener and a substitute for the public prosecutor who occupies the place of the public attorney; the absence of the latter does not cause the nullity of the procedure.

The tribunal of first instance is established at Boma. Its competence in civil and commercial matters extends throughout the State. It has cognisance of infractions of the penal code and is alone competent to judge Europeans who have committed offences punishable with death.

The territorial tribunals have an equal right to inflict punishments, but in general their competence does not apply beyond the limits of their circuit. They sit in most of the principal towns of the district.

The courts martial, composed like the tribunal of first instance and the territorial tribunals, take place in places assigned by the Governor, generally in military centres; they have cognisance of ordinary infractions of the penal law and also of faults committed by officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. When public safety demands it a special district can be temporarily placed under military rule, in a sort of state of siege. In this case everybody in that district is subject to its jurisdiction and its decisions are final for natives and European soldiers; European civilians alone have the right of appeal to Boma.¹ The interpretation of this regulation in the affair of the English trader Stokes, whom Commander Lothaire condemned to be hanged and caused to be executed at Lindi (Upper Aruwimi), 14th January, 1895, nearly disturbed the peaceful relations of the Congo State with England and Germany.

¹ Decree of 22nd December, 1888.

The tribunal of appeal sits at Boma : it comprises a president, two judges, a public prosecutor and a scrivener. It has cognisance in appeal from all sentences of the tribunal of the first instance and the territorial tribunals ; the rule is that in every question there are two degrees of jurisdiction.

Appeal from the decisions of the courts martial is deferred to another court martial sitting at Boma, composed of the president of the Tribunal of Appeal and of two assistants, having the rank of officer, appointed by the Governor-General.

The functions of the officer of the Public Attorney are exercised under the authority of the Governor-General : in the tribunal of appeal by a Public Prosecutor appointed by the Sovereign ; in other tribunals by substitutes of the Public Prosecutor appointed by the Governor-General from certain magistrates nominated by decree.

Outside this judicial machinery, a "Commission for the protection of the natives," selected from the members of certain philanthropic and religious associations, has for mission to inform the local authority of acts of violence of which the natives are victims.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CONGO ATROCITIES

I HAVE dwelt at some length on the detailed description of the Congolese laws, administrative and judicial, and on the organisation of the new Independent State. The reader will perceive that great care was being taken to save appearances and to satisfy European public opinion. There were laws, and excellent laws in the Congo, of which Leopold II was the sovereign. Everywhere where European travellers were likely to set foot on Congolese soil these laws were strictly observed, the blacks were protected and were sure to find justice before the tribunals just as well as, say, in Egypt under English rule. From the preceding pages it will also be evident that Leopold II was morally responsible for the misrule of his agents and his representatives—he was the sole master of the Congo—and the excuse that he did not know what was going on was an idle one.

In reality, however, all these laws and arrangements were only on paper. It is not my intention to dwell on the atrocities of the Congo. They have been frequently described. Suffice it to say that whilst Leopold pretended—when founding the Congo State—to create a new oasis of civilisation in the vast desert of African savagery and to carry the seeds

of regeneration amidst primitive races, he was instrumental in bringing about the misery of millions of these beings.

The King had thrown his private fortune into the vast Congo undertaking and Europe was full of his praise. For Europe, whom the clever Coburg had hoodwinked, had looked upon the basin of the Congo as "a vast international common," and the King of the Belgians was to be the disinterested guardian of the political orphan. He was to be the trustee, inspired only by philanthropic motives. Had he not taken the initiative in convening the first meeting at Brussels in 1876, when Europe was horror-struck by the woeful tales of atrocities of the slave trade? Had he not summoned philanthropists from all over the world to discuss means and ways how to stamp out that scourge of humanity—slavery? And was he not now spending over £40,000 yearly towards the same noble aim? Indeed, it was an unheard-of spectacle in the annals of history, for whilst other sovereigns would only give, from their private purses, say a few hundreds or thousands of roubles or marks or even pounds for charitable or philanthropic works, this young monarch was spending millions on the suppression of the slave trade and the civilisation of the negroes. "Well done!" cried benevolent Dame Europe, and *urbi et orbi* she sang the praise of the noble Coburg. And the young Coburg smiled in his venerable beard, and convened another anti-Slavery Conference at Brussels in 1890. The suppression of the slave trade required enormous sums—his generosity did not suffice—and new sources of

income must be found. The world applauded his self-sacrifice—no one as yet dared to doubt his benevolent intentions, his disinterestedness—and the Congo was abandoned to Leopold the Humane. How he must have shrugged his shoulders and smiled contemptuously at the childlike simplicity of Europe! The powers fell into the trap of the astute Coburg; they granted him permission to levy duties on imports. Leopold then borrowed twenty-five million francs from Belgium, and made his will, by which he bequeathed the Congo State to her. He granted concessions to trading companies to collect rubber, who paid fifty per cent of the profits to the State, i.e. to Leopold. And what usually happens and has happened all over the world whenever tax collection has been farmed out and become a monopoly also occurred in the Congo.

The companies were granted almost feudal rights in the basin of the affluents of the Congo; the negroes were at the mercy of the agents of the companies. Entire races were being sacrificed unscrupulously to the greed of the speculators. It is not my intention to enter into statistics. Suffice it to say that Europe suddenly began to realise that the philanthropist was making enormous profits in Africa. Europe was indignant. She could not forgive the astute business man on the Belgian throne—who was, after all, a king of yesterday—for having duped everybody.

Far be it from me to whitewash the late King. Leopold was the sole ruler, the Autocrat of the Congo, and just as little as Nicholas II, Autocrat of all the Russias, can find excuse for the atrocities committed

in his name and under his rule—just as little could Leopold II be considered free from guilt. He ought to have known what was going on in the Congo—and, indeed, he did know—and what is more, he was deriving enormous profits from the atrocious and barbarous treatment of the blacks. Leopold was guilty, but I cannot help saying that Europe, too, was not free from blame. It is also interesting to notice how very elastic the European political conscience is, and how its moral indignation in one case will give way to tactful passivity in the other. When Russian Moujiks, vodka mad, commit heinous crimes and indescribable outrages, when Cossacks, in the name of the paternal Government of the Tsar, let loose the tide of their brutality upon innocent women and children, Europe replies that she has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of a friendly power. And if a few Don Quixotic members of the House of Commons raise their voices against a tyrannical Government they are told to behave, are turned out of the Legislative Assembly and advised to give vent to their indignation in Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park, among socialist preachers, religious cranks and suffragettes. There they may indulge in fiery but harmless speeches, which well-bred people enjoy but treat with supercilious contempt. What are, indeed, the honour of Russian girls, the lives of men and women of culture, slaving under the knout and tortured in Siberian mines and narrow cells as compared to those of the negroes? Government cannot interfere in one instance—it would be *mauvais ton*, lack of tact—but it becomes a moral duty in the

other. Besides, the sovereign of the Congo was only a King of Belgium, and not a Tsar of Russia, he was a Coburg, the second king of a young dynasty, and not a Romanov—steeped in oppression and tyranny. He could be treated with less courtesy than the Autocrat of all the Russias. Then, again, it was Africa where the atrocities were being committed, and Nurse Europe had always assumed the prerogative of interfering in African affairs. The white men in the Empire of the Tsar could take care of themselves—but it was a different matter where the blacks were concerned. The European Powers have a black-and-white political conscience, that is, one for the white races and another for the black ones. In the Congo question, of course, the European Powers pretended that the Independent State held its birth certificate from the Berlin Conference. In any case, Europe was indignant.

Public opinion, especially in England, was roused. Woeful tales were told of Congo cruelties which created an atmosphere of crusades. The natives were ill treated, underfed and overtaxed. Robbed of their lands, they were compelled under the threat of severe punishment to collect rubber for the Belgians and their King. The moral and material regeneration, as Leopold II had termed his work in the Congo, was proclaimed to be nothing but the work of oppression. A crusade was preached. There are always people ready to play the Peters of Amiens. The crusade was preached in England. The Congo atrocities were too heavy a burden for the European conscience.

As early as 1896 the Aborigines Protection Society,

having repeatedly and in vain appealed to the Government at Brussels, turned to the British Government for protection. Sir Charles Dilke brought the Congo question forward in the House of Commons in 1897, requesting Her Majesty's Government to convene an international conference with a view to securing just and humane treatment of the natives. The Government having declined the suggestion, the promoters of the Congo protection scheme endeavoured to rouse public opinion. Many influential men joined the movement. A number of British Chambers of Commerce protested against the atrocities and the wicked system by which the native races were ruled in the Congo. To Mr. E. Morel and Mr. Holt belongs the merit of having promoted the campaign. A Congo Reform Association was called into existence with a view to assuring to the natives of the Congo a just and equitable treatment.

On May 20th, 1903, a debate again took place in the House of Commons on the Congo question. Mr. Herbert Samuel, the present Postmaster-General, called the attention of the Government to the misrule of the Congo and described the fiendish acts of cruelty perpetrated on the natives. Unanimously the House adopted the following resolution :—

“That the Government of the Congo Free State having, at its inception, guaranteed to the Powers that its native subjects should be governed with humanity, and no trading monopoly or privilege should be permitted within its dominions, this House requests His Majesty's Government to confer with the other Powers, signatories of the Berlin General Act by

virtue of which the Congo Free State exists, in order that measures may be adopted to abate the evils prevalent in that State."

The speakers in the House of Commons did not spare the King of the Belgians. Leopold had pretended that he was animated solely by humanitarian and philanthropic motives, that his sole aim was the penetration of civilisation, the love of progress. He had deceived everybody. He had been working for selfish ends.

The result of the debate was that the British Government presented a note to the Powers in August, 1903. At the same time Roger Casement, British Consul on the Congo, published a report in which he gave details of cruelties and misrule.

And what did Leopold do? He defended himself, cleverly, energetically. He doubted England's right to pose as the protector of humanitarianism and of the oppressed. Those who had crushed the Boers were not entitled to protect the negroes—and Europe would scarcely believe the sentimental indignation of those whose conscience was not quite clean. People who were intimate with African affairs were fully aware that England had her designs upon the Congo or, at least, upon the Katanga, a mining district adjoining Rhodesia. The Lado—of which the Congo State became the lessee, at a moment when the Dervishes were occupying the Soudan—England was now endeavouring to take back.

