

# The Crime of the Congo

By

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## PREFACE

THERE are many of us in England who consider the crime which has been wrought in the Congo lands by King Leopold of Belgium and his followers to be the greatest which has ever been known in human annals. Personally I am strongly of that opinion. There have been great expropriations like that of the Normans in England or of the English in Ireland. There have been massacres of populations like that of the South Americans by the Spaniards or of subject nations by the Turks. But never before has there been such a mixture of wholesale expropriation and wholesale massacre all done under an odious guise of philanthropy and with the lowest commercial motives as a reason. It is this sordid cause and the unctious hypocrisy which makes this crime unparalleled in its horror.

The witnesses of the crime are of all nations, and there is no possibility of error concerning facts. There are British consuls like Casement, Thesiger, Mitchell and Armstrong, all writing in their official capacity with every detail of fact and date. There are Frenchmen like Pierre Mille and Félicien Challaye, both of whom have written books upon the subject. There are missionaries of many races—Harris, Weeks and Stannard (British); Morrison, Clarke and Shepherd (American); Sjoblom (Swedish) and Father Vermeersch, the Jesuit. There is the eloquent action of the Italian Government, who refused to allow Italian officers to be employed any longer in such hangman's work, and there is the report of the Belgian commission, the evidence before which was suppressed because it was too dreadful for publication; finally, there is the incorruptible evidence of the kodak. Any American citizen who will glance at Mark Twain's "King Leopold's Soliloquy" will see some samples of that. A perusal of all of these sources of information will show that there is not a grotesque, obscene or ferocious torture which human ingenuity could invent which has not been used against these harmless and helpless people.

This would, to my mind, warrant our intervention in any case. Turkey has several times been interfered with simply on the general ground of humanity. There is in this instance a very special reason why America and England should not stand by and see these people done to death. They are, in a sense, their wards. America was the first to give official recognition to King Leopold's enterprise in 1884, and so has the responsibility of having actually put him into that position which he has so dreadfully abused. She has been the indirect and innocent cause of the whole tragedy. Surely some reparation is due. On the other hand England has, with the other European Powers, signed the treaty of 1885, by which each and all of them make it responsible for the condition of the native races. The other Powers have so far shown no desire to live up to this pledge. But the conscience of England is uneasy and she is slowly rousing herself to act. Will America be behind?

At this moment two American citizens, Shepherd and that noble Virginian, Morrison, are about to be tried at Boma for telling the truth about the scoundrels. Morrison in the dock makes a finer Statue of Liberty than Bartholdi's in New York harbour.

Attempts will be made in America (for the Congo has its paid I apologists everywhere) to pretend that England wants to oust Belgium from her colony and take it herself. Such accusations are folly. To run a tropical colony honestly without enslaving the natives is an expensive process. For example Nigeria, the nearest English colony, has to be subsidized to the extent of \$2,000,000 a year. Whoever takes over the Congo will, considering its present demoralized condition, have a certain expense of \$10,000,000 a year for twenty years. Belgium has not run the colony. It has simply sacked it, forcing the inhabitants without pay to ship everything of value to Antwerp. No decent European Power could do this. For many years to come the Congo will be a heavy expense and it will truly be a philanthropic call upon the next owner. I trust it will not fall to England.

Attempts have been made too (for there is considerable ingenuity and unlimited money on the other side) to pretend that it is a question of Protestant missions against Catholic. Any one who thinks this should read the book, "La Question Kongolaise," of the eloquent and holy Jesuit, Father Vermeersch. He lived in the country and, as he says, it was the sight of the "immeasurable misery," which drove him to write.

We English who are earnest over this matter, look eagerly to the westward to see some sign of moral support of material leading. It would be a grand sight to see the banner of humanity and civilization carried forward in such a cause by the two great English-speaking nations.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

## INTRODUCTION

I am convinced that the reason why public opinion has not been more sensitive upon the question of the Congo Free State, is that the terrible story has not been brought thoroughly home to the people. Mr. E. D. Morel has done the work of ten men, and the Congo Reform Association has struggled hard with very scanty means; but their time and energies have, for the most part, been absorbed in dealing with each fresh phase of the situation as it arose. There is room, therefore, as it seemed to me, for a general account which would cover the whole field and bring the matter up to date. This account must necessarily be a superficial one, if it is to be produced at such a size and such a price, as will ensure its getting at that general public for which it has been prepared. Yet it contains the essential facts, and will enable the reader to form his own opinion upon the situation.

Should he, after reading it, desire to help in the work of forcing this question to the front, he can do so in several ways. He can join the Congo Reform Association (Granville House, Arundel Street, W. C.). He can write to his local member and aid in getting up local meetings to ventilate the question. Finally, he can pass this book on and purchase other copies, for any profits will be used in setting the facts before the French and German public.

It may be objected that this is ancient history, and that the greater part of it refers to a period before the Congo State was annexed to Belgium on August 10th, 1908. But responsibility cannot be so easily shaken off. The Congo State was founded by the Belgian King, and exploited by Belgian capital, Belgian soldiers and Belgian concessionaires. It was defended and upheld by successive Belgian Governments, who did all they could to discourage the Reformers. In spite of legal quibbles, it is an insult to common sense to suppose that the responsibility for the Congo has not always rested with Belgium. The Belgian machinery was always ready to help and defend the State, but never to hold it in control and restrain it from crime.

One chance Belgium had. If immediately upon taking over the State they had formed a Judicial Commission for the rigid inspection of the whole matter, with power to punish for all past offences, and to examine all the scandals of recent years, then they would have done something to clear the past. If on the top of that they had freed the land, given up the system of forced labour entirely, and cancelled the charters of all the concessionaire companies, for the obvious reason that they have notoriously abused their powers, then Belgium could go forward in its colonizing enterprise on the same terms as other States, with her sins expiated so far as expiation is now possible.

She did none of these things. For a year now she has herself persevered in the evil ways of her predecessor. Her colony is a scandal before the whole world. The era of murders and mutilations has, as we hope, passed by, but the country is sunk into a state of cowed and

hopeless slavery. It is not a new story, but merely another stage of the same story. When Belgium took over the Congo State, she took over its history and its responsibilities also. What a load that was is indicated in these pages.

The record of the dates is the measure of our patience. Can any one say that we are precipitate if we now brush aside vain words and say definitely that the matter has to be set right by a certain near date, or that we will appeal to each and all of the Powers, with the evidence before them, to assist us in setting it right? If the Powers refuse to do so, then it is our duty to honour the guarantees which we made as to the safety of these poor people, and to turn to the task of setting it right ourselves. If the Powers join in, or give us a mandate, all the better. But we have a mandate from something higher than the Powers which obliges us to act.

Sir Edward Grey has told us in his speech of July 22nd, 1909, that a danger to European peace lies in the matter. Let us look this danger squarely in the face. Whence does it come? Is it from Germany, with her traditions of kindly home life—is this the power which would raise a hand to help the butchers of the Mongalla and of the Domaine de la Couronne? Is it likely that those who so justly admire the splendid private and public example of William II. would draw the sword for Leopold? Both in the name of trade rights and in that of humanity Germany has a long score to settle on the Congo. Or is it the United States which would stand in the way, when her citizens have vied with our own in withstanding and exposing these iniquities? Or, lastly, is France the danger? There are those who think that because France has capital invested in these enterprises, because the French Congo has itself degenerated under the influence and example of its neighbour, and because France holds a right of pre-emption, that therefore our trouble lies across the Channel. For my own part, I cannot believe it. I know too well the generous, chivalrous instincts of the French people. I know, also, that their colonial record during centuries has been hardly inferior to our own. Such traditions are not lightly set aside, and all will soon be right again when a strong Colonial Minister turns his attention to the concessionnaires in the French Congo. They will remember de Brazza's dying words: "Our Congo must not be turned into a Mongalla." It is an impossibility that France could ally herself with King Leopold, and certainly if such were, indeed, the case, the *entente cordiale* would be strained to breaking. Surely, then, if these three Powers, the ones most directly involved, have such obvious reasons for helping, rather than hindering, we may go forward without fear. But if it were not so, if all Europe frowned upon our enterprise, we would not be worthy to be the sons of our fathers if we did not go forward on the plain path of national duty.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Windlesham, Crowborough,  
September, 1909.

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# The Crime of the Congo

## I

### HOW THE CONGO FREE STATE CAME TO BE FOUNDED

IN THE earlier years of his reign King Leopold of Belgium began to display that interest in Central Africa which for a long time was ascribed to nobility and philanthropy, until the contrast between such motives, and the actual unscrupulous commercialism, became too glaring to be sustained. As far back as the year 1876 he called a conference of humanitarians and travellers, who met at Brussels for the purpose of debating various plans by which the Dark Continent might be opened up. From this conference sprang the so-called International African Association, which, in spite of its name, was almost entirely a Belgian body, with the Belgian King as President. Its professed object was the exploration of the country and the founding of stations which should be rest-houses for travellers and centres of civilization.

On the return of Stanley from his great journey in 1878, he was met at Marseilles by a representative from the King of Belgium, who enrolled the famous traveller as an agent for his Association. The immediate task given to Stanley was to open up the Congo for trade, and to make such terms with the natives as would enable stations to be built and depôts established. In 1870 Stanley was at work with characteristic energy. His own intentions were admirable. "We shall require but mere contact," he wrote, "to satisfy the natives that our intentions are pure and honourable, seeking their own good, materially and socially, more than our own interests. We go to spread what blessings arise from amiable and just intercourse with people who have been strangers to them." Stanley was a hard man, but he was no hypocrite. What he said he undoubtedly meant. It is worth remarking, in view of the accounts of the laziness or stupidity of the natives given by King Leopold's apologists in order to justify their conduct toward them, that Stanley had the very highest opinion of their industry and commercial ability. The following extracts from his writings set this matter beyond all doubt:

"Bolobo is a great centre for the ivory and camwood powder trade, principally because its people are so enterprising."

Of Irebu—"a Venice of the Congo"—he says:

"These people were really acquainted with many lands and tribes on the Upper Congo. From Stanley Pool to Upoto, a distance of 6,000 miles, they knew every landing-place on the river banks. All the ups and downs of savage life, all the profits and losses derived from barter, all the diplomatic arts used by tactful savages, were as well known to them as the Roman alphabet to us. . . . No wonder that all this commercial knowledge had left its traces on their faces; indeed, it is the same as in

































































































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was likely to ensue. To get the rubber in the forests—which, generally speaking, are very swampy—involves much fatigue and often fruitless searching for a well-flowing vine. As the area of supply diminishes, moreover, the demand for rubber constantly increases. Some little time back I learned the Bongandanga district supplied seven tons of rubber a month, a quantity which it was hoped would shortly be increased to ten tons. The quantity of rubber brought by the three men in question would have represented, probably, for the three of them certainly not less than seven kilog. of pure rubber. That would be a very safe estimate, and at an average of 7fr. per kilog. they might be said to have brought in £2 worth of rubber. In return for this labour, or imposition, they had received goods which cost certainly under 1s., and whose local valuation came to 45 rods (1s. 10*d.*). As this process repeats itself twenty-six times a year, it will be seen that they would have yielded £52 in kind at the end of the year to the local factory, and would have received in return some 24s. or 25s. worth of goods, which had a market value on the spot of £2 7s. 8*d.* In addition to these formal payments they were liable at times to be dealt with in another manner, for should their work, which might have been just as hard, have proved less profitable in its yield of rubber, the local prison would have seen them. The people everywhere assured me that they were not happy under this system, and it was apparent to a callous eye that in this they spoke the strict truth.”

Again I insert a passage to show that Casement was by no means an ill-natured critic:

“It is only right to say that the present agent of the A.B.I.R. Society I met at Bongandanga seemed to me to try, in very difficult and embarrassing circumstances, to minimize as far as possible, and within the limits of his duties, the evils of the system I there observed at work.”

Speaking of the Mongalla massacres—those in which Lothaire was implicated—he quotes from the judgment of the Court of Appeal:

“That it is just to take into account that, by the correspondence produced in the case, the chiefs of the Concession Company have, if not by formal orders, at least by their example and their tolerance, induced their agents to take no account whatever of the rights, property, and lives of the natives; to use the arms and the soldiers which should have served for their defence and the maintenance of order to force the natives to furnish them with produce and to work for the Company, as also to pursue as rebels and outlaws those who sought to escape from the requisitions imposed upon them. . . . That, above all, the fact that the arrest of women and their detention, to compel the villages to furnish both produce and workmen, was tolerated and admitted even by certain of the administrative authorities of the region.”

Yet another example of the workings of the system:

“In the morning, when about to start for K—, many people from the surrounding country came in to see me. They brought with them three individuals who had been shockingly wounded by gun fire, two men and a very small boy, not more than six years of age, and a fourth—a boy child of six or seven—whose right hand was cut off at the wrist. One of the men, who had been shot through the arm, declared that he was Y of L—, a village situated some miles away. He declared that he had been shot as I saw under the following circumstances: the soldiers had entered his town, he alleged, to enforce the due fulfilment of the rubber tax due by the community. These men had tied him up and said that unless he paid 1,000 brass rods to them they would shoot him. Having no rods to give them they had

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shot him through the arm and had left him.”

I may say that among my photographs are several with shattered arms who have been treated in this fashion.

This is how the natives were treated when they complained to the white man:

“In addition, fifty women are required each morning to go to the factory and work there all day. They complained that the remuneration given for these services was most inadequate, and that they were continually beaten. When I asked the Chief W why he had not gone to D F to complain if the sentries beat him or his people, opening his mouth he pointed to one of the teeth which was just dropping out, and said: ‘That is what I got from the D F four days ago when I went to tell him what I now say to you.’ He added that he was frequently beaten, along with others of his people, by the white man.”

One sentry was taken almost red-handed by Mr. Casement:

“After some little delay a boy of about fifteen years of age appeared, whose left arm was wrapped up in a dirty rag. Removing this, I found the left hand had been hacked off by the wrist, and that a shot hole appeared in the fleshy part of the forearm. The boy, who gave his name as I I, in answer to my inquiry, said that a sentry of the La Lulanga Company now in the town had cut off his hand. I proceeded to look for this man, who at first could not be found, the natives to a considerable number gathering behind me as I walked through the town. After some delay the sentry appeared, carrying a cap-gun. The boy, whom I placed before him, then accused him to his face of having mutilated him. The men of the town, who were questioned in succession, corroborated the boy’s statement. The sentry, who gave his name as K K, could make no answer to the charge. He met it by vaguely saying some other sentry of the Company had mutilated I I; his predecessor, he said, had cut off several hands, and probably this was one of the victims. The natives around said that there were two other sentries at present in the town, who were not so bad as K K, but that he was a villain. As the evidence against him was perfectly clear, man after man standing out and declaring he had seen the act committed, I informed him and the people present that I should appeal to the local authorities for his immediate arrest and trial.”

The following extract must be my final quotation from Consul Casement’s report:

“I asked then how this tax was imposed. One of them, who had been hammering out an iron neck-collar on my arrival, spoke first. He said:

“I am N N. These other two beside me are O O and P P, all of us Y—. From our country each village had to take twenty loads of rubber. These loads were big: they were as big as this. . . .’ (Producing an empty basket which came nearly up to the handle of my walking-stick.) ‘That was the first size. We had to fill that up, but as rubber got scarcer the white man reduced the amount. We had to take these loads in four times a month.’

“Q. ‘How much pay did you get for this?’

“A. (Entire audience.) ‘We got no pay! We got nothing!’

“And then N N, whom I asked again, said:

“‘Our village got cloth and a little salt, but not the people who did the work. Our chiefs eat up the cloth; the workers got nothing. The pay was a fathom of cloth and a little salt for every big basketful, but it was given to the chief, never to the men.

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It used to take ten days to get the twenty baskets of rubber—we were always in the forest and then when we were late we were killed. We had to go further and further into the forest to find the rubber vines, to go without food, and our women had to give up cultivating the fields and gardens. Then we starved. Wild beasts—the leopards—killed some of us when we were working away in the forest, and others got lost or died from exposure and starvation, and we begged the white man to leave us alone, saying we could get no more rubber, but the white men and their soldiers said: “Go! You are only beasts yourselves; you are nyama (meat).” We tried, always going further into the forest, and when we failed and our rubber was short, the soldiers came to our towns and killed us. Many were shot, some had their ears cut off; others were tied up with ropes around their necks and bodies and taken away. The white men sometimes at the posts did not know of the bad things the soldiers did to us, but it was the white men who sent the soldiers to punish us for not bringing in enough rubber.’

“Here P P took up the tale from N N:

“We said to the white men, “We are not enough people now to do what you want us. Our country has not many people in it and we are dying fast. We are killed by the work you make us do, by the stoppage of our plantations, and the breaking up of our homes.” The white man looked at us and said: “There are lots of people in Mputu” (Europe, the white man’s country). “If there are lots of people in the white man’s country there must be many people in the black man’s country.” The white man who said this was the chief white man at F F—; his name was A B; he was a very bad man. Other white men of Bula Matadi who had been bad and wicked were B C, C D, and D E.’ ‘These had killed us often, and killed us by their own hands as well as by their soldiers. Some white men were good. These were E F, F G, G H, H I, I K, K L.’

“These ones told them to stay in their homes and did not hunt and chase them as the others had done, but after what they had suffered they did not trust more any one’s word, and they had fled from their country and were now going to stay here, far from their homes, in this country where there was no rubber.

“Q. ‘How long is it since you left your homes, since the big trouble you speak of?’

“A. ‘It lasted for three full seasons, and it is now four seasons since we fled and came into the K— country.’

“Q. ‘How many days is it from N— to your own country?’

“A. ‘Six days of quick marching. We fled because we could not endure the things done to us. Our chiefs were hanged, and we were killed and starved and worked beyond endurance to get rubber.’

“Q. ‘How do you know it was the white men themselves who ordered these cruel things to be done to you? These things must have been done without the white man’s knowledge by the black soldiers.’

“A. (P P): ‘The white men told their soldiers: “You kill only women; you cannot kill men. You must prove that you kill men.” So then the soldiers when they killed us’ (here he stopped and hesitated, and then pointing to the private parts of my bulldog—it was lying asleep at my feet), he said: ‘then they cut off those things and took them to the white men, who said: “It is true, you have killed men.”’

“Q. ‘You mean to tell me that any white man ordered your bodies to be mutilated like that, and those parts of you carried to him?’

“P P, O O, and all (shouting): ‘Yes! many white men. D E did it.’

“Q. ‘You say this is true? Were many of you so treated after being shot?’

“All (shouting out): ‘Nkoto! Nkoto!’ (Very many! Very many!)

“There was no doubt that these people were not inventing. Their vehemence, their flashing eyes, their excitement, was not simulated. Doubtless they exaggerated the numbers, but they were clearly telling what they knew and loathed. I was told that they often became so furious at the recollection of what had been done to them that they lost control over themselves. One of the men before me was getting into

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this state now.”

Such is the story—or a very small portion of it—which His Majesty’s Consul conveyed to His Majesty’s Government as to the condition of those natives, who, “in the name of Almighty God,” we had pledged ourselves to defend!

The same damning White Book contained a brief account of Lord Cromer’s experience upon the Upper Nile in the Lado district. He notes that for eighty miles the side of the river which is British territory was crowded with native villages, the inhabitants of which ran along the bank calling to the steamer. The other bank (Congoese territory), was a deserted wilderness. The “Tuquoque” argument which King Leopold’s henchmen are so fond of advancing will find it hard to reconcile the difference. Lord Cromer ends his report:

“It appears to me that the facts which I have stated above afford amply sufficient evidence of the spirit which animates the Belgian Administration, if, indeed, Administration it can be called. The Government, so far as I could judge, is conducted almost exclusively on commercial principles, and, even judged by that standard, it would appear that those principles are somewhat short-sighted.”

In the same White Book which contains these documents there is printed the Congoese defence drawn up by M. de Cuvelier. The defence consists in simply ignoring all the definite facts laid before the public, and in making such statements as that the British have themselves made war upon natives, as if there were no distinction between war and massacre, and that the British have put a poll-tax upon natives, which, if it be reasonable in amount, is a perfectly just proceeding adopted by all Colonial nations. Let the possessors of the Free State use this system, and at the same time restore the freedom of trade by throwing open the country to all, and returning to the natives that land and produce which has been taken from them. When they have done this—and punished the guilty—there will be an end of anti-Congo agitation. Beyond this, a large part (nearly half) of the Congo Reply (*notes sur le rapport de Mr. Casement, de Dec. 11, 1903*), is taken up by trying to show that in one case of mutilation the injuries were, in truth, inflicted by a wild boar. There must be many wild boars in Congoland, and their habits are of a singular nature. It is not in the Congo that these boars are bred.

## VIII

### KING LEOPOLD’S COMMISSION AND ITS REPORT

THE immediate effect of the publication as a State paper of the general comment of Lord Cromer, and of the definite accusations of Consul Casement, was a demand both in Belgium and in England for

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an official inquiry. Lord Landsdowne stipulated that this inquiry should be impartial and thorough. It was also suggested by the British Government that it should be international in character, and separated from the local administration. Very grudgingly and under constant pressure the King appointed a Commission, but whittled down its powers to such a point that its proceedings must lose all utility. Such were the terms that they provoked remonstrance from men like M. A. J. Wauters, the Belgian historian of the Congo Free State, who protested in the *Mouvement Géographique* (August 7th, 1904) that such a body could serve no useful end. Finally, their functions were slightly increased, but they possessed no punitive powers and were hampered in every direction by the terms of their reference.

The *personnel* of the Commission was worthy of the importance of the inquiry. M. Janssens, a well-known jurist of Belgium, was the president. He impressed all who came in contact with him as a man of upright and sympathetic character. Baron Nisco's appointment was open to criticism, as he was himself a Congo functionary, but save for that fact there was no complaint to make against him. Dr. Schumacher, a distinguished Swiss lawyer, was the third Commissioner. The English Government applied to have a representative upon the tribunal, and with true Congo subtlety the request was granted after the three judges had reached the Congo. The Englishman, Mr. Mackie, hurried out, but was only in time to attend the last three sittings, which were held in the lower part of the river, far from the notorious rubber agents. It is worth noting that on his arrival he applied for the minutes of the previous meetings and that his application was refused. In Belgium the evidence of the Commission has never been published, and it is safe to say that it never will be. Fortunately the Congo missionaries took copious notes of the proceedings and of the testimony which came immediately under their own notice. It is from their evidence that I draw these accounts. If the Congo authorities contest the accuracy of those accounts, then let them confute them forever and put their accusers to confusion by producing the actual minutes which they hold.

The first sitting of any length of which there are records is that at Bolobo, and extended from November 5th to 12th, 1904. The veteran, Mr. Grenfell, gave evidence at this sitting, and it is useful to summarize his views as he was one of the men who held out longest against the condemnation of King Leopold, and because his early utterances have been quoted as if he were a supporter of the system. He expressed to the Commissioners his disappointment at the failure of the Congo Government to realize the promises with which it inaugurated its career. He declared he could no longer wear the decorations which he had received from the Sovereign of the Congo State. He gave it as his opinion that the ills the country was suffering from were due to the haste of a few men to get rich, and to the absence of anything like a serious attempt to properly police the country in the

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interests of the people. He instanced the few judicial officers, and the virtual impossibility of a native obtaining justice, owing to witnesses being compelled to travel long distances, either to Leopoldville or Boma. Mr. Grenfell spoke out emphatically against the administrative *régime* on the Upper River, so far as it had been brought under his notice.

Mr. Scrivener, a gentleman who had been twenty-three years on the Congo, was the next witness. His evidence was largely the same as the "Diary" from which I have already quoted, concerning the condition of the Crown Domain. Many witnesses were examined. "How do you know the names of the men murdered?" a lad was asked. "One of them was my father," was the dramatic reply. "Men of stone," wrote Mr. Scrivener, "would be moved by the stories that are unfolded as the Commission probes this awful history of rubber collection."

Mr. Gilchrist, another missionary, was a new witness. His testimony was concerned with the State Domain and the Concessionnaire area, principally on the Lulanga River. He said:

"I also told them what we had seen on the Ikelemba, of the signs of desolation in all the districts, of the heartrending stories the people told us, of the butcheries wrought by the various white men of the State and companies who had, from time to time, been stationed there among whom a few names were notorious. I pointed out to them the fact that the basin of the Ikelemba was supposed to be free-trade territory also, but that everywhere the people of the various districts were compelled to serve the companies of these respective districts, in rubber, gum copal or food. At one out-of-the-way place where we were on the south bank, two men arrived just as we were leaving, with their bodies covered with marks of the chicotte, which they had just received from the trader of Bosci because their quantity had been short. I said to the Commissaire, given favourable conditions, particularly freedom, there would soon be a large population in these interior towns, the Ngombe and Mongo."

In answer to questions the following facts were solicited:

*"Unsettled condition of the people.* The older people never seem to have confidence to build their houses substantially. If they have any suspicion of the approach of a canoe or steamer with soldiers they flee.

*"Chest disease, pneumonia, etc.* These carry off very many. The people flee to the islands, live in the open air, expose themselves to all kinds of weather, contract chills, which are followed by serious lung troubles, and die. For years we never saw a new house because of the drifting population. They have a great fear of soldiers. In the case of many the absence from the villages is temporary; in the case of a few they permanently settle on the north bank of the river.

*"Want of proper nourishment.* I have witnessed the collecting of the State imposition, and after this was set aside the natives had nothing but leaves to eat."

Also, that fines, which the Commission at once declared to be illegal, were constantly levied on the people, and that these fines had continued after the matter had been reported to the Governor-General. In spite of this declaration of illegality, no steps were taken in the matter, and M. de Bauw, the chief offender, was by last accounts the



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supreme executive official of the district. At every turn one finds that there is no relation at all between law and practice in the Congo. Law is habitually broken by every official from the Governor-General downward if the profits of the State can be increased thereby. The only stern enforcement of the laws is toward the foreigner, the Austrian Rubinck, or the Englishman Stokes, who is foolish enough to think that an international agreement is of more weight than the edicts of Boma. These men believed it, and met their death through their belief without redress, and even, in the case of the Austrian, without public remonstrance.

The next considerable session of the Commission was at Baringa. Mr. Harris and Mr. Stannard, the missionaries at this station, had played a noble part throughout in endeavouring within their very limited powers to shield the natives from their tormentors. In both cases, and also in that of Mrs. Harris, this had been done at the repeated risk of their lives. Their white neighbours of the rubber factories made their lives miserable also by preventing their receipt of food from the natives, and harassing them in various ways. On one occasion a chief and his son were both murdered by the order of the white agent because they had supplied the Harris household with the fore-quarter of an antelope. Before giving the terrible testimony of the missionaries—a testimony which was admitted to be true by the chief agent of the A.B.I.R. Company on the spot, it would be well to show the exact standing of this Corporation and its relation to the State. These relations are so close that they become to all intents and purposes the same. The State holds fifty per cent. of the shares; it places the Government soldiers at the company's disposal; it carries up in the Government steamers and supplies licenses for the great number of rifles and the quantity of cartridges which the company needs for its murderous work. Whatever crimes are done by the company, the State is a close accomplice. Finally, the European directors of this bloodstained company are, or were at the time, the Senator Van der Nest, who acted as President; and as Council: Count John d'Oultremont, Grand Marshal of the Belgian Court; Baron Dhanis, of Congo fame, and M. van Eetevelde, the creature of the King, and the writer of so many smug despatches to the British Government about the mission of civilization and the high purpose of the Congo State. Now listen to some of the testimony as condensed by Mr. Harris:

“First, the specific atrocities during 1904 were dealt with, including men, women, and children; then murders and outrages, including cannibalism. From this I passed on to the imprisonment of men, women and children. Following this I called attention to the destruction of the Baringa towns and the partial famine among the people in consequence. Also the large gangs of prisoners—men, women and children—imprisoned to carry out this work; the murder of two men whilst it was being done. Next followed the irregularities during 1903. The expedition conducted by an A.B.I.R. agent against Samb'ekota, and the arming continually of A.B.I.R. sentries with Albini rifles. Following this I drew attention to the administration of Mons. Forcie, whose *régime* was a terrible one, including the murder of

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Isekifasu, the principal Chief of Bolima; the killing, cutting up and eating of his wives, son and children; the decorating of the chief houses with the intestines, liver and heart of some of the killed, as stated by 'Veritas' in the West African Mail.

"I confirmed in general the letter published in the West African Mail by 'Veritas.'

"Following this I came to Mons. Tagner's time, and stated that no village in this district had escaped murders under this man's *régime*.

"Next we dealt with irregularities common to all agents, calling attention to and proving by specific instances the public floggings of practically any and every one; quoting, for instance, seeing with my own eyes six Ngombe men receive one hundred strokes each, delivered simultaneously by two sentries.

"Next, the normal condition has always been the imprisoning of men, women and children, all herded together in one shed, with no arrangement for the demands of nature. Further, that very many, including even chiefs, had died either in prison or immediately on their release.

"Next, the mutilation of the woman Boaji, because she wished to remain faithful to her husband, and refused to subject herself to the passions of the sentries. The woman's footless leg and hernia testify to the truth of her statement. She appeared before the Commission and doctor.