Altogether Leopold claimed the vast territory as his personal property, and in his Proclamation of 1906 he wrote to the General Secretary of the Congo State as follows :—

“You” (i.e. the General Secretary of the Congo State) “must on every opportunity set right false opinions on the legal situation of the Congo State. This situation is unparalleled and unique, I confess, as the erection of the State, with the whole responsibility, has rested on me. The Congo State was and could only be the work of an individual. Now, there is no deeper or worthier right than that of the creator over his own work, the fruit of his work. The Powers welcomed the birth of the new State with their good wishes, but none of them were asked to take a share in my labours ; none of them have a right of intervention in the Congo. They have recognised the independence of the Congo State ; they have agreed to the State’s policy of neutrality and to its boundaries ; no objection has been raised. The law of nations rules the relations between sovereign states ; there is no special law of nations for the Congo State. The Berlin Act contains several general rules to be observed in the Congo basin. These apply equally to all the states in this basin ; the right of possession of the Congo State they do not touch. The question of the sovereignty over the country and also the subject of its constitution were expressly and unanimously omitted from the programme of the Berlin Conference. My rights in the Congo State are indivisible ; they are the witness of my work and my endeavours. They must on every opportunity be brought to the fore, for they alone have made possible my lawful bequest to Belgium. I am anxious to proclaim this loudly, for Belgium has no claim on the Congo State except through me. If I protect my

right from attack it is from patriotism, for without it Belgium is deprived of her claim."

The whole Congo movement—Leopold's friends said—originated with the merchants of Liverpool, who, in consequence of the Act of Brussels, saw themselves excluded from vast commercial profits in the Independent State. A portion of the Belgian Press, hurt on the point of national pride, was on the side of the Sovereign.

"A great agitation," said the *Indépendance Belge*, "is taking place in England, where missionaries are influencing and exciting British commercial sentimentality, and creating that atmosphere which gives birth to crusades. They tell the tales of arms cut off; they speak of the Congo as the hell of the negro, as the cursed land. The humanitarian excitement is great. Nothing more nor less than the deposition of Leopold would satisfy them. But," continued that paper, "England ought to put her own house in order before she grows indignant at the Congo atrocities. It is the ancient story of the mote and the beam." The Belgian Press pointed out that English views with regard to the Congo were wrong, because they were based entirely upon false grounds, and that the weeping sentimentalism of the missionaries had been made use of for the commercial interest of those who find little advantage in the Congo under the present régime. "And thus from a religious movement the agitation has become commercial, and in the end political. England is annoyed to see her endeavours frustrated. She is hurt in her national pride. And instead of the amelioration of the lot of the

negroes, those people really intend to deprive the King and Belgium of their colony."¹

"Let us first take Silesia," said Frederick II of Prussia, "we shall always find some jurisconsult afterwards to defend our legitimate right to the province." Such was also the attitude of Leopold. Kings always find learned lawyers to defend their actions. Thus many confirmed the King's claims to the Congo as his own private property. Professor Castelein writes as follows: "Only one judicial act was indispensable to the taking possession of the right of sovereignty by Leopold II. This was the ratification of that right by the Belgian Parliament, for it might have raised exception to it on the ground of incompatibility on account of the burden and perils which this second sovereignty might involve for the Government of Belgium. We have just shown that this condition was duly fulfilled. But, on the other hand, the authorisation granted by the Belgian Parliament to its King to become the sovereign of the Congo Independent State could not create that sovereignty. Who, then, created it? We reply, Leopold II. It was Leopold II who, by his own will, personal acts and individual collaboration in many forms and directions—he being, indeed, the spirit and support of all that was done—created in a legitimate manner the Independent State of the Congo, and made himself also in strict legitimacy its sovereign."²

The King of Belgium, however, was compelled to

¹ *Indépendance Belge*, February 24th, 1908.

² Castelein, S. J., *The Congo State*, London, p. 9.

give way, and on June 23rd, 1904, he appointed a Special Enquiry Commission. The Report of the Commission was published in November, 1905. It has been styled a "marvel of diplomatic evasion of facts," and Lord Lansdowne made the following remark with regard to the members of the Commission: "Of the three members of the Commission of Enquiry appointed by the Sovereign of the Congo, the first is an official of the Belgian Government, the second is in the service of the Congo State, whilst the third is a jurisconsult of Swiss nationality."

In four months the enquiry was terminated, and altogether the Commissioners absented themselves only six months from Europe. The Commissioners admitted that much good had been done in the Congo State, but they could not deny the existing abuse, and they did not hesitate to stigmatise the system under which the concessionaire companies were working. Reforms were necessary. The proposals for reforms were made by a special Commission in June, 1906, and were accompanied by a *pronunciamiento* of Leopold which I have quoted above. Here are some extracts from the proposed reforms:—

The Natives

"The land belongs to the natives who, according to local custom and by Decree of 14th September, 1886, reside, build and labour thereon. The Governor-General or the District Commissary are empowered, in order to forward the art of building among the natives and encourage them to new efforts, to show in each village a one-storied building three times the

size of those they already possess or even, in our opinion, a still larger one. This land may not be sold by the natives without consent of the Government.

Taxation

“Every adult native who is able to work is put, either individually or in a group, into a taxation district. The Governor-General adjusts the amount of taxation in relation to the ability of the different districts to bear it and the stage of development of the natives. It may not be under six or over twenty-four francs a year. The tax is payable monthly; under certain circumstances it may be delayed. The native may pay it in produce or in work. The number of hours of work must, under no circumstances, exceed forty per head per month.

“If the native who has property in land or moveables refuses to pay in produce, he may be compelled to work out the amount of the tax in labour.

Hired Labour

“A black under fourteen years of age cannot bind himself to a term of service of more than two years as an ordinary worker or of more than three years as errand-boy or messenger.

Employment of Troops

“No military expedition may be undertaken before an attempt has been made to settle the disturbance peacefully. Only the Governor-General, the District Commissary and their representatives may order a

military expedition. In no case may the command, in a matter of police or war, be given to a black.

Government Inspectors

“At least three Government Inspectors are directed to see to the carrying out of native laws and the observance of the law in the relations between the natives themselves and between the natives and the white inhabitants. (A species of *ephors.*)

Taxation of Industrial Associations

“The Societies in the Congo State pay two per cent income tax, the foreign Societies with branches in the Congo State pay one per cent of their income derived from Congo trade.

The State Domains

“The lands and mines that are administered as a State monopoly, and also the unworked mines, compose the State demesne (*domaine national*). This is under a special administration whose members are appointed and displaced by the head of the State. The issues of the demesne estate are, after allowing for all the costs of administration (especially those relating to the forests), placed in the exchequer for payment of public expenses that are not otherwise provided for. The occasional balance is to be used in the following way: a fifth for repayment of the Belgian loan to the Congo State, a fifth for establishment of a reserve fund, the rest for objects of public utility in the Congo State and in Belgium as far as such are useful to the Congo State (the establishment

of colonial associations, colonial investigations, tropical hygiene, aid in creation of a colonial fleet, the making of cannon for colonial artillery). The issues of the domain are to be used for no objects but those of public utility—but this, as exemplified above, is not to be too narrowly interpreted.”

In Belgium the attitude towards the King in the meantime changed. In December, 1906, the question of the annexation of the Congo by the country was discussed in the Chamber, and after long negotiations the final annexation took place in February, 1909. France and Germany have recognised the transfer, but England and the United States are waiting until the abuses have ceased.

CHAPTER XX

LEOPOLD II AS FATHER AND HUSBAND

WE have spoken of Leopold as a monarch, as founder of an Empire, and as a European ruler; let us now describe the husband and the father. Great as Leopold was in his rôle of king and ruler, posterity cannot but condemn him for his private life, and especially for his attitude towards his wife and daughters. And yet even in this respect many have endeavoured to whitewash him.

“We must not judge the King,” wrote the *Indépendance Belge* in 1904, when the European Press was attacking the hard-hearted father who disinherited his own daughters, “we must not judge the King by the ethical standard applied to ordinary mortals; he is a great man, an extraordinary man, and such men often shock public opinion and public sentiment.” Of course, I do not endorse the flattering judgment of the official Belgian journal, but it is strange to reflect upon the fact that people will never differentiate between the intellectual and the sentimental sides of a man. History furnishes us examples of men whose names have been handed down to posterity and who did honour to their nations with their heads but not with their hearts; they were unscrupulous and unsentimental, and yet, thanks to their intelligence, they did a great deal more good and benefited those

whom they wished to, more than many honest dullards. They were rascals and rogues, but clever rogues; all their actions were ruled and governed by their reason, by their heads, in which the heart had no voice whatever. The late King of the Belgians was devoid of sentiment and sentimentality, impulse, generosity; the softer feelings had no place in his nature; he was ruled by his reason and his intelligence. This is the keynote to his character. He made a good ruler—a clever politician—but a bad father and an unfaithful husband. In saying this I am only stating facts and uttering a just judgment.

Let me first speak of his attitude towards his wife. Here it will be necessary, however, briefly to relate the late Queen's life, and the scenes which took place after her death. I have spoken of the marriage of the Duke of Brabant in a previous chapter. King Leopold I was proud of this marriage. It was a triumph of his policy, for had he not succeeded in obtaining recognition from the old and Imperial House of Habsburg? The old dynasties of Europe, and especially the Habsburgs, had looked with some mistrust upon the astute Coburg, the youngest of his clan, who evidently had a presentiment of the international influence of his House. They were afraid of him, for he could adapt himself to all circumstances and to all nationalities, Russian and French, British and Belgian; he was a Liberal, too—and his princely relations could scarcely forgive him such heresy. But now the proud House of Habsburg honoured him with her confidence. What a triumph! And Belgium appreciated it. By a curious

coincidence, in the same year in which Leopold II of Belgium married Marie Henriette, Napoleon III wedded the beautiful Eugénie and Francis Joseph Princess Elizabeth. All these marriages began under favourable conditions, but, alas ! they brought much unhappiness in after days. None noticed the phantoms of misery and suffering lurking in the corners, and the clouds gathering on the horizon, which were soon to darken the bright sky of the Royal and Imperial couple.

Grief, sorrow and sadness followed in the midst of the gay suite, and soon made their presence felt.

The Princess Henriette was only a child ; the world smiled on her, and everything appeared in a roseate light : but she soon learned the bitter lesson of life, that the fates do not spare even princes and princesses, kings and queens.

When the young Archduchess Marie Henriette of Austria, daughter of the Prince Palatine of Hungary, the Archduke Joseph, and of the Duchess Maria Dorothea of Wurtemberg, appeared at Brussels in the freshness of barely seventeen years, the grace of her youth, her smile and her fair face enchanted everybody. She made an immediate conquest, not only of the prince, then Duke of Brabant, who was to be her royal husband, but of the people over whom she was called to be Queen. But the happy period of her life hardly lasted longer than fifteen years. The Queen's life was saddened by grievous troubles. She experienced the joys of maternity, but she suffered also its greatest sorrows. Her son, the Count of Hainault, born in 1859—and



QUEEN MARIE HENRIETTE OF BELGIUM
ABOUT THE TIME OF HER MARRIAGE TO KING LEOPOLD II

great was the popular enthusiasm welcoming the birth of the young prince who seemed destined to continue the new dynasty—died at the age of nine.

The following touching episode shows how great was the affection of the Belgians for their Queen and how much she counted upon it. It was in 1860; Napoleon was dreaming of annexing Belgium, and many political writers in his pay supported his schemes. But the population of the capital and delegates from the provinces assembled before the Royal Palace giving vent to their indignation and manifesting their attachment to the house of Coburg.

The young Duchess, on the balcony of the Palace, after the army and municipal guards had marched by, took her thirteen-months-old son in her arms and showed him to the people crowded in the Square, as if to recommend him to the affection and devotion of the country. Two years later, when King Leopold I, whose robust constitution had triumphed over a dangerous illness, re-entered Brussels with his son, his daughter-in-law and his grandson, there were again acclamations; and again, warmer still, in 1865, on the day of the joyful entry of Leopold II.

The members of the two Chambers assembled at the Palais de la Nation, under the presidency of the Prince de Ligne, to receive the oath of the new King. The Queen entered the first with Prince Leopold and Princess Louise, and in her tribune were placed the Count of Flanders, the King of Portugal, the Prince of Wales, Prince Arthur of England, the Duke of Cambridge, the Prince Royal of Prussia, the Archduke Joseph of Austria, Prince William of Bade,

Prince Nicholas of Nassau, Prince Louis of Hesse, Prince Augustus of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen.

After the inauguration, when the Royal Family entered the Palace of Brussels, the Queen appeared on the balcony with the King and their children, and it was at this moment, that, with a beautiful gesture, she presented Prince Leopold, heir to the throne, to the people. She wished the Count of Hainault to hear the applause and cheers of the crowd. But before four years had passed, on January 22nd, 1869, pitiless death had taken the child from its mother, and deprived the King of his heir.

She had three daughters : Princess Louise, born in 1858 ; Princess Stephanie, born in 1864 ; and Princess Clémentine, born in 1872 ; she had little joy from them. The conduct of Princess Louise and the tragic death of the Archduke Rudolf were terrible blows to the Queen and saddened her disposition.

The Queen's charity was marvellous. She relieved many miseries not only as a royal duty, but with sincere womanly solicitude.

She had inherited a love of sport increased by her Austro-Hungarian education, and the little carriage and fine horses that she drove herself, with faultless elegance and supreme skill, used to give her a picturesque popularity in Brussels that did not lose its prestige after cycling and motoring came into vogue.

She loved the arts, and above all, music. Her constant attendance at the representations at the *Théâtre de la Monnaie* and even at general performances was proverbial. The Queen took pleasure in congratu-

lating the authors and encouraging the actors. Not only did she feel deeply the beauties of the art of music, but she cultivated it, playing the piano and the harp—Hasselmans was her master—and even on occasion composing fantasias on motifs borrowed from her favourite operas, or venturing on wholly original compositions. She wrote an opera called “Wanda.”

Her music was a source of consolation to her when sorrow and grief had been showered upon her by the hand of Fate. Weber and Mozart, Beethoven and Bach were her favourite composers. An anecdote relates that she was once compelled to listen to a musician who was chiefly performing his own compositions, which clearly showed his utter lack of talent. When he had finished, the Queen sweetly asked him to repeat one of the pieces, as she had never heard anything like it before. The artist was flattered; and when he was taking his leave, the Queen added: “Yours is a different style of music from that of Schumann and Chopin, and even Wagner. You cannot expect the present generation to appreciate you.” “I can well afford to wait,” exclaimed the composer, “especially since Your Majesty——” “Oh,” said Marie Henriette, “I am only an incompetent outsider.” When he had gone, and her ladies complimented her on her forbearance, she replied, “I am merely exercising the Royal prerogative of mercy; I have shut my eyes and my ears to the murder of several airs. *Noblesse oblige.*”

The Queen often surprised her friends by her repartees. Here is an example quoted by a writer

in the *Daily Telegraph* (September 20th, 1902). A certain lady "with a past" was eagerly and anxiously endeavouring to make the acquaintance—at Brussels and Spa—of all those who she thought could introduce her into the best society. But her "past" disqualified her for such an honour. One day a friend of the Queen remarked that Madame X——, the lady in question, asserted to be related to a celebrated French aristocrat, "un certain Comte, Comte—— Oh, I have forgotten the name." "It must be 'un Conte bleu,'" replied the Queen.

A short time after their marriage the Duke and Duchess of Brabant visited the principal towns of Belgium. Everywhere they met with a warm welcome. The Duchess was very attractive, and had youth and gaiety—a fresh gaiety that she derived from the Hungarian wilds where her careless childhood had been passed.

At Brussels, the ceremonies of Court, with their fixed rites and inviolable formulas, greatly amused her, who had lived on her mother's estate, far from the official world of Vienna. The solemn speechifying brought to her lips smiles that greatly angered the old King, who was very regardful of forms. M. Paul Hymans tells a very good tale about this :—

One day, having to listen to a grave functionary who made a most pompous discourse to the Royal Family, she was seized with a great burst of laughter; she tried to restrain it, but it was irresistible. Her access of mirth was so natural and frank that it communicated itself to all those near the Princess, and

soon the whole Court were laughing in the face of the abashed old man. As he did not lack a sense of humour, he himself began to laugh, and the ceremony was more amusing than was its wont. Leopold I alone never relaxed his countenance.

But a day came, a day followed by many sad years, when Queen Henriette ceased to laugh and even to smile.

The following episode will show the relations existing between the Queen and the inhabitants of Laeken.

At Laeken, one morning, there appeared on the road an individual of extraordinary appearance and as little engaging-looking as possible, unkempt hair, neglected beard, clothes bespattered with mud, worn-out shoes, and, besides this, an unusual and picturesque air that excited astonishment and awoke curiosity, dissipating the first impression of antipathy, if not repugnance. He was questioned, but replied in an incomprehensible language. Whence did he come? How could he reply to this by gestures? He understood neither Flemish nor French, and the words that escaped his lips had not the least resemblance to the idioms known by reputation to the less-cultivated inhabitants of rural Laeken.

English? Certainly not. German? No. Italian? Still less.

However, a "natural," a peasant who regularly took vegetables to the Royal kitchen and who sometimes saw the Queen, struck his forehead, illuminated by a sudden idea, a stroke of genius. He had heard at the Palace that Her Majesty understood foreign idioms unknown to the vulgar. Perhaps by chance she

might know that of the stranger, of this Wandering Jew, who had adventured to Laeken, not even having the five coppers of the legend in his pocket. While his comrades surrounded and stayed the intruder, teasing him with their importunities, he ran to the castle and told a gardener, who told a liveried valet, who informed a major-domo, who addressed himself to an official. Finally, from post to post, the tale of the peasant came to the Queen's ears. She was amused and interested, and ordered the enigmatical Ahasuerus to be brought before her. Scarcely had the mysterious wanderer entered her presence—intimidated as may be guessed, for he understood that he had not been brought before an ordinary chatelaine—when, encouraged by her gestures, he uttered some confused words, and her Majesty broke into laughter, saying, "He is from Hungary ; he is a Hungarian."

The Queen, daughter of the Archduke Joseph Palatine of Hungary, spoke Hungarian as perfectly as German, and, indeed, it was her favourite tongue.

The vagrant had indeed met with luck.

Then the Queen proceeded to enquire concerning him. She learned that her compatriot, an aged man, a widower, who lived miserably in his pusta, while his sons made their fortunes in the United States, had missed the steamer at Hamburg that should have taken him to them in the New World ; that, in distress, he had turned back towards his native country, walking to economise his tiny store, soon exhausted ; that he had missed his way ; that, thinking he was going south-east, he had walked towards the south-west, traversing Hanover, the

Low Countries and North Belgium, regions whose names he did not know ; and that, finally—and the issue may be guessed. It was to the Queen of the Belgians that the strayed Hungarian owed his rapid return to his native country.

On August 22nd, 1878, twenty-five years had rolled by since the Royal marriage. Their silver wedding was celebrated amid indescribable enthusiasm. The Commune of Laeken inaugurated the fête. A platform was erected for their Majesties before the church. "Twenty-five years ago, Sire," said the burgomaster Bockstaël, "under the pacific and glorious reign of your august father, Belgium celebrated with great rejoicings the marriage festival of Your Majesty with the most gracious and illustrious of Princesses. Madam, a great genius has written that woman surrounds man with the flowers of life, like the lianas of the forest that surround the trunks of oaks with their perfumed garlands. That thought has never received a more noble consecration than in the union of Your Majesty with our beloved King."

On the following day, the board of the Senate and that of the Chamber went to the Palace of Brussels to congratulate the King and Queen. The address of the Senate ran : "Twenty-five years ago a Princess belonging to a dynasty whose memory is dear to Belgians, came to Belgium to unite her destiny to that of the heir to the throne. The nation, in welcoming this noble Princess with warm acclamations, foresaw that she would make happy the Prince who, still young, gave evidence already of the qualities

he later showed when on the throne, where he proved himself the worthy successor of his august father. Madam, the nation was not deceived ; your adopted country has become your true country, and we all know that Your Majesty may, with truth, like our King, say that you are Belgian in heart and soul. The people who know the sentiments of Your Majesties respond thereto with sincere affection and respectful devotion."