"Next, the fact that natives are imprisoned for visiting friends and relatives in other villages, and the refusal to allow native canoes to pass up and down river without carrying a permit signed by the rubber agent; pointing out that even missionaries are subject to these restrictions, and publicly insulted, in an unprintable manner, when they do so.

"Next point dealt with was responsibility—maintaining that responsibility lay not so much in the individual as in the system. The sentry blames the agent, he in turn the director, and so on.

"I next called attention to the difficulties to be faced by natives in reporting irregularities. The number of civil officials is too small; the practical impossibility of reaching those that do exist—the native having first to ask permission of the rubber agent.

"The relations that are at present necessary between the A.B.I.R. and the State render it highly improbable that the natives will ever report irregularities. I then pointed out that we firmly believe that but for us these irregularities would never have come to light.

"Following on this the difficulties to be faced by missionaries were dealt with, pointing out that the A.B.I.R. can and do impose on us all sorts of restrictions if we dare to speak a word about their irregularities. I then quoted a few of the many instances which found their climax in Mrs. Harris and I almost losing our lives for daring to oppose the massacres by Van Caelcken. It was also stated that we could not disconnect the attitude of the State in refusing us fresh sites with our action in condemning the administration. I then mentioned that the forests are exhausted of rubber, pointing out that during a five days' tour through the forests I did not see a single vine of any size. This is solely because the vines have been worked in such a manner that all the rubber roots need many years' rest, whereas the natives now are actually reduced to digging up those roots in order to get rubber.

"The next subject dealt with was the clear violation both of the spirit and letter of the Berlin Act. In the first place we are not allowed to extend the Mission, and, further, we are forbidden to trade even for food.

"Next the statement was made that, so far as we are aware, no single sentry had ever been punished by the State till 1904 for the many murders committed in this district.

"I next pointed out that one reason why the natives object to paddle for the A.B.I.R. is because of the sentries who travel in the A.B.I.R. canoes, and whose only business is to flog the paddlers in order to keep them going.

"After Mr. Stannard had been heard, sixteen Esanga witnesses were questioned

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one by one. They gave clearly the details of how father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter were killed in cold blood for rubber. These sixteen represented over twenty murders in Esanga alone. Then followed the big chief of all Bolima, who succeeded Isekifasu (murdered by the A.B.I.R.). What a sight for those who prate about lying missionaries! He stood boldly before all, pointed to his twenty witnesses, placed on the table his one hundred and ten twigs, each twig representing a life for rubber. 'These are chiefs' twigs, these are men's, these shorter are women's, these smaller still are children's.' He gives the names of scores, but begs for permission to call his son as a reminder. The Commission, though, is satisfied with him, that he is telling the truth, and therefore say that it is unnecessary. He tells how his beard of many years' growth, and which nearly reached his feet, was cut off by a rubber agent, merely because he visited a friend in another town. Asked if he had not killed A.B.I.R. sentries, he denied it, but owned to his people spearing three of the sentry's boys. He tells how the white man fought him, and when the fight was over handed him his corpses, and said: 'Now you will bring rubber, won't you?' To which he replied: 'Yes.' The corpses were cut up and eaten by Mons. Forcie's fighters. He also told how he had been chicotted and imprisoned by the A.B.I.R. agent, and further put to the most menial labour by the agent.

"Here Bonkoko came forward and told how he accompanied the A.B.I.R. sentries when they went to murder Isekifasu and his wives and little ones; of finding them peacefully sitting at their evening meal; of the killing as many as they could, also the cutting up and eating of the bodies of Isekifasu's son and his father's wives; of how they dashed the baby's brains out, cut the body in half, and impaled the halves.

"Again he tells how, on their return, Mons. Forcie had the sentries chicotted because they had not killed enough of the Bolima people.

"Next came Bongwalanga, and confirmed Bonkoko's story; this youth went to 'look on.' After this the mutilated wife of Lomboto, of Ekerongo, was carried by a chief, who showed her footless leg and hernia. This was the price she had to pay for remaining faithful to her husband. The husband told how he was chicotted because he was angry about his wife's mutilation.

"Then Longoi, of Lotoko, placed eighteen twigs on the table, representing eighteen men, women and children murdered for rubber. Next, Inunga laid thirty-four twigs on the table and told how thirty-four of his men, women and children had been murdered at Ekerongo. He admits that they had speared one sentry, Iloko, but that, as in every other such instance, was because Iloko had first killed their people. Lomboto shows his mutilated wrist and useless hand, done by the sentry. Isekansu shows his stump of a forearm, telling the same pitiful story. Every witness tells of floggings, rape, mutilations, murders, and of imprisonments of men, women and children, and of illegal fines and irregular taxes, etc., etc. The Commission endeavours to get through this slough of iniquity and river of blood, but finding it hopeless, asks how much longer I can go on. I tell them I can go on until they are satisfied that hundreds of murders have been committed by the A.B.I.R. in this district alone; murders of chiefs, men, women and little children, and that multitudes of witnesses only await my signal to appear by the thousand.

"I further point out that we have only considered about two hundred murders from the villages of Bolima, Esanga, Ekerongo, Lotoko; that by far the greater majority still remain. The following districts are as yet untouched: Bokri, Nson-go, Boru-ga, Ekala, Baringa, Linza, Lifindu, Nsongo-Mboyo, Livoku, Boendo, the Lomako river, the Ngombe country, and many others, all of whom have the same tale to tell. Every one saw the hopelessness of trying to investigate things fully. To do so, the Commission would have to stay here for months."

What comment can be added to such evidence as this! It stands in its naked horror, and it is futile to try to make it more vivid. What can any of those English apologists of the Congo who have thrown a

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doubt upon the accounts of outrages because in passing through a section of this huge country upon a flying visit they had not happened to see them—what can Lord Mountmorris, Captain Boyd Alexander, or Mrs. French Sheldon say in the face of a mass of evidence with the actual mutilated limbs and excoriated backs to enforce it? Can they say more than the man actually incriminated, M. Le Jeune, the chief agent at the spot? “What have you to say?” asked the President. M. Le Jeune shrugged his shoulders. He had nothing to say. The President, who had listened, to his honour be it spoken, with tears running down his cheeks to some of the evidence, cried out in amazement and disgust. “There is one document I would put in,” said the agent. “It is to show that 142 of my sentinels were slain by the villagers in the course of seven months.” “Surely that makes the matter worse!” cried the sagacious judge. “If these well-armed men were slain by the defenceless villagers, how terrible must the wrongs have been which called for such desperate reprisals!”

You will ask what was done with this criminal agent, a man whose deeds merited the heaviest punishment that human law could bestow. Nothing whatever was done to him. He was allowed to slip out of the country exactly as Captain Lothaire, in similar circumstances, was allowed to slip from the country. An insignificant agent may be occasionally made an example of, but to punish the local manager of a great company would be to lessen the output of rubber, and what are morality and justice compared to that?

Why should one continue with the testimony given before the Commission? Their wanderings covered a little space of the country and were confined to the main river, but everywhere they elicited the same tale of slavery, mutilation, and murder. What Scrivener and Grenfell said at Bolobo was what Harris and Stannard said at Baringa, what Gilchrist said at Lulanga, what Rushin and Gamman said at Bongadanga, what Mr. and Mrs. Lower said at Ikan, what Padfield said at Bonginda, what Weeks said at Monscombe. The place varied, but the results of the system were ever the same. Here and there were human touches which lingered in the memory; here and there also episodes of horror which stood out even in that universal Golgotha. One lad testified that he had lost every relative in the world, male or female, all murdered for rubber. As his father lay dying he had given him the charge of two infant brothers and enjoined him to guard them tenderly. He had cared for them until he had been compelled at last to go himself into the forest to gather the rubber. One week their quantity had been short. When he returned from the wood the village had been raided in his absence, and he found his two little brothers lying disembowelled across a log. The company, however, paid 200 per cent.

Four natives had been tortured until they cried out for some one to bring a gun and shoot them.

The chiefs died because their hearts were broken.

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Mr. Gamman knew no village where it took them less than ten days out of fifteen to satisfy the demands of the A.B.I.R. As a rule, the people had four days in a month to themselves. By law the maximum of forced labour was forty hours in a month. But, as I have said, there is no relation at all between law and practice in the Congo.

One witness appeared with a string knotted in forty-two places, and with a packet of fifty leaves. Each knot represented a murder and each leaf a rope in his native village.

The son of a murdered chief took the body of his father (all names, dates and place specified) to show it to the white agent, in the hope of justice. The agent called his dog and set it on him, the dog biting the son on the leg as he carried the corpse of his father.

The villagers brought their murdered men to M. Spelier, director of the La Lulanga Company. He accused them of lying and ordered them off.

One chief was seized by two white agents, one of whom held him while the other beat him. When they had finished they kicked him to make him get up, but the man was dead. The Commission examined ten witnesses in their investigation of this story. The chief was Jonghi, the village Bogeka, the date October, 1904.

Such is a fractional sample of the evidence which was laid before the Commission, corroborated by every detail of name, place and date which could enforce conviction. There is no doubt that it did enforce thorough conviction. The judges travelled down the river sadder and wiser men. When they reached Boma, they had an interview with Governor-General Constermann. What passed at that interview has not been published, but the Governor-General went forth from it and cut his own throat. The fact may, perhaps, give some indication of how the judges felt when the stories were still fresh in their minds, and their nerves wincing under the horror of the evidence.

A whole year elapsed between the starting of the Commission and the presentation of their Report, which was published upon October 31st, 1905. The evidence which would have stirred Europe to its foundations was never published at all, in spite of an informal assurance to Lord Lansdowne that nothing would be held back. Only the conclusions saw the light, without the document upon which they were founded.

The effect of that Report, when stripped of its courtly phrases, was an absolute confirmation of all that had been said by so many witnesses during so many years. It is easy to blame the Commissioners for not having the full courage of their convictions, but their position was full of difficulty. The Report was really a personal one. The State was, as no one knew better than themselves, a fiction. It was the King who had sent them, and it was to the King himself that they were reporting upon a matter which deeply affected his personal honour as well as his material interests. Had they been, as had been suggested, an international body, the matter would have been simple. But of the

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three good care had been taken that two should be men who would have to answer for what was said. Mr. Janssens was a more or less independent man, but a Belgian, and a subject all the same. Baron Nisco was in the actual employ of the King, and his future was at stake. On the whole, I think that the Commissioners acted like brave and honest men.

Naturally they laid all stress upon what could be said in favour of the King and his creation. They would have been more than human had they not done so. They enlarged upon the size and the traffic of the cities at the mouth of the Congo—as if the whole loot of a nation could pass down a river without causing commerce and riches at its mouth. Very early in the Report they indicated that the question of the State appropriation of the land had forced itself upon their notice. “If the State wishes to avoid the principle of the State appropriation of vacant lands resulting in abuse,” says the Report, “it should place its agents and officials on their guard against too restrictive interpretation and too rigorous applications.” Weak and trimming, it is true, but it was the cornerstone of all that the King had built, and how were they to knock it rudely out? Their attitude was not heroic. But it was natural. They go on:

“As the greater portion of the land in the Congo is not under cultivation, this interpretation concedes to the State A RIGHT OF ABSOLUTE AND EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP OVER VIRTUALLY THE WHOLE OF THE LAND, WITH THIS CONSEQUENCE: THAT IT CAN DISPOSE—ITSELF AND SOLELY—OF ALL THE PRODUCTS OF THE SOIL; PROSECUTE AS A POACHER ANY ONE WHO TAKES FROM THAT LAND THE LEAST OF ITS FRUITS, OR AS A RECEIVER OF STOLEN GOODS ANY ONE WHO RECEIVES SUCH FRUIT: FORBID ANY ONE TO ESTABLISH HIMSELF ON THE GREATER PART OF THE TERRITORY. THE ACTIVITY OF THE NATIVES IS THUS LIMITED TO VERY RESTRICTED AREAS, AND THEIR ECONOMIC CONDITION IS IMMOBILIZED. THUS ABUSIVELY APPLIED, SUCH LEGISLATION WOULD PREVENT ANY DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE LIFE. IN THIS MANNER, NOT ONLY HAS THE NATIVE BEEN OFTEN FORBIDDEN TO SHIFT HIS VILLAGE, BUT HE HAS EVEN BEEN FORBIDDEN TO VISIT, EVEN TEMPORARILY, A NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE WITHOUT SPECIAL PERMIT. A NATIVE DISPLACING HIMSELF WITHOUT BEING THE BEARER OF SUCH AN AUTHORIZATION, WOULD LEAVE HIMSELF OPEN TO ARREST, TO BE TAKEN BACK AND EVEN PUNISHED.”

Who could possibly deny, after reading this passage, that the Congo native has been reduced from freedom into slavery? There follows a curious sentence:

“Let us hasten,” says the Report, “to say that in actual fact so great a rigour has not been shown. Almost everywhere certain products of the domain have been abandoned to the natives, notably palm kernels, which form the object of an important export trade in the Lower Congo.”

This palm kernel trade is an old-established one, affecting only

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the mouth of the river, which could not be disturbed without obvious international complications, and which bears no relation to the great Upper Congo populations, whose inhuman treatment was the question at issue.

The Report then proceeds to point out very clearly, the all-important fact which arises from the expropriation of the native from the land. "Apart from the rough plantations," it says, "which barely suffice, to feed the natives themselves and to supply the stations, all the fruits of the soil are considered as the property of the State or of the Concessionnaire societies." This being so, there is an end forever of free trade, or, indeed, of any trade, save an export by the Government itself, or by a handful of companies which really represent the Government, of the whole wealth of the country to Europe for the benefit of a ring of millionaires.

Having dealt with the taking of the land and the taking of its products, the Commission handles with kid gloves the third great root proposition, the forcing of the natives, for nothing, under the name of taxes, for trifles under the absurd name of trade, to work for the sake of their oppressors. It expends many words in showing that natives do not like work, and that, therefore, compulsion is necessary. It is sad to see just and learned men driven to such straits in defending what is indefensible. Do the blacks of the Rand gold mines like work? Do the Kimberley diamond hunters like work? Do the carriers of an East German caravan like work? No more than the Congolese. Why, then, do they work? Because they are paid a fair wage to do so. Because the money earned by their work can bring them more pleasure than the work does pain. That is the law of work the whole world over. Notably it is the law on the Congo itself, where the missionaries, who pay honestly for work, have no difficulty in getting it. Of course, the Congolese, like the Englishman, or the Belgian, does not like work when it is work which brings a benefit to others and none to himself.

But in spite of this preamble, the Commission cannot escape the actual facts.

"Numbers of agents only thought of one thing: to obtain as MUCH AS POSSIBLE IN THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE TIME, and their demands were often excessive. This is not at all astonishing, at any rate as regards the gathering of the produce of the domain. . . .

that is to say, the revenues for Government;

FOR THE AGENTS THEMSELVES WHO REGULATED THE TAX AND SAW TO ITS COLLECTION, HAD A DIRECT INTEREST IN INCREASING ITS AMOUNT, SINCE THEY RECEIVED PROPORTIONAL BONUSES ON THE PRODUCE THUS COLLECTED."

No more definite statement could be made of the system which had been attacked by the Reformers and denied by the Congo officials for so many years. The Report then goes on to tell that when the

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State, in one of those pretended reforms which were meant for European, not for Congolese, use, allotted forty hours of forced labour per month as the amount which the native owed the State, the announcement was accompanied by a private intimation from the Governor-General to the District Commissioners, dated February 23rd, 1904, that this new law must have the effect, not of lessening, but “of bringing about a constant increase in the resources of the Treasury.” Could they be told in plainer terms that they were to disregard it?

The land is taken, the produce is taken, the labour is taken. In old days the African slave was exported, but we progress with the ages and now a higher intelligence has shown the folly of the old-fashioned methods when it is so easy to enslave him in his own home.

We may pass the Report of the Commission in so far as it deals with the taxation of the natives, food taxes, portorage taxes and other imposts. It brings out very clearly the curse of the parasitic army, with their families, which have to be fed by the natives, and the difficulty which it causes them with their limited plantations to find the means for feeding themselves. Even the wood to the State steamers is not paid for, but is taken as a tax. Such demands “force the natives in the neighbourhood of the stations in certain cases to an almost continuous labour”—a fresh admission of slave conditions. The Report describes the result of the rubber tax in the following terms:

“This circumstance [exhaustion of the rubber] explains the repugnance of the native for rubber work, which in itself is not particularly painful. In the majority of cases the native must go one or two days’ march every fortnight, until he arrives at that part of the forest where the rubber vines can be met with in a certain degree of abundance. There the collector passes a number of days in a MISERABLE EXISTENCE. HE HAS TO BUILD HIMSELF AN IMPROVISED SHELTER, WHICH CANNOT, OBVIOUSLY, REPLACE HIS HUT. HE HAS NOT THE FOOD TO WHICH HE IS ACCUSTOMED. HE IS DEPRIVED OF HIS WIFE, EXPOSED TO THE INCLEMENCIES OF THE WEATHER AND THE ATTACKS OF WILD BEASTS. WHEN ONCE HE HAS COLLECTED THE RUBBER HE MUST BRING IT TO THE STATE STATION OR TO THAT OF THE COMPANY, AND ONLY THEN CAN HE RETURN TO HIS VILLAGE, WHERE HE CAN SOJOURN FOR BARELY MORE THAN TWO OR THREE DAYS, BECAUSE THE NEXT DEMAND IS UPON HIM. . . . IT IS HARDLY NECESSARY TO ADD THAT THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS IS A FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THE FORTY HOURS’ LAW.”

The Report deals finally with the question of the punishments meted out by the State. These it enumerates as “the taking of hostages, the imprisonment of the chiefs, the institution of sentries or capitas, fines and military expeditions,” the latter being a euphemism for cold-blooded massacres. It continues:

“Whatever one may think of native ideas, acts such as taking women as hostages outrage too much our ideas of justice to be tolerated. The State has prohibited this practice long ago, but without being able to suppress it.”



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The State prohibits, but the State not only condones, but actually commands it by private circular. Again the gap which lies betwixt law and fact where the interest of gain is concerned.

“It was barely denied,” the Report continues, “that in the various posts of the A.B.I.R. which we visited, the imprisonment of women hostages, the subjection of the chiefs to servile labour, the humiliations meted out to them, the flogging of rubber collectors, the brutality of the black employés set over the prisoners, were the rule commonly followed.”

Then follows an illuminative passage about the sentries, *capitas* or “forest guards,” or messengers, as they are alternatively called. It is a wonder that they were not called hospital orderlies in the efforts to make them seem inoffensive. What they actually were was, as we have seen, some twenty thousand cannibals armed with Albini repeating rifles. The Report says:

“This system of native supervisors (*surveillants*) has given rise to numerous criticisms, even on the part of State officials. The Protestant missionaries heard at Bolobo, Ikoko (Lake Mantumba), Lulonga, Bonginda, Ikau, Baringa and Bongandanga, drew up formidable accusations against the acts of these intermediaries. They brought before the Commission a **MULTITUDE OF NATIVE WITNESSES, WHO REVEALED A LARGE NUMBER OF CRIMES** and excesses alleged to have been committed by the sentinels. According to the witnesses these auxiliaries, especially those stationed in the villages, abuse the authority conferred upon them, convert themselves into **DESPOTS, CLAIMING THE WOMEN AND THE FOOD, NOT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES BUT FOR THE BODY OF PARASITES AND CREATURES WITHOUT ANY CALLING WHICH A LOVE OF RAPINE CAUSES TO BECOME ASSOCIATED WITH THEM, AND WITH WHOM THEY SURROUND THEMSELVES AS WITH A VERITABLE BODYGUARD; THEY KILL WITHOUT PITY ALL THOSE WHO ATTEMPT TO RESIST THEIR EXIGENCIES AND WHIMS.** The Commission was obviously unable in all cases to verify the exactitude of the allegations made before it, the more so that the facts were often several years old. However, **TRUTH OF THE CHARGES IS BORNE OUT BY A MASS OF EVIDENCE AND OFFICIAL REPORTS.**”

It adds:

“**OF HOW MANY ABUSES HAVE THESE NATIVE SENTINELS BEEN GUILTY IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY, EVEN APPROXIMATELY. SEVERAL CHIEFS OF BARINGA BROUGHT US, ACCORDING TO THE NATIVE CUSTOM, BUNDLES OF STICKS, EACH OF WHICH WAS MEANT TO SHOW ONE OF THEIR SUBJECTS KILLED BY THE CAPITAS. ONE OF THEM SHOWED 120 MURDERS IN HIS VILLAGE COMMITTED DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS.** Whatever one may think of the confidence with which this native form of book-keeping may inspire one, a document handed to the Commission by the Director of the A.B.I.R. does not allow any doubt to remain as to the sinister character of the system. It consisted of a list showing that from 1st January to 1st August, 1905—that is to say, within a space of seven months—142 sentries of the Society had been killed or wounded by the natives. Now, it is to be assumed that in many cases these sentries had been attacked by the natives by way of revenge. One may judge by this of the number of bloody

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affrays to which their presence had given rise. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE AGENTS INTERROGATED BY THE COMMISSION, OR WHO WERE PRESENT AT THE AUDIENCES, DID NOT EVEN ATTEMPT TO DENY THE CHARGES BROUGHT AGAINST THE SENTINELS.”

That last sentence seems the crown of the arch. If the agents on the spot did not attempt before the Commission to deny the outrages who shall venture to do it in their name?

The remainder of the Report, though stuffed with courtly platitudes and with vague recommendations of reform which are absolutely unpractical, so long as the root causes of all the trouble remain undisturbed, contains a few positive passages which are worth preserving. Talking of the want of definite instructions to military expeditions, it says:

“The consequences are often very murderous. And one must not be astonished. If in the course of THESE DELICATE OPERATIONS, WHOSE OBJECT IT IS TO SEIZE HOSTAGES AND TO INTIMIDATE THE NATIVES, constant watch cannot be exercised over the sanguinary instincts of the soldiers when orders to punish are given by superior authority, it is difficult that the expedition should not degenerate into massacres, accompanied by pillage and incendiarism.”

Again:

“The responsibility for these abuses must not, however, always be placed upon the commanders of military expeditions. In considering these facts one must bear in mind the deplorable confusion still existing in the Upper Congo between a state of war and a state of peace; between administration and repression; between those who may be regarded as enemies and those who have the right to be regarded as citizens of the State and treated in accordance with its laws. The Commission was struck with the general tone of the reports relating to operations described above. Often, while admitting that the expedition had been sent out SOLELY FOR SHORTAGE IN TAXATION, AND WITHOUT MAKING ALLUSION TO AN ATTACK OR RESISTANCE ON THE PART OF THE NATIVES, WHICH ALONE WOULD JUSTIFY THE USE OF ARMS, the authors of these reports speak of ‘SURPRISING VILLAGES,’ ‘ENERGETIC PURSUIT,’ ‘NUMEROUS ENEMIES KILLED AND WOUNDED,’ ‘LOOT,’ ‘PRISONERS OF WAR,’ ‘CONDITIONS OF PEACE.’ Evidently these officers thought themselves at war, acted as though at war.”

Again:

“The course of such expeditions grave abuses have occurred; men, women and children HAVE BEEN KILLED EVEN AT THE VERY TIME THEY SOUGHT SAFETY IN FLIGHT. OTHERS HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED. WOMEN HAVE BEEN TAKEN AS HOSTAGES.”

There is an interesting passage about the missionaries:

“Often also, in the regions where evangelical stations are established, the native, instead of going to the magistrate, his natural protector, adopts the habit when he thinks he has a grievance against an agent or an Executive officer, to confide in the

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missionary. The latter listens to him, helps him according to his means, and makes himself the echo of all the complaints of a region. Hence the astounding influence which the missionaries possess in some parts of the territory. It exercises itself not only among the natives within the purview of their religious propaganda, but over all the villages whose troubles they have listened to. The missionary becomes, for the native of the region, the only representative of equity and justice; he adds to the ascendancy acquired from his religious zeal, the prestige which, in the interest of the State itself, should be invested in the magistrates.”

I will now turn for a moment to contemplate the document as a whole.

With the characteristic policy of the Congo authorities, it was originally given to the world as being a triumphant vindication of King Leopold's administration, which would certainly have been the greatest whitewashing contract ever yet carried through upon this planet. Looked at more closely, it is clearly seen that behind the veil of courtly phrase and complimentary forms, every single thing that the Reformers have been claiming has been absolutely established. That the land has been taken. That the produce has been taken. That the people are enslaved. That they are reduced to misery. That the white agents have given the *capitas* a free hand against them. That there have been illegal holdings of hostages, predatory expeditions, murders and mutilations. All these things are absolutely admitted. I do not know that anything more has ever been claimed, save that the Commission talks coldly of what a private man must talk of hotly, and that the Commission might give the impression that they were isolated acts, whereas the evidence here given and the general depopulation of the country show that they are general, universal, and parts of a single system extending from Leopoldville to the Great Lakes, and from the French border to Katanga. Be it private domain, crown domain, or Concessionnaire territory, be it land of the Kasai, the Anversoise, the Abir, or the Katanga companies, the tale still tells of bloodshed and horror.

Where the Commission differs from the Reformers is in their estimate of the gravity of this situation and of the need of absolute radical reforms. It is to be borne in mind that of the three judges two had never been in Africa before, while the third was a direct servant of the attacked institution. They seem to have vaguely felt that these terrible facts were necessary phases of Colonial expansion. Had they travelled, as I have done, in British West Africa, and had it been brought home to them that a blow to a black man, Sierra Leone, for example, would mean that one would be taken by a black policeman before a black judge to be handed over to a black gaoler, they would understand that there are other methods of administration. Had they ever read of that British Governor of Jamaica, who, having in the face of dangerous revolt, executed a Negro without due forms of law, was recalled to London, tried, and barely escaped with his life. It is by such tension as this that Europeans in the Tropics, whatever be their nation, must be braced up to maintain their civilized *morale*. Human

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nature is weak, the influence of environment is strong. Germans or English would yield and in isolated cases have yielded, to their surroundings. No nation can claim much individual superiority in such a matter. But for both Germany and England (I would add France, were it not for the French Congo) can claim that their system works as strongly against outrage as the Belgian one does in favour of it. These things are not, as the Commissioners seemed to think, necessary evils, which are tolerated elsewhere. How can their raw opinion weigh for a moment upon such a point when it is counterbalanced by the words of such Reformers as Sir Harry Johnston or Lord Cromer? The fact is that the running of a tropical colony is, of all tests, the most searching as to the development of the nation which attempts it; to see helpless people and not to oppress them, to see great wealth and not to confiscate it, to have absolute power and not to abuse it, to raise the native instead of sinking yourself—these are the supreme trials of a nation's spirit. We have all failed at times. But never has there been failure so hopeless, so shocking, bearing such consequences to the world, such degradation to the good name of Christianity and civilization as the failure of the Belgians in the Congo.

And all this has happened and all this has been tolerated in an age of progress. The greatest, deepest, most wide-reaching crime of which there is any record, has been reserved for these latter years. Some excuse there is for racial extermination where, as with Saxons and Celts, two peoples contend for the same land which will but hold one. Some excuse, too, for religious massacre when, like Mahomet the Second at Constantinople, or Alva in the Lowlands, the bigoted murderers honestly conceived that their brutal work was in the interest of God. But here the real doers have sat remote with cold blood in their veins, knowing well from day to day what they were doing, and with the sole object of adding more to wealth which was already enormous. Consider this circumstance and consider also the professions of philanthropy with which the huge massacre was inaugurated, the cloud of lies with which it has been screened, the persecution and calumny of the few honest men who uncovered it, the turning of religion against religion and of nation against nation in the attempt to perpetuate it, and having weighed all this, tell me where in the course of history there is any such story. What is progress? Is it to run a little faster in a motor-car, to listen to gabble in a gramophone?—these are the toys of life. But if progress is a spiritual thing, then we do not progress. Such a horror as this of Belgium and the Congo would not have been possible fifty years ago. No European nation would have done it, and if it had, no other one would have failed to raise its voice in protest. There was more decorum and principle in life in those slower days. We live in a time of rush, but do not call it progress. The story of the Congo has made the idea a little absurd.

IX

THE CONGO AFTER THE COMMISSION

THE high hopes which the advent of the Commission raised among the natives and the few Europeans who had acted as their champions, were soon turned to bitter disappointment. The indefatigable Mr. Harris had sent on after the Commission a number of fresh cases which had come to his notice. In one of these a chief deposed that he had been held back in his village (Boendo) in order to prevent him from reaching the Commission. He succeeded in breaking away from his guards, but was punished for his enterprise by having his wife clubbed to death by a sentry. He brought with him, in the hope that he might lay them before the judges, one hundred and eighty-two long twigs and seventy-six smaller ones, to represent so many adults and children who had been murdered by the A.B.I.R. Company in his district during the last few years. His account of the methods by which these unfortunate people met their deaths will not bear printing. The wildest dreams of the Inquisition were outdone. Women had been killed by thrusting stakes into them from below. When the horrified missionary asked the chief if this was personally known to him, his answer was, "They killed my daughter, Nsinga, in this manner; I found the stake in her." And a reputable Belgian statesman can write in this year of grace that they are carrying on the beneficent and philanthropic mission which has been handed down to them.