The celebrations lasted four days. They followed the traditional ceremony : official congratulations, review of the army, Te Deum, banquets, gala spectacle, and general illuminations, but two original festive manifestations were the most impressive. The first was the reception by the Queen of women delegated by all the town corporations of Belgium. Mme. Jules Anspach, in their name, addressed the Queen and presented her with a Royal garland and a superb lace robe. "Among the freest peoples," she said, "reign the best-loved sovereigns."

The Queen replied : "I have not needed twenty-five years to become Belgian in heart and soul. I say with joy that I am a Belgian woman as you are."

The other manifestation was that of the children. 23,000 children of the communal schools marched past the King and Queen in the Palace Square, while at the foot of the Royal stand, crowded with uniforms and brilliant toilettes, there were heaped up flowers sending forth heavy perfume. It was a picture full of grace, life, and movement—it inspired the most popular picture of one of Belgium's great painters. And yet this scene of joy and festivity was a memory.

It could find no echo in the heart of the poor Queen, who had forgotten what happiness was long ago.

In 1858 the first child, Prince Leopold, the Duke of Brabant and Count of Hainault, had been born ; in 1859 the second child, Princess Louise ; and in 1864 the third, Princess Stéphanie. Dry figures and barren dates often speak very eloquently. These figures show that to some extent an intimate relationship existed between Leopold and his Consort.

After 1864 a genealogical pause ensued, and in 1869 the first blow struck the Royal pair : Prince Leopold, the Heir Apparent, died at the age of nine on January 22nd, 1869. This blow, instead of bringing husband and wife, already estranged, closer together, only widened the gulf between them. The Queen left the vicinity of a cursed throne to mourn and weep in solitude the death of her only son, whilst her spouse sought consolation elsewhere.

But wives are expected, by some husbands at least, to perpetuate their race and family, to present them with male heirs. And the husband is always ready to lay the blame, rightly or wrongly, on the wife's shoulders when no son is forthcoming. The fault becomes even more grave in the case of queens. They are expected to render royal service to the country by perpetuating the dynasty. Napoleon was not the only ruler who divorced his wife because he wished to have a male heir to consolidate his dynasty. Court rumour has it that the Tsaritsa used to apologise every time after the birth of each of her girls. Leopold II was anxious to have

a male heir, and in 1872 Queen Marie Henriette consented to resume conjugal life with her Royal spouse, from whom she had separated some time before. She sacrificed herself, as one may say, for her country. A child was born unto them, but alas ! it was a daughter and not a son which was given unto them. This child was Princess Clémentine, and it appears that Queen Marie Henriette always disliked her. The despair and annoyance of the Queen were great. The gulf between husband and wife was widened, and after the birth of their last child Leopold and Marie Henriette avoided one another. They never met again until the death of the Queen. The Queen passed the last years of her life almost abandoned, wandering on the cold mountain tops of earthly greatness alone with her grief. Her whole life, so it was whispered in Vienna, had been influenced, nay, shaped and moulded, by a gypsy's warning, which was uttered at sundown one bright summer's evening on the heights above Penzing, when the Queen was a girl. It happened seemingly in the following manner : One evening the Princess, coming home after a long promenade, passed some gypsies on the grass, who at once arose and begged for alms. The Archduchess generously gave them a couple of gulden, and was going to proceed on her way, when one of the Bohemian women, a beautiful girl with an uncanny look, stepped forward, and taking the Princess's hand into her own uttered the following warning : Beware of new kingdoms ; they will work good, but also evil to you and yours. From a throne you will dispense happi-



From a photograph

PRINCESS CLEMENTINE OF BELGIUM

ness unto others, but none will dispense any unto you. Those near and dear to you will be ruined by a revolution, and your own subjects will accuse you of oppression. Avoid politics, and vie with the violet which flourishes in the shade." This gloomy prediction made no impression whatever upon the cheerful Princess, but a day came when she remembered it. She remembered the reference of the gypsy to the evil brought upon her by a new kingdom, when her relative, Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico and husband of Leopold's sister Charlotte, met his doom. Maximilian was shot and Charlotte lost her reason. But was not Belgium herself a new kingdom? Her relatives had indeed foreboded evil when the marriage was being celebrated. A revolutionary wave was sweeping over Europe. Republicanism could easily upset the newly established throne of Belgium, and the fate of Marie Antoinette might easily befall Marie Henriette. But most vividly did the Queen remember the gypsy's warning when she lost her son, on whom she had lavished all her love and built all her hopes. She remained inconsolable all her life, and never knew another hour of genuine happiness. And it was perhaps for this reason too that the Queen, although drawn in spite of herself into public celebrations, hardly occupied herself at all with public affairs.

Always remembering the gypsy's warning, Marie Henriette avoided politics, and never took any close interest in the struggle of parties beyond such as was dictated by her estimate of the possible influence it could have upon her own life. For a long time she

used vividly to picture to herself the scenes of France in 1789, and whenever a riot broke out in Brussels she always remembered the prophecy that she would be accused by her subjects of oppression. Being always ready to help and succour, it was difficult to imagine how such an accusation could be hurled at her. And yet this prophecy came to pass in a way, and the Queen felt much easier afterwards.

One day the Queen, who was a skilful rider and one of the best horsewomen in Europe, gave loose reins to her charger, and was soon galloping at lightning pace over the fields of one of her subjects. The owner, an irate gentleman of Republican tendencies and little love for dynastic families, stopped her and bluntly accused the Queen of trespassing and of ruining his crops. He threatened her with an action at law, and could only with difficulty be prevailed upon to forgo his intention.

For several years before her death the Queen's health had visibly changed for the worse. Her last two years she spent at Spa, where the public anxiously followed the progress of the disease that threatened her life. For six months it was known that the disease allowed no hope; then later news gave rise to a report of considerable amelioration in Her Majesty's general condition. Two days before the end, the doctors even permitted the Count of Flanders to undertake his projected journey to Italy, so convinced were they that death would not so soon surprise the illustrious invalid.

The Queen had passed several seasons at Spa, and won by the beauties of this spot, on September

26th, 1894, bought the old Hotel du Midi, in the Avenue du Marteau. She transformed it and made it her home. On July 15th, 1895, the Committee of "Spa Attractions" presented Marie Henriette with her bust in bronze, done by the sculptor Charlier, and Spa choirs proclaimed their gratitude to the Sovereign in songs of enthusiasm and hope.

When the Queen had become by adoption a resident of Spa, her sole desire was to lead a simple life, following her tastes and her great love of nature. When she did not ride, she drove. In the morning her two horses often started for long expeditions, for she was not dismayed by fifty or sixty miles. "If I remained the whole year at Spa," she said, "I should make a different excursion every day." Curious adventures occurred during these expeditions, and naïve replies were made to the Queen by peasants who did not recognise her, or who could not imagine that a sovereign could be so simply dressed, without trailing robe and without diadem. "Nin meme one couronne so s'tiesse, cum in l'arrendje ruknohon," said one countryman who had lent the Queen his old umbrella and not his Sunday one, for fear of never seeing it again.

All this greatly amused Her Majesty, who recounted this anecdote on her return. As is also known, she used to bring back from her excursions armfuls of wild flowers and bouquets tied by endless strings offered her by the peasant children.

She went one day from Spa to Kinkempois Wood, where she lunched and left her carriage in safe keeping. So as not to betray the incognito that she

loved so much, she took a second-class ticket on the boat by which she went to Liège, where, like a school-girl on the sly, she made numerous purchases.

She was a skilled and fearless driver, and became acquainted with the artistic charms of the whole neighbourhood. She gave pecuniary aid towards the making of new promenades, such as the wild and picturesque valley of the Hoeque, which she officially inaugurated, and that of the *Etangs*, which she named *Promenade de la Belle Vue*. In the struggle for the preservation of the Cascade of Coo, and especially of the *Fonds de Quarreux*, the protectors of the sites found in her not only an ally who disposed of official influence, but one who shared their ideal and like themselves wished natural beauty to prevail. When she returned from her excursions the Queen's great pleasure was to attend a concert given either in the gallery or theatre. She gave marked preference to certain artistes, for instance, Dyna Beumer and Noté. One day when Noté was singing at the Park, the Queen wished to hear this celebrated baritone without, however, missing a representation of the *Bossu*, on the advertisements of which her name was placed. She therefore went to the Park, bidding the Director present Noté to her after the first piece. When Noté came the Queen said, "I congratulate you, M. Noté. Your voice is more beautiful than ever, and I regret that I must go, but I have promised——"

"You are going!" replied Noté, with his usual good humour; "but the second piece that I am going to sing is much better than the first. You should stay——"

The Queen smiled and . . . stayed. At the end of the concert she said to the Mayor de Warzee, "How could I help it? Noté is so nice that I really couldn't refuse."

Although not disdaining the drama, the Queen preferred all operettas, principally *La Mascotte* and *Mam'zelle Nitouche*. She had the artistes presented to her in the intervals or immediately after the play, still in their costumes.

A tasteful musician and distinguished harpist, the Queen loved instrumental music as well as song. Mozart, Rossini, and Gounod were her favourites. She did not like Wagner, and said the passion for him was an infection that would pass. She used to take an active part in the festivities of the season. She fought vigorously in the battle of flowers, and was greatly interested in the horse race. She established a prize for the *corso fleuri*, a superb banner, once won by Prince Lubomirsky. She made numerous purchases at the *Exposition des beaux-arts*. She was present at fêtes in neighbouring towns, and the inhabitants of Theux long remembered her visits to their Fancy Fair and Battle of Flowers, and those of Battice her coming to their horse race. The Queen reserved special days for receptions at Court, to which she invited chosen artistes, showing astonishing variety of memory and justness of appreciation. She generally invited twenty persons. Sometimes she held morning receptions for her more intimate friends. She used to accompany one artist on the piano, and on one occasion, when he seemed to be perturbed, "Do not be afraid," she said to him, "but another time be

more orderly, and fasten the sheets of your music together better. Meanwhile I will give you an elastic, it will be a souvenir." The Queen often charmed her guests by her harp playing. Being very religious, she was always present at the grand mass on Sunday, and a place was reserved for her in the choir. She paid great attention to her garden, and liked to work in it, weeding, transplanting, and arranging flower-beds. Her two dogs, Caro and Moucho, often accompanied her and seemed to be her special favourites, as did her horse Cocotte, who always saluted her with its hoof. She had a llama that spat in the face of anyone who tried to caress it, and two nightingales who came to her in the morning to be fed.