In a later communication Mr. Harris gives the names of men, women and children killed by the sentries of a M. Pilaet.

"Last year," he says, "or the year before, the young woman, Imenega, was tied to a forked tree and chopped in half with a hatchet, beginning at the left shoulder, chopping down through the chest and abdomen and out at the side." Again, with every detail of name and place, he dwelt upon the horrible fact that public incest had been enforced by the sentries—brother with sister, and father with daughter. "Oh, Inglesia," cried the chief in conclusion, "don't stay away long; if you do, they will come, I am sure they will come, and then these enfeebled legs will not support me, I cannot run away. I am near my end; try and see to it that they let me die in peace; don't stay away."

"I was so moved, your Excellency, at these people's story that I took the liberty of promising them, in the name of the Congo Free State, that you will only kill them in future for crimes. I told them the Inspector Royal was, I hoped, on his way, and that I was sure he would listen to their story, and give them time to recover themselves."

It is terrible to think that such a promise, through no fault of Mr. Harris, has not been fulfilled. Are the dreams of the Commissioners never haunted by the thought of those who put such trust in them, but whose only reward has been that they have been punished for the

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evidence they gave and that their condition has been more miserable than ever. The final practical result of the Commission was that upon the natives, and not upon their murderers, came the punishment.

M. Malfeyt, a Royal High Commissioner, had been sent out on pretence of reform. How hollow was this pretence may be seen from the fact that at the same time M. Wahis had been despatched as Governor-General in place of that Constermann who had committed suicide after his interview with the judges of the Commission. Wahis had already served two terms as Governor, and it was under his administration that all the abuses the Commission had condemned had actually grown up. Could King Leopold have shown more clearly how far any real reform was from his mind?

M. Malfeyt's visit had been held up as a step toward improvement. The British Government had been assured that his visit would be of a nature to effect all necessary reforms. On arriving in the country, however, he announced that he had no power to act, and only came to see and hear. Thus a few more months were gained before any change could be effected. The only small consolation which we can draw from all this succession of impotent ambassadors and reforming committees, which do not, and were never intended to, reform, is that the game has been played and exposed, and surely cannot be played again. A Government would deservedly be the laughing-stock of the world which again accepted assurances from the same source.

What, in the meanwhile, was the attitude of that A.B.I.R. Company, whose iniquities had been thoroughly exposed before the Commission, and whose manager M. Le Jeune, had fled to Europe? Was it ashamed of its bloodthirsty deeds? Was it prepared in any way to modify its policy after the revelations which its representatives had admitted to be true? Read the following interview which Mr. Stannard had with M. Delvaux, who had visited the stations of his disgraced colleague:

“He spoke of the Commission of Inquiry in a contemptuous manner, and showed considerable annoyance about the things we had said to the Commission. He declared the A.B.I.R. had full authority and power to send out armed sentries, and force the people to bring in rubber, and to imprison those who did not. A short time ago, the natives of a town brought in some rubber to the agent here, but he refused it because it was not enough, and the men were thrashed by the A.B.I.R. employees, and driven away. The director justified the agent in refusing the rubber because the quantity was too small. The Commissioners had declared that the A.B.I.R. had no power to send armed sentries into the towns in order to flog the people and drive them into the forests to seek rubber; they were ‘guards of the forest,’ and that was their work. When we pointed this out to M. Delvaux, he poohpoohed the idea, and said the name had no significance; some called the sentries by one name, some by another. We pointed out that the people were not compelled to pay their taxes in rubber only, but could bring in other things, or even currency. He denied this, and said that the alternative tax only meant that an agent could impose whatever tax he thought fit. It had no reference whatever to the natives. The A.B.I.R. preferred the taxes to be paid in rubber. This is what the A.B.I.R. says, in

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spite of the interpretation by Baron Nisco, the highest judicial authority in the State, that the natives could pay their taxes in what they were best able. All these things were said in the presence of the Royal High Commissioner, who, whether he approved or not, certainly did not contradict or protest against them.”

Within a week or two of the departure of the Commission the state of the country was as bad as ever. It cannot be too often repeated that it was not local in its origin, but that it occurred there, as elsewhere, on account of pressure from the central officials. If further proof were needed of this it is to be found in the Van Caelchen trial. This agent, having been arrested, succeeded in showing (as was done in the Caudron case) that the real guilt lay with his superior officers. In his defence he

“bases his power on a letter of the Commissaire-Général de Bauw (the Supreme Executive Officer in the District), and in a circular transmitted to him by his director, and signed ‘Constermann’ (Governor-General), which he read to the Court, deploring the diminished output in rubber, and saying that the agents of the A.B.I.R. should not forget that they had the same powers of ‘*contrainte par corps*’ (bodily detention) as were delegated to the agent of the Société Commerciale Anversoise au Congo for the increase of rubber production; that if the Governor-General or his Commissaire-Général did not know what they were writing and what they signed, he knows what orders he had to obey; it was not for him to question the legality or illegality of these orders; his superiors ought to have known and have weighed what they wrote before giving him orders to execute; that bodily detention of natives for rubber was no secret, seeing that at the end of every month a statement of ‘*contrainte par corps*’ (bodily detention) during the month has to be furnished in duplicate, the book signed, and one of the copies transmitted to the Government.”

Whilst these organized outrages were continuing in the Congo, King Leopold, at Belgium, had taken a fresh step, which, in its cynical disregard for any attempt at consistency, surpassed any of his previous performances. Feeling that something must be done in the face of the finding of his own delegates, he appointed a fresh Commission, whose terms of reference were “to study the conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry, to formulate the proposals they call for, and to seek for practical means for realizing them.” It is worth while to enumerate the names of the men chosen for this work. Had a European Areopagus called before it the head criminals of this terrible business, all of these men, with the exception of two or three, would have been standing in the dock. Take their names in turn: Van Maldeghem, the President—a jurist, who had written on Congo law, but had no direct complicity in the crimes; Janssens, the President of the former Commission, a man of integrity; M. Davignon, a Belgian politician—so far the selection is a possible one—now listen to the others! De Cuvelier, creature of the King, and responsible for the Congo horrors; Droogmans, creature of the King, administrator of the secret funds derived from his African estates, and himself President of a Rubber Trust; Arnold, creature of the King; Liebrechts, the same; Gohr, the same; Chenot, a Congo Commissioner; Tombeur, the same; Fivé, a Congo

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inspector; Nys, the chief legal upholder of the King's system; De Hemptinne, President of the Kasai Rubber Trust; Mobs, an Administrator of the A.B.I.R. Is it not evident that, save the first three, these were the very men who were on their trial? The whole appointment is an example of that cynical humour which gives a grotesque touch to this inconceivable story. It need not be added that no result making for reform ever came from such an assembly. One can but rejoice that the presence of the small humane minority may have prevented the others from devising some fresh methods of oppression.

It cannot be said, however, that no judicial proceedings and no condemnation arose from the actions of the Congo Commission. But who could ever guess who the man was who was dragged to the bar. On the evidence of natives and missionaries, the whole white hierarchy, from Governor-General to subsidized cannibal, had been shown to be blood-guilty. Which of them was punished? None of them, but Mr. Stannard, one of the accusing witnesses. He had shown that the soldiers of a certain M. Hagstrom had behaved brutally to the natives. This was the account of Lontulu the chief:

“Lontulu, the senior chief of Bolima, came with twenty witnesses, which was all the canoe would hold. He brought with him one hundred and ten twigs, each of which represented a life sacrificed for rubber. The twigs were of different lengths and represented chiefs, men, women and children, according to their length. It was a horrible story of massacre, mutilation and cannibalism that he had to tell, and it was perfectly clear that he was telling the truth. He was further supported by other eye-witnesses. These crimes were committed by those who were acting under the instructions and with the knowledge of white men. On one occasion the sentries were flogged because they had not killed enough people. At one time, after they had killed a number of people, including Isekifasu, the principal chief, his wives and children, the bodies, except that of Isekifasu, were cut up, and the cannibalistic fighters attached to the A.B.I.R. force were rationed on the meat thus supplied. The intestines, etc., were hung up in and about the house, and a little child who had been cut in halves was impaled. After one attack, Lontulu, the chief, was shown the dead bodies of his people, and asked by the rubber agent if he would bring in rubber now. He replied that he would. Although a chief of considerable standing, he has been flogged, imprisoned, tied by the neck with men who were regarded as slaves, made to do the most menial work, and his beard, which was of many years' growth, and reached almost to the ground, was cut off by the rubber agent because he visited another town.”

Lontulu was cross-examined by the Commission and his evidence was not shaken. Here are some of the questions and answers:

“President Janssens: ‘M. Hagstrom leur a fait la guerre. Il a tué beaucoup d'hommes avec ses soldats.’

“To Lontulu: ‘Were the people of Monji, etc., given the corpses to eat?’

“Lontulu: ‘Yes, they cut them up and ate them.’

“Baron Nisco: ‘Did they flog you?’

“Lontulu: ‘Repeatedly.’

“Baron Nisco: ‘Who cut your beard off?’

“Lontulu: ‘M. Hannotte.’

“President Janssens: ‘Did you see sentries kill your people? Did they kill



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many?’

“Lontulu: ‘Yes, all my family is finished.’

“President: ‘Give us names.’

“Lontulu: ‘Chiefs Bokomo, Isekifasu, Botamba, Longeva, Bosangi, Booifa, Eongo, Lomboto, Loma, Bayolo.’

“Then followed names of women and children and ordinary men (not chiefs).

“Lontulu: ‘May I call my son lest I make a mistake?’

“President: ‘It is unnecessary; go on.’

“Lontulu: ‘Bomposa, Beanda, Ekila.’

“President: ‘Are you sure that each of your twigs (110) represents one person killed?’

“Lontulu: ‘Yes.’

“President: ‘Was Isekifasu killed at this time?’

“Reply not recorded.

“President: ‘Did you see his entrails hanging on his house?’

“Lontulu: ‘Yes.’

“*Question:* ‘Were the sentries and people who helped given the dead bodies to eat?’

“*Answer:* ‘Yes, they ate them. Those who took part in the fight cut them up and ate them. . . . He was chicotted (flogged), and said, “Why do you do this? Is it right to flog a chief?”’ Gave a very full account of his harsh treatment and sufferings.”

The action was taken for criminal libel by M. Hagstrom against Mr. Stannard, for saying that this evidence had been given before the Commission. Of course, the only way to establish the fact was a reference to the evidence itself which lay at Brussels. But as Hagstrom was only a puppet of the higher Government of the Congo (which means the King himself), in their attempt to revenge themselves upon the missionaries it was not very likely that official documents would be produced for the mere purpose of serving the end of Justice. The minutes then were not forthcoming. How, then, was Mr. Stannard to produce evidence that his account was correct? Obviously by producing Lontulu, the chief. But the wretched Lontulu, beaten and tortured, with his beard plucked off and his spirit broken, had been cast into gaol before the trial, and knew well what would be his fate if he testified against his masters. He withdrew all that he had said at the Commission—and who can blame him? So M. Hagstrom obtained his verdict and the Belgian reptile Press proclaimed that Mr. Stannard had been proved to be a liar. He was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment, with the alternative of a £40 fine. Even as I write, two more of these lion-hearted missionaries, Americans this time—Mr. Morrison and Mr. Shepherd—are undergoing a similar prosecution on the Congo. This time it is the Kasai Company which is the injured innocent. But the eyes of Europe and America are on the transaction, and M. Vandervelde, the fearless Belgian advocate of liberty, has set forth to act for the accused. What M. Labori was to Dreyfus, M. Vandervelde has been to the Congo, save that it is a whole nation who are his clients. He and his noble comrade, Mr. Lorand, are the two men who redeem the record of infamy which must long darken the good name of Belgium.

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I will now deal swiftly with the records of evil deeds which have occurred since the time which I have already treated. I say “swiftly” not because there is not much material from which to choose, but because I feel that my reader must be as sated with horrors as I who have to write them. Here are some notes of a journey undertaken by W. Cassie Murdoch, as recently as July and September, 1907. This time we are concerned with the Crown Domain, King Leopold’s private estate, of which we have such accounts from Mr. Clark and Mr. Scrivener dating as far back as 1894. Thirteen years had elapsed and no change! What do these thirteen represent in torture and murder? Could all these screams be united, what a vast cry would have reached the heavens. In the Congo hell the most lurid glow is to be found in the Royal Domain. And the money dragged from these tortured people is used in turn to corrupt newspapers and public men—that it may be possible to continue the system. So the devil’s wheel goes round and round! Here are some extracts from Mr. Murdoch’s report:

“I remarked to the old chief of the largest town I came across that his people seemed to be numerous. ‘Ah,’ said he, ‘my people are all dead. These you see are only a very few of what I once had.’ And, indeed, it was evident enough that his town had once been a place of great size and importance. There cannot be the least doubt that this depopulation is directly due to the State. Everywhere I went I heard stories of the raids made by the State soldiers. The number of people they shot, or otherwise tortured to death, must have been enormous. Perhaps as many more of those who escaped the rifle died from starvation and exposure. More than one of my carriers could tell of how their villages had been raided, and of their own narrow escapes. They are not a warlike people, and I could hear of no single attempt at resistance. They are the kind of people the State soldiers are most successful with. They would rather any day run away than fight. And in fact, they have nothing to fight with except a few bows and arrows. I have been trying to reckon the probable number of people I met with. I should say that five thousand is, if anything, beyond the mark. A few years ago the population of the district I passed through must have been four times that number. On my return march I was desirous of visiting Mbelo, the place where Lieutenant Massard had been stationed, and in which he committed his unspeakable outrages. On making inquiries, however, I was told that there were no people there now, and that the roads were all ‘dead.’ On reaching one of the roads that led there, it was evident enough that it had not been used for a long time. Later on, I was able to confirm the statement that what had once been a district with numerous large towns, was now completely empty. . . .

“With the exception of a few people living near the one State post now existing on this side of the Lake, who supply the State with *kwanga* and large mats, all the people I saw are taxed with rubber. The rubber tax is an intolerable burden—how intolerable I should have found it almost impossible to believe had I not seen it. It is DIFFICULT TO DESCRIBE IT CALMLY. What I found was simply this: *The ‘tax’ demands from twenty to twenty-five days’ labour every month.* There never was a ‘forty hours per month labour law’ in the Crown Domain, and so long as the tax is demanded in rubber, there never will be—at least in the section of it I visited. If that law were applied, no rubber would, or could possibly, be produced, for the simple reason that *there is no rubber left in this section of the Domain.*

“It was some time before I made the discovery that in the *Domaine de la Couronne* west of Lake Leopold there is no rubber. On my way through I was continually meeting numbers of men going out on the hunt for rubber, and heard with amazement the distance they had to walk. It seemed so impossible that I was

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somewhat sceptical of the truth of what I was told. But I heard the same story so often, and in so many different places, that I was at last obliged to accept it. On my return I followed up this track, and found that it was all true. And I found also that the rubber is collected from the *Domaine Privé* in forests from ten to forty miles beyond the boundary of the Crown Domain.

“Once the vines had been found the working of the rubber is a small part of the labour. I have made a careful calculation of the distance the people I met have to walk, and I find that the average cannot be less than 300 miles there and back. But walking to the forest and back does not occupy from twenty to twenty-five days per month. They will cover the 300 miles in ten or twelve days. The rest of the time is used in hunting for the vines, and in tapping them when found. I met a party returning with their rubber who had been six nights in the forest. This was the lowest number. Most of them have to spend ten, some as many as fifteen, nights in the forest. Two days after I left the Domain on my way back I saw some men returning empty-handed. They had been hunting for over eight days and had found nothing. What the poor wretches would do I cannot imagine. If they failed to produce the usual amount of rubber on the appointed day they would be put in ‘bloc’ (imprisoned).

“The workmen of the *chef de poste* at Mbongo described a concoction which is sometimes administered to *capitas* when their tale of rubber is short. The white man chops up green tobacco leaves and soaks them in water. Red peppers are added, and a dose of the liquid is administered to defaulting *capitas*. This wily official manages to get thirteen monthly ‘taxes’ in the year. At one village I bought a contrivance by which the natives reckon when the tax falls due. Pieces of wood are strung on a piece of cane. One piece is moved up every day. On counting them I found there were only twenty-eight. I asked why, and was told that originally there were thirty pieces, but the white man had so often sent on the twenty-eighth day to say the time was up, that at last they took off two.

“Individual acts of atrocity here have for the most part ceased. The State agents seem to have come to the conclusion that it is a waste of cartridges to shoot down these people. **BUT THE WHOLE SYSTEM IS A VAST ATROCITY INVOLVING THE PEOPLE IN A STATE OF UNIMAGINABLE MISERY.** One man said to me, ‘Slaves are happy compared with us. Slaves are protected by their masters, they are fed and clothed. As for us—the *capitas* do with us what they like. Our wives have to plant the cassava gardens and fish in the stream to feed us while we spend our days working for Bula Matadi. No, we are not even slaves.’ And he is right. *It is not slavery as slavery was generally understood: it is not even the uncivilized African’s idea of slavery. There never was a slavery more absolute in its despotism or more fiendish in its tyranny.*”

It will be seen that, so far as the people are concerned, the problem is largely solved, the bitterness of death is past. No European intervention can save them. In many places they have been utterly destroyed. But they were the wards of Europe, and surely Europe, if she is not utterly lost to shame, will have something to say to their fate!

## X

### SOME CATHOLIC TESTIMONY AS TO THE CONGO

IT MUST be admitted that the Roman Catholic Church, as an organized body, has not raised her voice as she should in the matter of the

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Congo. Never was there such a field for a Las Casas. It was the proudest boast of that church that in the dark days of man's history she was the one power which stood with her spiritual terrors between the oppressor and the oppressed. This noble tradition has been sadly forgotten in the Congo, where the missions have themselves, as I understand, done most excellent work, but where the power of the Church has never been invoked against the constant barbarities of the State. In extenuation, it may be stated that the chief Catholic establishments are down the river and far from the rubber zones. It is important, however, to collect under a separate heading such testimony as exists, for an unworthy attempt has been made to represent the matter as a contest between rival creeds, whereas it is really a contest between humanity and civilization on one side and cruel greed upon the other.

The organization of the Catholic Church is more disciplined, and admits of less individualism than that of those religious bodies which supplied the valiant champions of right in the Congo. The simple priests were doubtless as horrified as others, within the limit of their knowledge, but the means of expression were denied them. M. Colfs, himself a Catholic, said in the Belgian Chamber: "Our missionaries have less liberty than foreign missionaries. They are expected to keep silence. . . . There is a gag. This gag is placed in the mouth of Belgian missionaries."

Signor Santini, the Catholic and Royalist Deputy for Rome, has been one of the leaders in the anti-Congo movement, and has done excellent work in Italy. From his own sources of information he confirms and amplifies all that the English and Americans have asserted. Speaking in the Italian Parliament on February 4th, 1907, Signor Santini said:

"I am proud to have been the first to bring the question of the Congo before this House. If at the present day we are spared the shame of seeing again officers of our Army, valorous and perfectly stainless, serving under and at the orders of an association of sweaters, slave-holders and barbarians, it is legitimate for me to declare that I have, if only modestly, at least efficaciously, co-operated in this result."

There is no conflict of creeds in such an utterance as that.

Catholic papers have occasionally spoken out bravely upon the subject.

*Le Patriote*, of Brussels (Royalist and Catholic), in its issue of February 28th, 1907, has an indignant editorial:

"The rebellion in the A.B.I.R. territory extends. The Government itself forces the rubber, and delivers it on the Antwerp quay to the brokers of the A.B.I.R. . . . Nothing is altered on the Congo. The same abominable measures are adopted; the same outrages take place. . . . The Government is adopting the same measures as in the Mongalla, flooding the A.B.I.R. territory with soldiers to utterly smash the people, whom it thinks will then work, and the rubber output be increased. . . . The memory of these deeds will remain graven in the memory of men, and in the memory of Divine vengeance. Sooner or later the executioners will have to render

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an account to God and to history.”

There is one order of the Catholic Church which has always had a most noble record in its treatment of native races. These are the Jesuits. No one who has read the “History of Paraguay,” or studied the records of the Missions to the Red Indians of the eighteenth century, can forget the picture of unselfish devotion which they exhibit. Father Vermeersch, a worthy successor of such predecessors, has published a book, “La Question Congolaise,” in which he finds nothing incompatible between his position as a Catholic and his exposure of the abuses of the Congo.

In all points the position of Father Vermeersch and of the English Reformers appears to be identical.

On the rightful possession of the land by the natives he writes in terms which might be a paragraph from Mr. Morel:

“On the Congo the land cannot be supposedly vacant. Presumption is in favour of occupation, of a full occupation. By this is meant that it is not sufficient to recognize to the natives rights of tenure over the land they actually cultivate, or certain rights of usage—wood-cutting, hunting, fishing—on the remainder of the territory; but these rights of usage, which are much more important than with us, appear to imply a full *animus domini*, and to signify a complete appropriation, which is carried out amongst us in different fashion. It is not, in effect, indispensable in natural law that I should exhaust the utility of an article or of land in order to be able to claim it as my own; it suffices that I should make use of it in a positive manner, but of my own will, personally, and that I should have the will to forbid any stranger to use it without my consent. Hence effective occupation is joined to intention, and all the constituent elements to a valid title of property exist. Let us suppose, moreover, that some great Belgian landowner wishes to convert portions of his property into sporting land—that land, nevertheless, remains in his entire possession. Amongst the Congo natives, no doubt, occupation is usually collective; but such occupation is as worthy of respect as no matter what individual appropriation.”

He continues:

“To whom does the rubber belong which grows upon the land occupied by the Congo natives? To the natives, and to no one else, without their consent and just compensation.”

Again:

“To sum up, we recognize it with much regret, the State’s appropriation of so-called vacant land on the Congo confronts us with AN IMMENSE EXPROPRIATION.”

He makes a bold attack upon King Leopold’s own preserve:

“Humanity, whose cause we plead, Christian rights, whose principles we endeavour to inculcate, compel us to touch briefly upon a curious and mysterious creation which is peculiar to the Congo State—the *Domaine de la Couronne*.”

“What are the revenues of this mysterious civil personality? Estimates, more

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or less conjectural in nature, elaborated by M. Cattier appear to establish the profits from the exploitation of rubber alone, at eight to nine millions of francs per annum. M. le Comte de Smet de Naeyer reduces this figure to four or five millions. Short of positive data one can only deal in conjectures. But we regret still more that an impenetrable veil hides from sight all that takes place in the territory of this Domain. It is eight or ten times the size of BELGIUM, AND THROUGHOUT THIS VAST EXTENT OF TERRITORY THERE IS NEITHER MISSIONARY NOR MAGISTRATE.”

Only one missionary at that date had entered this dark land, and his exclamation was: “The Bulgarian atrocities are child’s play to what has taken place here.”

Father Vermeersch then proceeds to deal with the Congo balance-sheets. His criticism is most destructive. He shows at considerable length, and with a fine grasp of his subject, that there is really no connection at all between the so-called estimate and the actual budget. In the course of the State’s development there is an excess running to millions of pounds which has never been accounted for. In this Father Vermeersch is in agreement with the equally elaborate calculations of Professor Cattier, of Brussels.

He puts the economical case in a nutshell thus:

“X—, District Commissioner, commits every day dozens of offences against individual liberty. What can be done? These violations of the law are necessitated by a great enterprise which must have workmen. In such cases the intervention of the magistrate would be a ruinous imprudence, calculated to bring trouble into the region.”

“But the law?”

“Oh, law in the Congo is not applicable!”

“But if you offered a decent remuneration, would you not get free labour?”

“That is precisely what the State will not listen to. It maintains that the enterprise must be carried out for nothing!”

And disposes once again of the “forty hours a month” fiction:

“It is IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE STATE TO OBTAIN THE AMOUNT OF RUBBER IT SELLS ANNUALLY, BY LABOUR LIMITED TO FORTY HOURS A MONTH, especially when it is borne in mind that a number of these hours are absorbed in other *corvées*. Of two things one, therefore. Either the surplus is furnished freely; and if so, how can coercion be logically argued? Or this supplementary labour is forced; and if so, the law of forty hours is shown to be merely a fraud.”

He shows the root causes of the evil:

“So long as an inflexible will fixes in advance the quantity of rubber to be obtained; so long as instructions are given in this form: ‘Increase by five tons your rubber output per month’ (instance given by Father Cus and van Hencxthoven in their report), we cannot await with confidence a serious improvement, which is the desire of all. . . .”

“The Governor-General dismisses and appoints magistrates at his will, suspends the execution of penalties; even sends back, if need be, gentlemen of the

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gown to Europe. Who does not realize the grave inconvenience of this dependence? That is not all. No proceedings can be attempted against a European without the authority of the Governor-General.”

And, finally, his reasons for writing his book:

“The contemplation of an immeasurable misery has caused us to publish this book. The gravity of the evil, its roots causes, had long escaped us. When we knew them we could not retain within ourselves the compassion with which we were imbued, and we resolved to tell the citizens of a generous country, appealing to their religion, to their patriotism, to their hearts.”

Surely after such evidence from such a source there must be some heart-searchings among those higher members of the Catholic hierarchy, including both Cardinals and Bishops, who have done what they could to cripple the efforts of the reformers. Misinformed through their own want of care in searching for the truth, they have stood before the whole world as the defenders of that which will be described by the historian as the greatest crime in history.

## XI

### THE EVIDENCE UP TO DATE

I SHALL now append some extracts from the reports of several British Vice-Consuls and Consuls sent in during the last few years. These bear less upon outrages, which have admittedly greatly decreased, but mainly upon the general condition of the people, which is one of deplorable poverty and misery—a slavery without that care which the owner was bound to exercise over the health and strength of the slave. I shall give without comment some extracts from the reports of Vice-Consul Mitchell, which date from July, 1906:

“Most of the primitive bridges over the numerous creeks and marshes had rotted away, and we had some difficulty in crossing on fallen trees or a few thin sticks. This was the case all the way to Banalya, and I may here state that this condition of the roads, even of the most frequented, is universal in this province. The reason is that the local authorities have neither men, means, nor time at their disposal for the making of decent roads. *The parsimony of the State in this respect is the more remarkable in the ‘Domaine Privé,’ whence large amounts are derived, and where next to nothing is expended.*

“So long as the policy of the State Government is to extract all it can from the country, while using only local materials, and spending the least possible amount on development and improvements, no increase in the general well-being can be expected. . . .

“. . . At all the posts on the north (right) bank, between Yambuya and Basoko, I found the European agents absent in the interior, and at Basoko itself only the doctor was left in charge, all the rest of the staff being away ‘*en expédition*,’ that is, on punitive expeditions.

“I stayed at Basoko for five days, partly at Dr. Grossule’s request, and partly in

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the endeavour to learn something of the operations going on in the interior. Three canoe-loads of prisoners arrived, all heavily loaded with chains. But all I could learn was that they were sent in by Lieutenant Baron von Otter, who had been sent to the promontory lying between the mouth of the Aruwimi and the Congo to enforce the Labour Ordinances.

“In all the Basenji villages through which I have passed on my two journeys, the natives assert that it *takes them three weeks every month to find and make their tale of rubber, besides taking it once every three months to the State post, from four to six days distant.*

“This country is taxed to the utmost, not one penny of the proceeds of which is spent on the roads. This condition of the most important highway in the province is nothing less than disgraceful, and yet this is the road of which the authorities are really proud.

“Thus, with the exception of a trivial payment for some things, the Government carries on the work of the country at no expense beyond the wages and the European rations of the white agents, and these are excessively few in number. It is true there are the *Force Publique* and some *travailleurs*. These are recruited by conscription and receive pay and rations, but it is at the lowest possible rate. . . .

“Coming to the Basenji, the following particulars of a village in the forest will show their liabilities. This village has fourteen adult males; its neighbour, which works with it, the chiefs being brothers, has nine. Each man has to take to the State post a large basket, holding about twenty-five pounds of rubber, once every month and a half. To get this rubber, though they find it only one day’s journey distant, takes them thirty days. It then takes them five days to carry it to the State post, and three days to return. Thus they spend thirty-eight days out of forty-five in the compulsory service of the State. For the basket of rubber they receive 1 kilog. of salt, nominally worth 1 fr. The chief receives 1 kilog. of salt for the whole. If the rubber is deficient in quality or quantity, the man is liable to be whipped and imprisoned without trial. As it is supposed to be the equivalent of the forty hours’ monthly labour, I fail to see by what right the man can be held responsible for the quality, even if he wilfully adulterates it with other substances.

“The people are all disheartened, and are unanimously of the opinion that they were better off under the Arabs, whose rule was intermittent, and from whom they could run away. . . .

“I must say that during more than nineteen years’ experience in Northern and Central Africa, *I have never seen such a miserably poor lot as the Basenji in this State.* . . .

“It is perfectly clear that the Inspectors, however conscientious, hard-working, and faithful they may be, *cannot remedy the excessive impositions on the natives under the present system.* . . .

“The grant of land and seed to the natives is of *absolutely no use* to them *till they are left time to use them.* . . .