When walking in her garden, which communicated with that of the Hospice, the Queen liked to talk with the old men and even to be present at certain religious services. She was very much beloved by them, not only for the simplicity she brought into these relations, but also for her generosity, always marked by extreme delicacy. No appeal to her philanthropy was ever made in vain, and none of the numberless demands that she received daily, and that were tried with such care by Baron Goffinet, remained without reply. In the winter she distributed playthings and bon-bons to poor children, carefully choosing the days when the rich also were enjoying themselves, St. Nicholas and Christmas, as if she wished to excuse this touching charity. It is said that she meant to bequeath her palace to the hospitals on condition that pensions were instituted there for ladies. In spite of her mental vigour, however, which astonished her

doctors, the Queen gradually gave way in the desperate struggle that she waged with admirable courage and energy.

At the moment of the Queen's death Leopold II was at Luchon, taking the waters.

The whole of the first day that followed the death of Marie Henriette was filled by the visits of official personages. Alone of the Royal Family, Princess Clémentine was in the villa, and most contradictory accounts were circulated about the arrival of other members. During that day Baron Goffinet gave some information to the Press: "Nothing is yet decided. The King's arrival must be waited for. Contradict all reports. . . ." And on the Queen's death, Goffinet gave these details: "We were playing at cards on Friday about five o'clock, when the Queen exclaimed about the beautiful weather. She counselled us to profit by the sunny day, and even showed a desire to go out into the Park. When I begged her to postpone the promenade till the next day, she made no remark and continued to play. At six o'clock she took a frugal meal, oysters and chicken. Then she caused one of her domestics to be summoned, and asked her the result of the afternoon races at the Hippodrome of Sart. She was very much interested in this. Then, feeling tired, Her Majesty remained alone with the nun who attended her, and asked her aid to rise from the chair. Scarcely was she on foot—it was 7.30—when she heaved a deep sigh, turned eyes of anguish on her nurse, and dropped down. It was then that a woman in waiting, who heard the cry of the sister, came to seek me, crying, 'The Queen is in pain. . . .'

As I reached Her Majesty's side, she breathed her last."

While M. Goffinet was speaking to the Press, the crowd waited at the gate of the villa, but nothing occurred. It was with the most absolute respect that the curious watched the two gendarmes walking to and fro before the entrance.

The Queen lay in state in a room on the first floor. She was dressed in white, reposed among the flowers in the silence of that chamber where came no light or noise from without ; her hands, crossed upon her breast, were surrounded by a rosary, and on her face the light from the candles that surrounded the funeral couch shed flickering shadows and gave a silver gleam to her soft white hair.

At the bed-foot nuns watched, their lips moving in prayer. Her husband was away, her daughters too.

The King's absence prevented the Court making definite arrangements for the funeral. At 4.30 the arrival of Ministers excited the curiosity of the crowd. They came on foot from the station, among them the Duke of Ursel, President of the Senate. They were received by Goffinet and taken into the room where the Queen lay ; there they remained a few instants and then were seen to come out again and return to the station ; the crowd remained awaiting the King's arrival, which they perseveringly expected. The funeral certificate drawn up, the burgomaster of Dameaux went to the Town Hall, where it was communicated to the Press. This was the last incident of that day of melancholy emotion.

On the following morning, however, Sunday, at 7.30, Princess Stéphanie arrived at Spa. She was received at the station by Baron Goffinet. Princess Clémentine met her at the entrance to the villa, in the great court, and a moving scene followed. The two Princesses fell sobbing into one another's arms. At this early hour the Avenue was still deserted except for soldiers, officials, and journalists. Princess Stéphanie was immediately conducted to the death chamber. She knelt for a long time by the mortal remains of the Queen, and only left to hear Mass celebrated by the curé De Theux, in the Royal villa. Mass was celebrated in the hall on the ground floor in the right wing of the villa, by the Abbé Lohmar, at 10.40. The Princesses Clémentine and Stéphanie, followed by their ladies of honour, and Oultrement, grand marshal of the Court, were present. To reach the hall the Princesses had to cross the great court before a line of gendarmes presenting arms.

The Princesses were in black, with bare heads, and it was in profound silence, broken only by the commands of the officer of the gendarmerie, that the procession passed. Mass lasted for half an hour; then the Princesses walked back with the same ceremonial.

The Queen's body was placed in the coffin, in the presence of Dr. Thiriar, on Sunday morning, at eleven o'clock, immediately after the visit of Princess Stéphanie.

Early, under the rays of a warm sun, after an icy sunrise, a few spectators in front of the Royal villa witnessed the sudden and impulsive embrace of the two sisters. The Princesses Stéphanie and Clémentine fell into each other's arms and sobbed hysterically.

“The crowd,” wrote the *Independance Belge*, “that gradually gathered before the Royal dwelling regarded with frightened curiosity the passage of agents of the police, carrying packets that they knew contained the indispensable antiseptics ; and the instinctive philosophy that sleeps in the humblest hearts awoke. To the sadness of death, to the wrench of separation, was joined the melancholy that the suggestion of human fragility awakes ; and the warm sun, all the beautiful country of Spa, which wore such a luxuriant background to the funeral preparations, seemed saddened, as if veiled by the crêpe seen everywhere.”

On this Sunday morning, the inhabitants and visitors of Spa, risen late, saw the villa asleep, the blinds closed. The promenaders became numerous. The pretty Avenue du Marteau, a favourite walk, was filled with movement. Luxury and elegance lingered under the shade of the trees, and the bright colours of toilettes looked gay in the sun. But from time to time servants passed through the crowd carrying funeral garlands.

It was soon perceived that one of the rooms on the ground floor had been turned into a lighted chapel ; the public expected soon to be admitted to pass before the coffin. The dense crowd before the entrance, although impatient, waited without indiscreet agitation. Respect dominated the desire to see. Hours passed by. They knew that close to the road, behind the closed blinds, the two daughters of the deceased, kneeling before the coffin, prayed and wept . . . and they did not talk too loudly.

At last the King arrived to pay the last respects

to her who had been the mother of his children. Leopold II reached the villa at four o'clock, entered, and there was a movement of curiosity. The whole neighbourhood was thronged. The King, led by the Grand Marshal, entered the death-chamber. Then for long minutes peace once more seemed to have settled down on the villa. The King was standing before the coffin.

Shortly afterwards the curious found new food for curiosity. They saw Princess Stéphanie, her shoulders shaken by violent sobs, come out of the chamber where her mother rested, and the people grew agitated. A carriage appeared almost immediately in the great court of the villa, coming from the park that stretches behind the villa. It was driven through the crowd, and behind the raised windows the crowd saw a woman weeping. It was the Princess Stéphanie returning to the Hotel de Belle Vue, where she was staying. A quarter of an hour later the crowd saw the King leave the chapel, followed by the Princess Clémentine, and enter the principal living-rooms of the villa.

At 6.15 Princess Stéphanie, a long black veil falling over her pale face, left the Hotel de Belle Vue in a carriage, accompanied by her lady of honour. She arrived at the station and alighted between two lines of curious spectators. She was taken to the waiting-room, and there, by herself, waited for the 6.20 train to Pepinster. Its lateness caused her to wait for twenty minutes. The crowd, which had grown, strove to see her through the glass doors of the waiting-room. On the platform

there was also a throng. Finally the train entered the station, and soldiers took their place on the platform. "Present arms!" commanded the officer. Between the drawn-up troops the Princess passed by, the long crêpe veil hiding her face. Suddenly, unexpectedly, shouts were heard: "Vive la Comtesse Lonyay!" Her Royal Highness got into a carriage, and ordering the window to be lowered, leant out and said with emotion: "I thank my fellow-countrymen."

What had happened? Various reports were circulated and different versions given in the Press. The Spa correspondent of one paper telegraphed that the Princess was present at the arrival of the King, who refused to speak to her, and required her to leave the palace. The *Chronique* gave the following account with regard to the sudden departure of Princess Stéphanie: "Her Royal Highness was in the death chamber when the King arrived, and he insisted on her leaving before he would enter. Princess Clémentine then went and fetched her sister away. No Court dignitary was present at Princess Stéphanie's departure. As soon as she had gone the King entered the room with Princess Clémentine, and remained in prayer for twenty-five minutes. His Majesty said he did not disapprove of the step taken by the Countess Lonyay, but that did not do away with the family difference concerning her." But a representative of the *Chronique* obtained an audience from the Princess, and asked her how much foundation there was in the report regarding the incident between herself and the King. The



From a hitherto unpublished photograph

THE COUNTESS LONYAY

Princess replied : "The reports have already reached me. The precise facts are these : I was praying by the bier of the Queen, when someone came about four o'clock to tell me that the King would not receive me. I immediately left the death-chamber. I had no interview with His Majesty." This attitude on the part of the King caused a painful impression in Belgium as well as in Europe. The *Étoile Belge* wrote : "The sudden departure of Countess Lonyay surprised the inhabitants and foreigners alike. The Countess had, however, come to Spa to pray before the mortal remains of her mother, and the step taken by the King seems to be inexplicable." Indeed, people had hoped that a reconciliation would take place between the King and Countess Lonyay in the death-chamber of the late Queen. But Leopold II could not forgive his daughter her *mésalliance*.

The hour came for the public to pass in file before the coffin. It was resting in the great hall, hung with black draperies, hidden under flowers and wreaths. The white and rose petals shone pale in the thick shade lighted by flickering candles. *Prie-Dieu* were placed before the masses of flowers, and the ladies of honour, in black robes, bareheaded, knelt upon them with rosaries in their hands. On each side of the coffin nuns knelt in turn.

Entering at one door and passing out at another, the public, one by one, filed past while gendarmes watched the slow and endless procession. In the silence the prayer of the nuns rose in colourless, monotonous sounds, among which could sometimes be

heard : "Salut Marie, pleine de grace." From without came, through the open doors, a few stifled cries of women and children. Then again the nuns' prayer could be heard, accompanied by the rough voices of women of the people : "Salut Marie, pleine de grace, le Seigneur est avec vous. . . ." Women going by crossed themselves before the coffin, or knelt suddenly, and their knees made a heavy sound on the floor. Old women passed, throwing a furtive glance towards the coffin, then turned away their heads, fearing their emotion, and fixed their eyes on the square of light which marked the door of exit before them . . . the square of bright light of brilliant sunshine, against which was silhouetted the leafage of the great park of the Royal villa.

Immediately after the solemn Mass celebrated at the Church of St. Gudule, Leopold mounted his motor-car, and at full speed left for the French frontier. Gossip would have it that he was eager to seek consolation in the whirl of Parisian pleasures and gaieties. The illustrated paper, *Der Wahre Jacob*, of Stuttgart, published a drawing at that time representing the King in deep mourning rushing into the arms of the famous Cléo de Mérode with the joyous exclamation : "O Cléo, grande est ma joie ! Me voici débarrassé de ma vieille ! Je te tends bien aimée, la main. Vive le veuvage."¹ How much truth there is in this statement we shall see in a following chapter, when we briefly relate the love affairs of the late King.

But the King's quarrels with his daughters were

¹ Cf. John Grand Carteret, *Leopold II*, Paris, p. 184.

not yet over. Soon a lawsuit between Leopold II and his two elder daughters surprised Belgium and Europe, and greatly contributed towards lessening the feeling of respect towards the King.

Whilst Port Arthur was being invested and Vladivostok bombarded, whilst Paris was aglow with excitement over the revival of the Affair (Dreyfus), Brussels, too, was witnessing her great judicial play, *King Lear Reversed!*

The Queen had died in 1902, and the lawsuit practically began at once. Marie Henriette had left her fortune to her daughters. Now the Princesses maintained that, as the late Queen had married under the Belgian system of common property, the inheritance consisted not only in the Queen's own private property, but also in half of the property of the King. Leopold II, they maintained, was worth at least a hundred million francs, fifty of which belonged by right to the Queen. The Press asked at the time why the Princesses Louise and Stéphanie were so impatient; their father being sixty-nine, they ought to exercise the Christian virtue of patience and wait—wait a little longer, until the event which was sure to happen sooner or later had occurred, and then they would enter into possession of his entire fortune. But Leopold, who almost hated his daughters, had left his entire fortune to Belgium, whilst his children, he said, ought to be satisfied with his "glory." And now, since Parliament had already accepted his gift, could it be annulled? The lawyers of the Princesses maintained that the King had no right to make a gift of the late Queen's part, which by right belonged to

her daughters. He had given something which did not belong to him.

It was not his generosity either, they maintained, which made him give his fortune to Belgium, it was a Mephistophelean hatred of his daughters, an unnatural desire for an almost unnatural feeling of revenge. But Leopold took no notice of public opinion, he did what he wished. It was almost a Drury Lane or Lyceum drama. One can imagine the hisses which would greet the Lyceum's evil father who refuses his daughter the right to weep on her mother's grave, and deprives the poor orphan of her rightful inheritance, which he is spending in the company of other women.

And thus, in March, 1904, Brussels and the European world enjoyed the spectacle of a lawsuit between father and daughter. The father was a king and the daughter a princess. Stéphanie was claiming the inheritance of her mother, Leopold refused to give it up, and the laws of Belgium were called upon to decide the matter. *Le procès du roi*," they called it at Brussels, and everybody was curious and anxious to be present at this drama played at the Courts of Justice. The interesting part of this lawsuit was that the sacred personality of the King was not the plaintiff but the defendant. Someone had dared to take action against a king—of course the plaintiff was a princess, his own daughter, but the king was a defendant, which was somewhat incongruous. It is not often that a plaintiff invokes the laws of a king against himself, a king whose own daughter sends the brokers



From a photograph

PRINCESS LOUISE OF BELGIUM

into his house. "King Leopold," wrote the *Neue Freie Presse*, "is the reverse of King Lear." The tragic side of the play performed at Brussels was the treatment of the daughters. It was Regan and Goneril, alias Louise and Stéphanie, who were the sufferers. Louise and Stéphanie claimed the inheritance of their mother, Queen Henriette, and whilst dressmakers and jewellers took the part of Louise, Stéphanie was plaintiff in person.

Numerous and fashionable audiences attended the court to witness and hear the debates in this remarkable and historic lawsuit. They were exciting days for Brussels, and they aroused the placid Belgian from his placidity. The main question at issue was whether a marriage contract concluded by the King, then Duke of Brabant, and the Archduchess Marie Henriette of Austria was a valid contract. The marriage contract stipulated for a division of property, but the plaintiffs maintained that this document was not drawn up and ratified in accordance with the laws of Belgium. According to the will of the Queen, her estate was divided among her daughters, after certain legacies had been provided for. The share of each daughter amounted to less than £20,000. But neither Louise of Coburg's creditors nor Princess Stéphanie were satisfied. Their counsels claimed that after the marriage a community of goods existed between the King and the late Queen, and the documents relating to the princely marriage were nothing but a royal museum of nullities. Counsel for Princess Stéphanie was Paul Jansen, leader of the Radical party in the Belgian Parliament. The lawyer explained the

reasons which prompted his illustrious client to take the present step. She had been a dutiful child, he said, to her parents, and a faithful wife to her former husband, the Crown Prince Rudolf. But, alas ! undeservedly she had received the treatment of a step-daughter from her royal father. She existed now on a small income granted her by Emperor Francis Joseph ; the amount, however, was not sufficient to enable her to maintain her position as a member of a royal house. She was therefore compelled to assert her right to a share in the estate of the late Queen. Her father was depriving her of what legally belonged to her. The action would be regarded, no doubt, as the greatest scandal that had ever happened in a royal family, but whose fault was it ? The King's, for he had acted contrary to the feelings of a father and a king.

Influential political personages made efforts to effect an amicable arrangement between the royal father and daughters, but in vain. The King's counsel, M. Lam Wilsh, urged that the King was a magnanimous sovereign, who wished that his riches should benefit not only his children but the country, and if he had disinherited his children for the sake of the country, he had stipulated that the Belgian Government should pay an allowance to his heirs.

Had the case been pleaded before a jury the Princesses would have won. Sentiment has its home in Brabant, as well as in the county of London, and the jurymen would undoubtedly have been favourable

to the daughters. Public opinion too was against the King. "He has not even a heart of a stone," wrote a Vienna paper; "he has a heart of gold, which is harder than stone." And even the *Indépendance Belge*, favourable to the King, criticised his attitude, and expressed the hope that Leopold II would make the noble gesture of forgiveness. But the King did not forgive, and remained firm and hard-hearted. He won his case. The judgment was given on April 20, 1904. This decision had been expected, said the daily Press. The law is what it is; it takes no cognisance of sentiment. True, the audience had wept when the lawyer of Princess Stéphanie, Paul Jansen, *l'homme boulet*, as they called him, had related his clients' misfortunes and thundered against his royal opponent. Europe was indignant; but the law remains the law. And thus the King triumphed. The illustrated European Press took its revenge by representing the father with the stony heart in numerous caricatures; whilst some official Belgian papers hinted at secret reasons which compelled Leopold's attitude in this scandalous affair.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF KING LEOPOLD

“Car les vieilles chansons ne sont point mensongères
Les rois, comme jadis, épousent les bergères.”

LEOPOLD has been branded as a faded pleasure-seeker—as a *roi galant* or *vert*. He is supposed to have taken King Henri IV of Navarre and Louis XV as his models. No doubt the late King had his distractions, although gossip certainly exaggerated the report. And, indeed, has there been a monarch who has led a chaste and irreproachable life? Leopold I, his austere father, had his *liaisons*, and the love affairs of Leopold II were not a few. Almost immediately after his marriage he had installed in the royal palace at Brussels a famous actress, Aimée Desclée. The Queen, offended in her dignity of sovereign and her delicacy as woman, at once left the capital. The Archbishop of Malines was dispatched to her, and he succeeded in persuading Marie Henriette to return. A queen, said the prelate, must see and suffer a good deal without protesting; such was her duty. And as if to justify the King's conduct, a rumour was spread that the Queen had an attachment for her handsome coachman. Disgusted at such calumny, Marie Henriette at once dismissed the latter. When Leopold had finally separated from the Queen he led

the life of a bachelor king, mostly in London, until the scandalous case of the notorious Mrs. Jefferies put a stop to his visits.

The case of Mrs. Jefferies had been hushed up, but not before the Belgian Press had got hold of it. A series of articles, entitled "Saligaud II," appeared in the *National Belge*. Leopold II took no notice of the accusations, but he never again visited the English metropolis except on State occasions. He is supposed to have transferred his love affairs to Paris, where he became a familiar figure. In the Faubourg St. Germain, in the Avenue du Bois and in Rue de la Paix he used to walk about simply and unostentatiously dressed, inspecting shop windows, examining pictures, books and antiquities. He liked Paris and the Boulevards and the life of the Ville Lumière. And this gave rise to the constant rumour which was aggrandised and ridiculed in the illustrated Press of Europe, that the King of the Belgians, neglecting the serious affairs of State, visited the French capital for the indulgence of those pleasures that especially appealed to him.

Gossips in Paris related all the details of Leopold's gallant adventures, gave the menu of his *petits soupers*, described the exact value of the presents he made to the ladies of his admiration, and were generally well informed. Leopold's alleged relationship with the famous dancer Cléo de Mérode has been the subject of much talk; indeed, Cléopold was the common sobriquet by which the King was known in Paris and caricatured in the Press. On the other hand, it has been asserted by those who should be in a position to know, that

while public gossip was discussing Leopold's love affairs, for ten years he had never set eyes on the charming object of this *chronique scandaleuse*. One evening, at the Opera in Paris, the King of the Belgians is reported to have said to a famous singer: "Will you please introduce to me the charming dancer of whom I hear so much?"

The tenor looked surprised. "Your Majesty?"

"Certainly," replied the King. "I have never seen her."

Cléo de Mérode was introduced to His Belgian Majesty, and the King very simply remarked:—

"Madam, I am delighted to see you at last and to be able to express to you my deepest regret, if the good fortune which is falsely attributed to me has in any way inconvenienced you. We are far from those times when the favour of a king did not compromise. Besides, I am only a small king."

The love affairs, however, of the King were many; begun very early when he was quite a boy, and continued after his marriage.

They ended in the late King's marrying the Baroness de Vaughan, but they began—if we are to believe the *chronique scandaleuse*—with a little intrigue with the pretty daughter of the royal gardener Jantjens. At all times and in all courts political parties have endeavoured to exercise their power over the sovereign through the influence of women. The latter have also been used in court intrigues and politics as so many Delilahs to ensnare the Samsons. *Cherchez la femme* is especially applicable to political affairs and court intrigues. And thus it happened that at the

Court of Leopold I the Clerical and Liberal parties were anxious to gain the Duke of Brabant and future king for their respective interests.