“To say that the State cannot afford the expense is absurd. The Congo is taxed unmercifully, and I do not suppose any country has less money spent upon it. The taxpayer gets literally nothing in return for the life of practical slavery he has to spend in the support of the Government.

“If trade and navigation were really free, and guarded by proper police, German trade through Ujiji, which already exists to some extent, might be greatly developed, as well as that with the British colonies and Zanzibar.

“The operations of the Dutch traders, who up to a few months ago had quite a considerable fleet of steamers on the Upper Congo and its affluents, and of the French at Brazzaville, and of the Portuguese, would also benefit greatly.

*“All these have practically disappeared from the Upper Congo.*

“Here, as elsewhere, the natives appeared to me to be so heavily taxed as to be depressed and to regard themselves as practically enslaved by the ‘Bula Matadi.’ The incessant call for rubber, food and labour, leaves them no respite nor peace of



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mind.”

The following are extracts from Vice-Consul Armstrong’s report, dated October, 1906:

“As the result of my journey through this portion of the country, I am forced to the conclusion that the condition of the people in the A.B.I.R. territory is deplorable, and although those living in the vicinity of the mission stations are, comparatively speaking, safe from ill-treatment by the rubber agents and their armed sentries, those in other parts are subjected to the gravest abuses.

“There is no free labour, the natives being forced to work at a totally inadequate wage. In visiting the various rubber-working towns, one would expect to see some signs of European commodities that had been given in exchange for the millions of pounds’ worth of rubber that has been extracted from them, but the native residents possess actually nothing at all.

“Their conditions of living are deplorable, and the filth and squalor of their villages is only too apparent. The people live in a state of uncertainty as to the advent of police officers and soldiers, who invariably chase them from their abodes and destroy their huts, and for this reason it is impossible for them to better their condition of living by the construction of suitable dwellings.

“No change of system to be looked for.

“No change in the existing system can be looked for until a more reasonable method of taxation is adopted. The present system permits the rubber agents to extract the largest possible quantity of rubber from the native at the lowest possible wage, and allows the employment of armed sentries to enforce this deplorable system.”

In these despatches Vice-Consul Armstrong gives evidence of a plot against the sturdy Mr. Stannard upon the part of the infamous A.B.I.R. Company. Their idea, no doubt, was to break down his health and embitter his existence by successive law-suits. In May of 1906, the natives of a village called Lokongi rose up against his murderous sentries and burned their houses. A charge was at once made against Mr. Stannard of having instigated them to this very natural and commendable action. Natives had been suborned or terrified into giving evidence against him, and it might have gone ill with him had it not been for the prompt action of the Consul. He set off for the village, accompanied by Mr. Stannard and the A.B.I.R. director. The natives were assembled and asked to speak the truth. They said, without hesitation, that Mr. Stannard had had nothing to do with the matter, but that the representatives of the company had threatened to torture them unless they said that he had. The A.B.I.R. director held his peace before these revelations and had no explanation to offer. Consul Armstrong then pointed out to the Public Prosecutor in good, straight terms, which his official superiors might well imitate, that the matter had gone far enough, that English patience was almost exhausted, and that Mr. Stannard should be baited no longer. The case was dropped.

I shall pass straight on now to the most recent reports received

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from the Congo, to show that there is no difference at all in the general condition, so far as it is reported by the impartial men at the spot, save that the actual killings and maimings have decreased. The great oppression and misery of the people seem to grow rather than abate. The following extracts are from Consul Thesiger's report of his experiences in the Kasai Company's district. This company, it may be worth remarking, has paid the enormous dividend of seven hundred per cent. The first paragraph may be commended to the consideration of those British or American travellers who, on the strength of a flying visit, venture to contradict the experience of those white men who spend their lives in the country:

“Although from the evidence of State officials it has been proved that individual cases of abuses are not infrequent even at these posts, the chance traveller will certainly see nothing of them, and when he judges of the condition of the country by what he actually sees at these stations, his opinions may be perfectly honest, but they are absolutely worthless. It is as though some well-meaning person, who had heard that a certain fashionable firm was making a fortune by sweated labour, were to venture to deny the facts because a cursory visit to the West End establishment showed that the salesmen behind the counter were well-dressed and well-nourished, ignoring altogether the festering misery of the sweaters' dens in which every article sold over that counter was made up.”

After showing that the Kasai Company, in their haste for wealth (and, perhaps, in their foresight, as knowing that their occupancy may be brought to an end), are cutting down the rubber vines instead of tapping them (illegal, of course, but what does that matter where Belgian Concessionnaires are in question), goes on to show the pressure on the people:

“The work is compulsory; it is also incessant. The vines have to be sought out in the forest, cut down and disentangled from the high-growing branches, divided into lengths, and carried home. This operation has to be continually repeated, as no man can carry a larger quantity of the heavy vine lengths than will keep him occupied for two or three days. Accidents are frequent, especially among the Bakuba, who are large-built men, hunters and agriculturists by nature, and unaccustomed to tree climbing. Large as the Bakuba villages still are, the population is diminishing. Here there is no sleeping sickness to account for the decrease, there have been no epidemics of late years; exposure, overwork, and shortage of proper food alone are responsible for it. The Bakuba district was formerly one of the richest food-producing regions in the country, maize and millet being the staple crops, together with manioc and other plants. So much so was this the case that the mission at Luebo used to send there to buy maize. Under the present *régime* the villagers are not allowed to waste in cultivating, hunting or fishing—time which should be occupied in making rubber.

“In a few villages they were cultivating by stealth small patches in the forest, where they were supposed to be out cutting the rubber vines; but everywhere else it was the same story: the *capitas* would not allow them time to clear new ground for cultivation, or permit them to hunt or fish; if they tried to do so their nets and implements were destroyed. The majority of the *capitas*, when questioned, acknowledged quite frankly that they had orders to that effect. These villages are living on the produce of the old manioc fields, and are buying food from the Ba-

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kette. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the population is diminishing. As one woman expressed it: 'The men go out hungry into the forest; when they come back they get sick and die.' The village of Ibunge, where formerly the largest market of the district was held weekly, now consists of a collection of hovels, eight of which are habitable, and the market is all but dead."

So the *capitas* are at their old work the same as ever. The Congo idea of reforming them has always been to change their name—so by calling a burglar a policeman a great reformation is effected.

Read, however, the following passage, which shows that if the *capita* is the same, so also is the agent. The white race is certainly superior, for when the savage sentry's heart relented the white man was able to scourge him back to his inhuman task:

"Once I had got outside the zone surrounding Ibanj, where the villages are not taxed in rubber, I found the *capitas*, with very few exceptions, were all armed with cap-guns. I met them frequently, escorting the rubber caravans to the company post, or going from village to village collecting the rubber from the centres under their charge and distributing the trade goods for the coming month. I noticed that they invariably carried their guns, and, in fact, I have seldom seen a *capita* stir outside his own home without his gun. These are the men who are appointed by the Kasai Company agents to enforce the rubber tax. Chosen always from a different race, they have no sympathy with the natives placed under them, and having the authority of the agent behind them they can do as they please, so long as they insure the rubber being brought at the proper times and in sufficient quantities. In the villages they are absolute masters, and the villagers have to supply them gratis with a house, food, palm wine, and a woman. They exercise freely the right of beating or imprisoning the villagers for any imaginary offences or for neglecting their work in any way, and even go as far as imposing fines in cowries on their own account, and confiscating for their own use the cowries paid over by the plaintiff or defendant's family in the case of trial by poison, which, in spite of statements to the contrary recently made in the Belgian Chamber, are of frequent occurrence in this country. The native cannot complain or obtain satisfaction in any way, as the *capita* acts in the name of the company, and the company's agent is always threatening them in the name of 'Bula-Matadi.' If the authorities wish to act in the matter, they might profitably make inquiry into the doings of the *capitas* at Bungueh, Bolong, and into those of the Zappo Zap *capita*, who appears to exercise the chief control over the villages near Ibunge, though he does not live in the latter town. These appear to me to be among the worst where most are bad. The *capitas*, however, are scarcely to be blamed, as, if they do not extort enough rubber, they are liable in their turn to suffer at the hands of the agent. Witness a case at Sangela, when it was reported that the *capita* had some time back been chicotted in the village itself by the agent for not bringing in rubber sufficient. Endless cases could be quoted, but these will probably be sufficient to show the methods pursued under the auspices of the Kasai Company. Yet in a letter dated the eighth of March, 1908, we find Dr. Dreypondt writing reproachfully:

"You know we have no armed sentries, but only tradesmen going, with goods of every kind, and unarmed, through the villages for the purchasing of rubber. We use only one trading principle—*l'offre et la demande*."

The laws at all points are completely ignored, "and many of the agents not only punish the natives in these ways themselves, but allow their *capitas* the same privileges. It is only by these means that the

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natives can be kept at their incessant work.”

Suicide is not natural with African, as it is with some Oriental races. But it has come in with the other blessings of King Leopold.

“At Ibanj, for instance, only a day’s march from a State post, two Bakette from the village of Baka-Tomba were not long ago imprisoned for shortage of rubber, and were daily taken out under the charge of an armed native to work in the fields with ropes round their necks. One of them, tired of captivity, pretended one day that he saw some animal in a tree and obtained leave from the guard to try and get it. He climbed the tree, tied the rope which was round his neck to a branch and hung himself. He was cut down, and, after a considerable time, was resuscitated, thanks to the medical experience of one of the missionaries. I was able to question the man myself at his village, and the story was also confirmed by the Capita.”

The American flag presents no refuge for the persecuted.

“About the same time this same man had the effrontery to take some seven armed natives on to the station of the American mission, during the absence of the missionaries, and demand from the native who was left in charge that he should hand over to him a native, not in his own employ, who had run away in consequence of some dispute, and who he declared was hiding at the mission. The overseer, a Sierra Leone man, very rightly declared his inability to do so, and said he must await the return of the missionaries. An altercation followed, and the agent struck him twice in the face. The man being a British subject, I told him if he chose to prosecute I would support him, or else I would insist on the agent paying him an indemnity in cloth. As a prosecution would have entailed his going to Lusambo, a fifteen days’ journey, with every prospect of being kept there some four to six months with all the witnesses while awaiting the hearing of his case, he chose the latter method. The cloth was paid.”

He continues:

“These cases can all be substantiated, and are typical of a certain class of agent which is unfortunately, although not general, far too common. Numerous complaints were also made to me in different villages against an agent, not only that he beat and imprisoned the natives for shortage of rubber, but also that he obliged them to supply him with alcohol distilled from palm wine, and was in the habit of taking any of the village women that struck his fancy at the weekly market held on or near his own post. The Company, I believe, promised the American mission last May that this man should be removed, but when I passed through he was still there. Placed in the power of men like these the natives dare not complain to the authorities, and are entirely helpless.”

Nominally the Company makes no punitive expeditions. As a matter of fact they have engaged Lukenga, a warlike chief of the neighbourhood, to do it for them. Nominally the capitas are not supplied with guns. As a matter of fact they all carry guns, which are declared to be their personal property. At every corner one meets hypocrisy and evasion of law.

Speaking of the Bakuba, the Consul says:

“Although not wanting in physical courage or strength, they are rather an agricultural than a warlike race, and their villages were formerly noted for their well-

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built and artistically decorated houses and their well-cultivated fields.

“It is, however, their misfortune to live in a forest country rich in rubber vines, and they have consequently come under the curse of the concessionary Company in the shape of the Kasai Trust. As a result their native industries are dying out, their houses and fields are neglected, and the population is not only decreasing, but also sinking to the dead-level of the less advanced and less capable races.

“There is no doubt that the Bakuba are the most oppressed race to-day in the Kasai. Harassed by their own king in the interest of the Rubber Company, driven by the agents and their capitas, disarmed and deprived even of the most ordinary rights, they will, if nothing is done to help them, sink to the level of the vicious and degraded Bakette.

“One asks oneself in vain what benefits these people have gained from the boasted civilization of the Free State. One looks in vain for any attempt to benefit them or to recompense them in any way for the enormous wealth which they are helping to pour into the Treasury of the State. Their native industries are being destroyed, their freedom has been taken from them, and their numbers are decreasing.

“The only efforts made to civilize them have been made by the missionaries, who are hampered at every turn.”

Consul Thesiger winds up with the remark that as the Company has behaved illegally at every turn it has forfeited all claims to consideration and that there is no hope for the country so long as it exists. Straight words—but how much more forcibly do they apply to that Congo State of which these particular companies are merely an outcome. Until it is swept from the map there is no hope for the country. You cannot avoid the rank products while the putridity remains.

The next document bearing upon the question is from the Rev. H. M. Whiteside, from the notorious A.B.I.R. district. I give it in full, that the reader may judge for himself how far the direct Belgian rule has altered the situation.

“I should like to bring to your notice a few facts regarding the condition of this (A.B.I.R.) district.

“After this extensive journey made through the district recently, and particularly the Bompona neighbourhood, I found the people working rubber in all the towns visited with the exception of those taxed in provisions.

“It is difficult to know which ‘tax,’ rubber or provisions, is hardest. The rubber workers implored us to free them from rubber, and at one village upon our departure they followed us a considerable distance, and it was difficult to get away from them. The amount of rubber collected is small compared with what was formerly demanded, but I have no doubt it requires one-third of the time of the people to collect it. Many of the people of the villages behind Bompona were away collecting rubber. We met many of the Ionji people in the forest, either actually engaged in their work or hunting for a district where the vines might have escaped other collectors. We also met other villagers in the bush in quest of rubber. Almost all the village migrates to the forest—men, many women and children—when rubber is required.

“In the light of these facts, how worthless are the assertions that rubber ‘tax’ has been stopped in the A.B.I.R. territory.

“With regard to the provision tax, it was difficult to get any data, but it is easy for one to see the oppressed condition of the people when one comes into contact with them. Between the provision tax, portorage and paddlers, I believe that the people of Bompona have got very little time to themselves. There is one thing that

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one cannot help seeing, *viz.*, the mean, miserable appearance of the people residing around the State post of Bompona. The houses or huts are in keeping with the owners of them. A very small bale of cloth could take the place of all I saw worn. I never saw a single brass rod, nor any domestic animals except a few miserable chickens. The extreme poverty of the people is most remarkable. There is no doubt as to their desire to possess European goods, but they have nothing with which to buy except rubber and ivory, which is claimed by the State.

"It may be thought that I am painting their condition in too dark colours, but I feel it requires strong words to give a fair idea of the utter hopelessness and abject appearance of the people of Bompona, of the people of the villages behind the State post some twenty-five miles away, and in a lesser degree of the rubber workers opposite Bompona.

"H. M. Whiteside.

"Ikau,  
"June 15th, 1909."