Leopold II was only seventeen, and courtiers had noticed his partiality for women. At once intrigues were set on foot to put some charming enchantress in his way, who would set on flame the young royal heart and gain a preponderating influence over his mind. An Italian marchesa was the willing instrument in the hands of the Holy Catholic priests, whilst the niece of a prominent courtier and a leader of the Liberal Party was introduced to the Heir Apparent for the same purpose. Whether the Duke of Brabant saw through the manœuvres or not, cannot be said ; but certain it is that he loved both ladies and many others besides ; he took what the gods, the Church and the courtiers had given him. But those women exercised very little influence over him, and both parties had thus laboured in vain. It had only been a labour of Love on the part of the Crown Prince. Gossip will have it that when the Duke of Brabant undertook his long journey to the East he not only made himself acquainted with the customs of the peoples, but his curiosity also prompted him to pry into the Mohammedan sanctum—the Oriental harem. The Duke of Brabant seems to have had many an interesting and, though perilous, not unpleasant adventure. One of these adventures occurred at Smyrna and is not without a comic side. The Governor of Smyrna was a former Prussian officer who had embraced Islam and risen to high honour in the service of the Sultan. Leopold expressed the

wish to visit a Turkish harem. The Governor obligingly sent his *defterdar*, or financial secretary, who placed himself at the service of His Royal Highness. The *defterdar* then took the Duke to a Greek *restaurateur*, who promised for a substantial remuneration to procure for Leopold the entry into some harem in the absence of the master. The *defterdar* then left the Duke to pursue his adventures in company of the old *restaurateur*. The Greek rogue took the Prince to the harem of the very same *defterdar*. The servants and the negro eunuchs were made drunk, and the Duke was able to penetrate into the sacred apartments of the *defterdar*'s wives. An hour later the financial secretary came to visit his harem, and only with great difficulty did the Prince escape without being caught by the infuriated and jealous husband. The next morning the *defterdar* called upon the Duke of Brabant to enquire how he had succeeded in his efforts. Leopold told him his adventure, and from his description the old Turk knew what trick the wily Greek had played on him. He told the truth to the amazed and amused Prince, but refused to take any further steps in the matter, for fear of making himself ridiculous. "The remuneration, however, which your Royal Highness promised to the Greek by right belongs to me," added the financial secretary. This business trait appealed to the future sovereign of the Congo. "You are a financial genius," he said, laughing, "and when I am in Constantinople I shall recommend you to the Sultan for the post of Minister of Finance." The *defterdar* looked frightened. "What harm have I done unto Your Royal Highness that you

should wish to ruin me?" he asked. "Ruin you? But I wish to serve you," said Leopold. "Oh, no," replied the defterdar, "the Sultan knows that all his ministers are robbing him, and after a while he usually sends them to prison or to death and confiscates their goods. I prefer to remain here in Smyrna and to work in peace."

Some of the ladies whom the King of the Belgians favoured with his royal protection—or better, who lavished their favours on him—played the part of the Marquise de Pompadour towards Louis XV and of Potemkin towards Catharine II. Leopold II has been called *le roi des Belges et des Belles*, and the European illustrated Press has been busy for years caricaturing the King's gallant adventures. The most celebrated of his favourites is naturally Caroline Lacroix, Baroness de Vaughan, whom he is supposed to have met in Paris in 1903—or, according to others, in 1900—that is, before the death of Queen Marie Henriette. She accompanied the old King on his travels, and was seen with him at Luchon, on the côte d'Azur, at Cologne, Wiesbaden; and soon after the favourite came to Laeken. She had been called "la reine du Congo," for she was to benefit largely by the atrocities committed in the Free State, where sweating and bleeding natives laboured so as to accumulate millions for the royal favourite, the Belgian Du Barry.

The King afterwards rented for her two splendid estates, at first one near Juvisy, and then the Château de Balincourt; and it was in the company of the Baroness, to whom he was morganatically married, that he passed the last years of his life. The Vatican

recognised her as the lawful wife of the King, for the marriage ceremony was solemnised at San Remo in accordance with the rites of the Catholic Church. Two sons were the issue of this morganatic union. The elder was born in 1906, and the King conferred on him the title of Count de Tervuren; he is supposed to be very much like the late Prince Leopold, who died in 1869. Leopold II was greatly attached to this his Benjamin and to the mother. The younger boy received the title of Count de Revenstein. The reader will remember that in the Congo the negroes had their right hands cut off, whenever they refused to work. When the second son of the Baroness was born, it was noticed that he was a cripple. One of his arms finishes in a kind of stump without a hand or fingers. Insinuations that the King was not the father of the children which the modern Du Barry had borne unto him were not lacking in the Press, and many were the witty and biting remarks to this effect and the caricatures representing the old King in the act of nursing baby Vaughan. One of the best appeared in the *Ruy-Blas* on December 28th, 1907. It reproduces a conversation taking place on the Boulevard Anspach between two Belgian officers:—

“Enfin, tout de même, elle lui a donné un fils avec l'aide de Dieu.” “Je croyais que c'était avec l'aide-de-camp,” replied the other.

Caroline Lacroix, Baroness de Vaughan, the former barmaid of Bordeaux, whose sister is a vendor of vegetables in the Halles in Paris, belongs to history. She will increase the number of mistresses of kings



From a photograph

BARONESS DE VAUGHAN AND HER TWO SONS

and emperors whose lives historians have recounted in detail and over whom chroniclers have woven a veil of romance. She was born at Bucharest, where her father was a foreman, and was the youngest of thirteen children, seven of whom died. The contemporary *chronique scandaleuse* has not yet quite done with the Baroness, for undoubtedly the European world will still enjoy the spectacle of a lawsuit on the part of the disinherited princesses against their morganatic stepmother.

The late King only left 15 million francs, the sum he had inherited from his father; the rest of his fortune, perhaps 130 millions, he gave to the Baroness de Vaughan.

Let us now sum up the life and character of Leopold II. From the very first moments of his reign he felt himself almost imprisoned in his rôle of constitutional monarch, and yet he remained faithful to his oath. He never acted against the Constitution—but endeavoured to exercise his power outside the boundaries prescribed by this Constitution. Like his cousin, Queen Victoria, he knew how to remain neutral between the parliamentary parties of his country. The Belgian Constitution is based upon the same principles as that of Great Britain, and just as England has her *Whigs* and her *Tories*, Belgium, ever since the establishment of the new kingdom, has had her parties, the Liberal and the Catholic. But whilst in Great Britain the opposition is mostly concerned with political and social questions, in Belgium the war is waged on religious grounds—and for that very reason

the fight is more intense and the arguments more heated. But in the midst of the struggle of parties the authority of the Sovereign remains unshaken. Leopold II carefully kept the balance between the two parties, seeming to exercise his sovereign power outside his Parliament. Apart from his work in the Congo, which we have endeavoured to judge justly and impartially—giving Cæsar his due, but not sparing him sharp and well-deserved criticism—two ideas seem to have influenced Leopold's policy: the desire to create a better national defence and to accomplish vast public works. Belgium is a neutral country, but it was the late King's firm conviction that Belgian neutrality ought to be an armed one, and that the Belgians should not shrink from making sacrifices so as to be able to make the national defence more efficacious and thus guard their accumulated wealth. After the Franco-German War in 1870 General Chazal, who had been Commander-in-Chief at the frontier, addressed a report to the Sovereign in which he insisted upon a better organisation of the Belgian army. "The Belgian people," said Chazal, "had passed through the hole of a needle," and he refused to assume further responsibility, if the national defence remained *in statu quo*. Leopold II was in favour of the suggestions made by Chazal, but none of the political parties could obtain from Parliament the necessary consent. The population, too, maintained that Belgian soil was neutral, and consequently remained hostile to the idea of increasing the military expenditure. Whenever the question of making sacrifices for the national defence was dis-

cussed it involved a fight against public opinion. But Leopold was admirably gifted for the struggle, for he possessed all the qualities tending to make a great statesman and a clever diplomatist; he had *finesse* and a remarkable *flair*, coupled with an iron will and a genius for business. His time and his country were often against him and opposed the realisation of his ideals, but he pursued his goal to the very end and succeeded. Thanks to his personal efforts the Cabinet Bernaert obtained in 1887 the credit necessary for the abolition of the old forts of Namur and Liège and the construction of the forts of the Meuse after the plans of General Brialmont. In 1906, after a sensational intervention of the King on the occasion of the festivities in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Belgian Independence, the Cabinet Smet de Nayer obtained from Parliament a new credit for the construction of the fort of Anvers. But forts are of little use if there is no army to occupy and defend them, and only general conscription could supply this want. For twenty years Leopold in vain sought to introduce the measure of military reform. "The lion of Flanders," he exclaimed in 1886, "must not be caught napping. Liberty arises and disappears with independence. Wars have become crushing, those whom they surprise are absolutely lost." At last, towards the end of his reign, he witnessed the gradual realisation of his plans with regard to military reform. I have spoken of Leopold's endeavour to embellish his capital, but I must not omit to mention his efforts to utilise Belgian industrial and commercial wealth by the canalisation

of the basin of the Meuse and the creation of the ports of Anvers and Zeebrugge.

No doubt Leopold alienated—and not without just cause—the sympathy of his people and his general popularity by his avarice and his private life. The incidents which occurred at Spa in the death-chamber of his wife, his lawsuit with his daughters offended Belgian and European sentimentalism. But the faults committed by the father and the husband need not diminish the merit of the Sovereign, and the ruler of a country may happen to be a rogue and yet, he being a clever rogue, the country is happy and prosperous under his rule. Leopold II never drew his sword, but he was one of the greatest conquerors of his century. He conquered at a moment and in an age when vast conquests became almost impossible, and his great merit consisted in the fact of his having grasped the spirit of his time. He acted in accordance with the requirements of his age and his epoch; and, imbued with the ideas of his environment, he shaped and moulded circumstances in his own peculiar manner. If his father had consolidated Belgian independence Leopold II had utilised the dormant energies of the Belgian people, its power to work, and thus furthered the development of national prosperity. He was hard-hearted, he was not always grateful to those who had served him—as, for instance, in the case of Gautier, who had succeeded in arousing the interest of Bismarck in the African question—but justice compels us to say that Leopold II was not exactly the avaricious and selfish monster such as many like to represent him. One fact seems to have been over-

looked by the critics of the late King—the fact that the many private misfortunes and the blows of fate did not a little contribute towards hardening his character and embittering his disposition. His eldest son, the Count of Hainault, died suddenly at the age of nine, and Leopold never consoled himself. His nephew Prince Baldwin, the eldest son of his brother, the Count of Flanders, in whom the late King centred his hopes and upon whom he transferred his affection, was the next to be carried off; he died in 1891. The tragic history of Leopold's only sister, Charlotte, the widowed Empress of Mexico, is well known. Maximilian of Austria was shot at Queretaro, whilst his wife lost her reason and has since been living in utter darkness. As regards his daughters, their conduct has scarcely been such as to fill the heart of the royal father with joy. Princess Louise, the wife of Prince Philip of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, had been involved in an amorous intrigue with the Hungarian officer Geza Matterchich-Keglevitch, which led to a scandalous divorce suit and her incarceration in an asylum. She succeeded in escaping, and since then has assumed the title of Princess of Belgium, renouncing her membership of the ducal house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Princess Stéphanie, the widow of Archduke Rudolf of Austria, offended her father when against his express wish she married Count Lonyay. And even Princess Clémentine, who seems to have been Leopold's favourite daughter, gave him cause for annoyance. For political reasons the late King refused his consent to the marriage of his daughter, the grandchild of King Louis-Philippe, to Prince Victor

Napoleon, the pretender to the French throne. Leopold was always anxious to remain on friendly terms with France, and General Brialmont, who himself was proud of his descent from one of Napoleon's generals, maintained that nothing could offend the late King so much as to accuse him of anti-French tendencies. For although a Coburg, he never forgot that he was a grandson of Louis-Philippe. But whatever his reasons, his refusal to grant his consent to Princess Clémentine's marriage resulted in a tension between father and daughter. But in spite of the blows which befell him, Leopold II—like Francis Joseph, of whose misfortunes it is said that they would have inspired the tragic genius of a Sophocles and an Æschylus—knew how to control himself. He remained almost indifferent, active, and energetic. Was he really insensible and inaccessible to all tender emotions? It is almost incredible in the son of her whom the Belgians surnamed *L'Ange des Belges*, for her goodness of heart. In reality—so at least the late King's friends maintained—Leopold had deliberately snapped the sensitive chords of his being, and henceforth his reason had always the control over his feelings. He endeavoured to impregnate the Heir Apparent, Prince Albert, with his own ideas, and did his best to prepare him for his rôle or his *métier* of monarch. The following anecdote is characteristic: On a very hot summer afternoon an official was reading a report to the late Sovereign in the presence of Prince Albert. Suddenly a light breeze, the window being open, scattered the papers from the royal table all over the floor. Leopold II invited the Prince to



From a photograph

ALBERT KING OF THE BELGIANS
HIS QUEEN AND SONS

collect the sheets, and motioning to the official who was hastening to offer his services, to sit down, remarked: "A future constitutional monarch must learn to bend." Leopold II himself knew—when circumstances required it—how to bend.

CONCLUSION

LEOPOLD II died on December 17th, 1909, just forty-four years after his accession, and at the ripe age of eighty-four. His testament contained the following words: "I die in the Catholic religion, and I ask pardon for the faults I have or may have committed. I leave 15,000,000 francs received from my father to my children, and I ask that my funeral shall be simple, and held at seven in the morning, attended by the household staff, etc." Several of his last visits to Paris were undertaken with a view to consulting some eminent physician. About five years before his death he is said to have consulted an eminent medical authority as to his chances of living to see several of his plans carried out. "Tell me the truth," said the King. The physician examined him and declared that the King's constitution was excellent and that, barring accidents, he could hope to live many more years. Leopold replied: "Ten years are enough for the execution of all my plans." But he did not live these ten years he required, and his plans, especially those with regard to the development of Belgian trade with remote countries, were not all carried out. He died almost suddenly, and whilst the Socialistic Press reviled his memory, the so-called bourgeois papers sang a pæan in his honour. I have endeavoured to describe him in his true colours, as a

king, a man, a husband and a father. Leopold II was a good king for Belgium, and the country owes him her state of prosperity. He was a bad father and an unfaithful husband. He neglected his wife, robbed her of her fortune and his daughters of their rightful inheritance, but he was a strong man nevertheless. Among the pigmies who sit on the thrones of contemporary Europe he was a giant. And, indeed, who could compare him to the Nicholases, the Alfonsos and the Manuels? Leopold II knew Belgium, knew Europe and knew humanity, and, like a strong man, he had a deep contempt for everything and everybody. He loved his country in his own interests, for all love is, after all, selfish. But he benefited his subjects more than other monarchs have benefited those over whom they rule. Like all strong men Leopold II was not a hypocrite. He shocked the public sense of morality, but he shocked it openly, almost unblushingly, unlike other sanctimonious striplings who reign by the grace of God. Leopold II "was a man, take all in all." And if the Romans are sheep, why should Cæsar not be a wolf? Nay, I shall even go so far as to admit that the late King was a rascal, but he was a clever rascal, and Belgium was happier under his rule than many another country under the rule of an honest dullard or hypocritical rogue.

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The Great Empress Dowager of China

By **PHILIP W. SERGEANT**

Author of

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A WOMAN who has been variously compared with Messalina, Catherine of Russia, Elizabeth of England, and the late Queen Victoria, can scarcely fail to have been a very remarkable woman. And such was the late Empress Dowager of China, although up to the moment of her death she was little more than a name to Europeans who have never visited the Far East. Her obituary notice probably acquainted many people for the first time with the fact that she had a commanding influence over the destinies of the mysterious Empire of China, where, according to the popular idea, women are nonentities. The life of the great Empress Dowager is now to be attempted for the first time by Mr. Philip Sergeant, who besides being known as the biographer of Cleopatra, Catherine, and the two French Empresses, spent more than four years in China while the Empress Dowager's sway was at its height.

The New New Guinea

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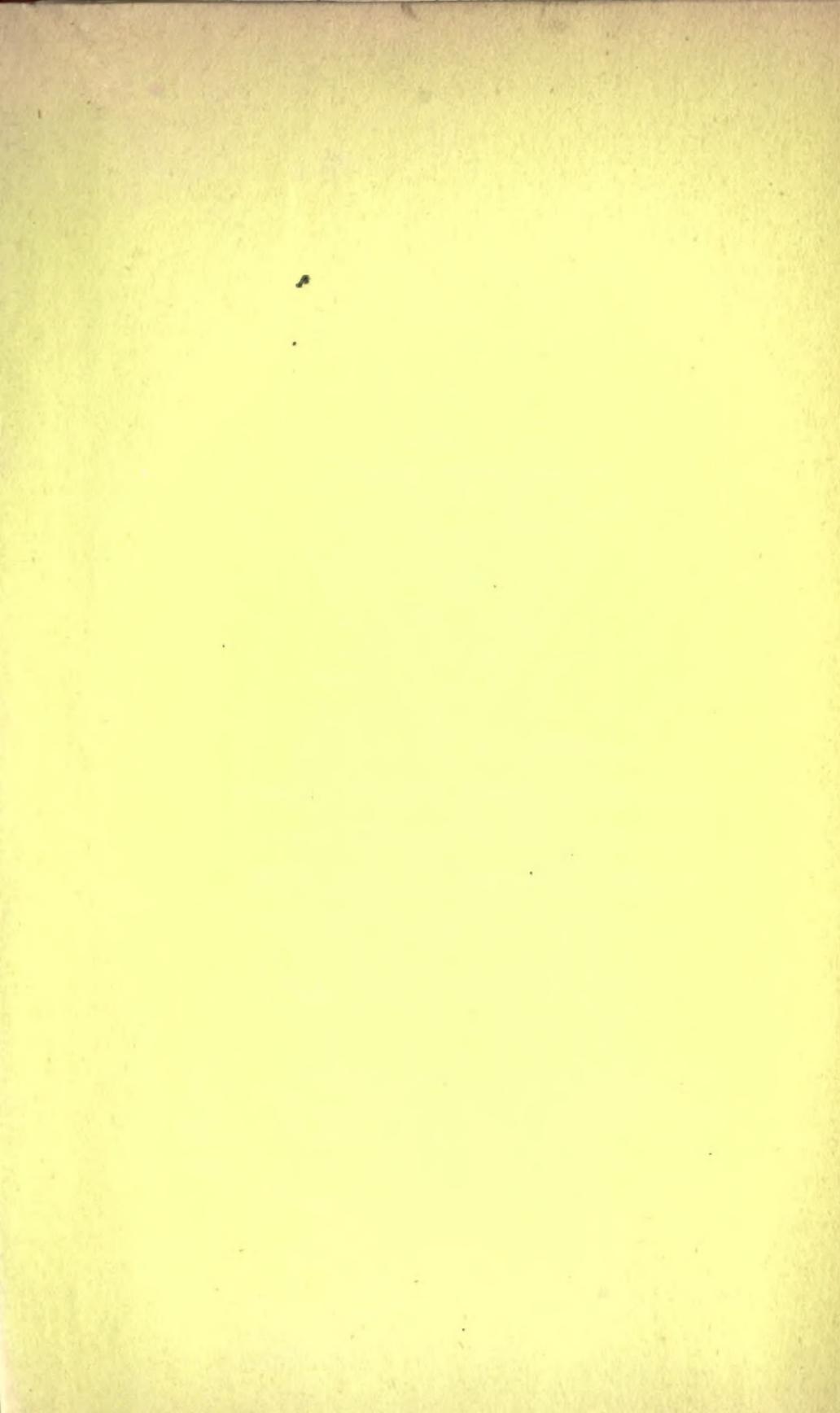
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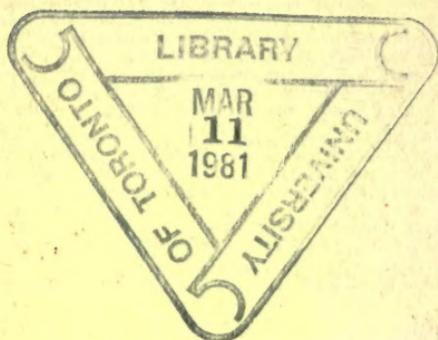
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