Finally, there is the following report from the extreme other end of the country. It is dated June 1st, 1909. The name of the sender, though not published, was sent to the Foreign Office. He is an American citizen:

"I am sorry to say there is need for agitation for the reform of the Belgian Kwango territory along this frontier. Robbing and murder are still being carried on under the rule of the Belgian official from Popocabacca. Last month he came with an armed force to the district of Mpangala Nlele, two days west of here, to decorate with the Congo medal a new chief in the stead of our old friend Nlekani. Nlekani left a number of sons, but none of them were willing to take the responsibility of the Medal Chieftainship. They, therefore, placed their villages under the authority of a powerful chief living to the north of them.

"The official of the Congo Government had been insisting for a year that a younger son of the old chief should consent to be the Medal Chief. This young man, named Kingeleza, was a fine, bright fellow, but thinking that, as a younger son, he would lack the necessary authority over the people and would get into trouble with the Government if he could not satisfy its requirements, he declined. The Belgian official was, however, so insistent that Kingeleza had finally agreed in order to avoid a clash with the Government.

"On his way to make the 'investiture,' the Belgian official robbed some villages and killed two men. Kingeleza's people, who had gathered together to witness the investiture, hearing of the treatment meted out to the other villages, took fright and fled from their own villages, which the Belgians, upon arriving, found deserted. Whereupon the soldiers proceeded to ferret the fugitives out of the woods, where they were hiding. Twenty were seized, among whom was one of Kingeleza's sisters, a young and attractive looking girl. Four of the villagers were subsequently released, and the balance marched off with other spoils to Popocabacca. The evangelist attached to the American mission, who was absent in the Lower Congo, had his house broken open and a tent and school materials carried off.

"As for Kingeleza, some of the Belgian soldiers met him in the path and shot him. They did not know that he was Kingeleza, and Kingeleza is still being sought for by the Belgian official.

"This same 'Chief of Brigands,' as I prefer to call him, has just been on another raid for which he even entered Portuguese territory within a few hours of where I am writing, wantonly destroying all that he could not carry off. The people had, happily, all escaped before he arrived. The Portuguese are reporting this outrage to the Governor-General at Loanda."

XII

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

I HAVE not in this statement touched upon the financial side of the Congo State. A huge scandal lies there—so huge that the limits of it have not yet been defined. I will not go into that morass. If Belgians wish to be hoodwinked in the matter, and to have their good name compromised in finance as well as in morality, it is they who in the end will suffer. One may merely indicate the main points, that during the independent life of the Congo State all accounts have been kept secret, that no budgets of the last year but only estimates of the coming one have ever been published, that the State has made huge gains, in spite of which it has borrowed money, and that the great sums resulting have been laid out in speculations in China and elsewhere, that sums amounting in the aggregate to at least £7,000,000 of money have been traced to the King, and that this money has been spent partly in buildings in Belgium, partly in land in the same country, partly in building on the Riviera, partly in the corruption of public men, and of the European and American Press (our own being not entirely untarnished, I fear), and, finally, in the expenses of such a private life as has made King Leopold's name notorious throughout Europe. Of the guilty companies the poorest seem to pay fifty and the richest seven hundred per cent. per annum. There I will leave this unsavoury side of the matter. It is to humanity that I appeal, and that is concerned with higher things.

Before ending my task, however, I would give a short account of the evolution of the political situation as it affected, first, Great Britain and the Congo State; secondly, Great Britain and Belgium. In each case Great Britain was, indeed, the spokesman of the civilized world.

So far as one can trace, no strong protest was raised by the British Government at the time when the Congo State took the fatal step, the direct cause of everything which has followed, of leaving the honest path, trodden up to that time by all European Colonies, and seizing the land of the country as their own. Only in 1896 do we find protests against the ill-usage of British coloured subjects, ending in a statement in Parliament from Mr. Chamberlain that no further recruiting would be allowed. For the first time we had shown ourselves in sharp disagreement with the policy of the Congo State. In April, 1897, a debate was raised on Congo affairs by Sir Charles Dilke without any definite result.

Our own troubles in South Africa (troubles which called forth in Belgium a burst of indignation against wholly imaginary British outrages during the war) left us little time to fulfil our Treaty obligations toward the natives on the Congo. In 1903 the matter forced itself to the front again, and a considerable debate took place in the House of Commons, which ended by passing a resolution with almost complete

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unanimity to the following effect:

“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 that 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.”

In July of the same year there occurred the famous three days’ debate in the Belgian House, which was really inaugurated by the British resolution. In this debate the two brave Reformers, Vandervelde and Lorand, though crushed by the voting power of their opponents, bore off all the honours of war. M. de Favereau, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, alternately explained that there was no connection at all between Belgium and the Congo State, and that it was a breach of Belgian patriotism to attack the latter. The policy of the Congo State was upheld and defended by the Belgian Government in a way which must forever identify them with all the crimes which I have recounted. No member of the Congo administration could ever have expressed the intimate spirit of Congo administration so concisely as M. de Smet de Naeyer, when he said, speaking of the natives: “They are not entitled to anything. What is given them is a pure gratuity.” Was there ever in the world such an utterance as that from a responsible statesman! In 1885 a State is formed for the “moral and material improvement of the native races.” In 1903 the native “is not entitled to anything.” The two phrases mark the beginning and the end of King Leopold’s journey.

In 1904 the British Government showed its continued uneasiness and disgust at the state of affairs on the Congo by publishing the truly awful report of Consul Casement. This document, circulated officially all over the globe, must have opened the eyes of the nations, if any were still shut, to the true object and development of King Leopold’s enterprise. It was hoped that this action upon the part of Great Britain would be the first step toward intervention, and, indeed, Lord Lansdowne made it clear in so many words that our hand was outstretched, and that if any other nation chose to grasp it, we would proceed together to the task of compulsory reform. It is not to the credit of the civilized nations that not one was ready to answer the appeal. If, finally, we are forced to move alone, they cannot say that we did not ask and desire their co-operation.

From this date remonstrances were frequent from the British Government, though they inadequately represented the anger and impatience of those British subjects who were aware of the true state of affairs. The British Government refrained from going to extremes because it was understood that there would shortly be a Belgian annexation, and it was hoped that this would mark the beginning of better



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things without the necessity for our intervention. Delay followed delay, and nothing was done. A Liberal Government was as earnest upon the matter as its Unionist predecessor, but still the diplomatic etiquette delayed them from coming to a definite conclusion. Note followed note, while a great population was sinking into slavery and despair. In August, 1906, Sir Edward Grey declared that we "could not wait forever," and yet we see that he is waiting still. In 1908 the long looked-for annexation came at last, and the Congo State exchanged the blue flag with the golden star for the tricolour of Belgium. Immediate and radical reforms were promised, but the matter ended as all previous promises have done. In 1909 M. Renkin, the Belgian Colonial Minister, went out to inspect the Congo State, and had the frankness before going to say that nothing would be changed there. This assurance he repeated at Boma, with a flourish about the "genial monarch" who presided over their destinies. By the time this pamphlet is printed M. Renkin will be back, no doubt with the usual talk of minor reforms, which will take another year to produce, and will be utterly futile when reduced to practice. But the world has seen this game too often. Surely it will not be made a fool of again. There is some limit to European patience.

Meanwhile, in this very month of August, 1909, a full year after the annexation by Belgium (an annexation, be it mentioned, which will not be officially recognized by Great Britain until she is satisfied in the matter of reforms), Prince Albert, the heir to the throne, has returned from the Congo. He says:

"The Congo is a marvellous country, which offers unlimited resources to men of enterprise. In my opinion our colony will be an important factor in the welfare of our country, whatever sacrifices we will have to make for its development. What we must do is to work for the moral regeneration of the natives, ameliorate their material situation, suppress the scourge of sleeping sickness, and build new railways."

"Moral regeneration of the natives!" Moral regeneration of his own family and of his own country—that is what the situation demands.

## XIII

### SOME CONGOLESE APOLOGIES

IT ONLY remains to examine some of the Congolese attempts to answer the unanswerable. It is but fair to hear the other side, and I will set down such points as they advance as clearly as I can:

1.—*That the Congo State is independent and that it is no one else's business what occurs within its borders.*

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I have, I trust, clearly shown that by the Berlin Treaty of 1885 the State was formed on certain conditions, and that these conditions as affecting both trade and the natives have not been fulfilled. Therefore we have the right to interfere. Apart from the Treaty this right might be claimed on the general grounds of humanity, as has been done more than once with Turkey.

2.—*That the French Congo is as bad, and that we do not interfere.*

The French Colonial system has usually been excellent, and there is, therefore, every reason to believe that this one result of evil example will soon be amended. There, at least, we have no Treaty obligation to interfere.

3.—*That the English agitation is due to jealousy of Belgian success.*

We do not look upon it as success, but the most stupendous failure in history. What is there to be jealous of? Is it the making of money? But we could do the same at once in any tropical Colony if we stooped to the same methods.

4.—*That it is a plot of the Liverpool merchants.*

This legend had its origin in the fact that Mr. Morel, the leader and hero of the cause, was in business in Liverpool, and was afterward elected to be a member of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. There is, indeed, a connection between Liverpool and the movement, because it was while engaged in the shipping trade there that Mr. Morel was brought into connection with the persons and the facts which moved him to generous indignation, and started him upon the long struggle which he has so splendidly and unselfishly maintained. As a matter of fact, all business men in England have very good reason to take action against a system which has kept their commerce out of a country which was declared to be open to international trade. But of all towns Liverpool has the least reason to complain, as it is the centre of that shipping line which (alas! that any English line should do so) conveys the Congo rubber from Boma to Antwerp.

5.—*That it is a Protestant scheme in order to gain an advantage over the Catholic missions.*

In all British Colonies Catholic missions may be founded and developed without any hindrance. If the Congo were British to-morrow, no Catholic church, or school would be disturbed. What advantage, then, would the Protestants gain by any change? These charges are, as a matter of fact, borne out by Catholics as well as by Protestants. Father Vermeersch is as fervid as any English or American pastor.







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have shown, a deficit. It is easy to show a profit if a land be exploited as Spain exploited Central America, or Belgium the Congo. It would always be more profitable to sack a business than to run it. Now, if the forced revenue of the Congo State disappeared, it would, at a moderate estimate, take a minimum of a million a year for twenty years to bring the demoralized State back to the normal condition of a tropical colony. Would Belgium pay this £20,000,000? It is certain that she would not. Reform, then, is an absolute impossibility so long as Belgium holds the Congo.

What, then, should be done?

That is for the statesmen of Europe and America to determine. America hastened before all the rest of the world in 1884 to recognize this new State, and her recognition caused the rest of the world to follow suit. But since then she has done nothing to control what she created. American citizens have suffered as much as British, and American commerce has met with the same impediments, in spite of the shrewd attempt of King Leopold to bribe American complicity by allowing some of her citizens to form a Concessionnaire Company and so to share in the unholy spoils. But America has a high moral sense, and when the true facts are known to her, and when she learns to distinguish the outcome of King Leopold's dollars from the work of honest publicists, she will surely be ready to move in the matter. It was in crushing pirates that America made her first international appearance upon the world's stage. May it be a precedent.

But to bring the matter to a head the British Government should surely act with no further delay. The obvious course would appear to be that having prepared the ground by sounding each of the Great Powers, they should then lay before each of them the whole evidence, and ask that a European Congress should meet to discuss the situation. Such a Congress would surely result in the partition of the Congo lands—a partition in which Great Britain, whose responsibilities of empire are already too vast, might well play the most self-denying part. If France, having given a pledge to rule her Congo lands in the same excellent fashion as she does the rest of her African Empire, were to extend her borders to the northern bank of the river along its whole course until it turns to the south, then an orderly government might be hoped for in those regions. Germany, too, might well extend her East African Protectorate, so as to bring it up to the eastern bank of the Congo, where it runs to the south. With these large sections removed it would not be difficult to arrange some great native reservation in the centre, which should be under some international guarantee which would be less of a fiasco than the last one. The Lower Congo and the Boma railway would, no doubt, present difficulties, but surely they are not above solution. And always one may repeat that any change is a change for good.

Such a partition would form one solution. Another, less permanent and stable—and to that extent, as it seems to me, less good—is

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that which is advanced by Mr. Morel and others. It is an international control of the river, some provision for which is, as I understand, already in existence. The trouble is that what belongs to all nations belongs to no nation, and that when the native risings and general turmoil come, which will surely succeed the withdrawal of Belgian pressure, something stronger and richer than an International Riverine Board will be needed to meet them. I am convinced that partition affords the only chance of solid, lasting amendment.

Let us suppose, however, that the Powers refuse to convene a meeting, and that we are deserted even by America. Then it is our duty, as it has often been in the world's history, to grapple single-handed with that which should be a common task. We have often done so before, and if we are worthy of our fathers, we will do it again. A warning and a date must be fixed, and then we must decide our course of action.

And what shall that action be? War with Belgium? On them must rest the responsibility for that. Our measures must be directed against the Congo State, which has not yet been recognized by us as being a possession of Belgium. If Belgium take up the quarrel then so be it. There are many ways in which we can bring the Congo State to her knees. A blockade of the Congo is one, but it has the objection of the international complications which might ensue. An easier way would be to proclaim this guilty land as an outlaw State. Such a proclamation means that to no British subject does the law of that land apply. If British traders enter it, they shall be stopped at the peril of those who stop them. If British subjects are indicted, they shall be tried in our own Consular Courts. If complications ensue, as is likely, then Boma shall be occupied. This would surely lead to that European Conference which we are supposing to have been denied us.

Yet another solution. Let a large trading caravan start into the Congoland from Northern Rhodesia. We claim that we have a right to free trade by the Berlin Treaty. We will enforce our claim. To do so would cut at the very roots of the Congo system. If the caravan be opposed, then again Boma and a conference.

Many solutions could be devised, but there is one which will come of itself, and may bring about a very sudden end of the Congo Power. Northern Rhodesia is slowly filling up. The railhead is advancing. The nomad South African population, half Boers, half English, adventurers and lion hunters, are trekking toward the Katanga border. They are not men who will take less than those rights of free entry and free commerce which are, in fact, guaranteed them. Only last year twelve Boer wagons appeared upon the Katanga border and were, contrary to all international law, warned off. They are the pioneers of many more. No one has the right, and no one, save their own Government, has the force to keep them out. Let the Powers of Europe hasten to regulate the situation, or some day they may find themselves in the presence of a *fait accompli*. Better an orderly partition conducted

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from Paris or Berlin, than the intrusion of some Piet Joubert, with his swarthy followers, who will see no favour in taking that which they believe to be their right.

But whichever solution is adopted, the conscience of Europe should not be content merely with the safeguarding of the future. Surely there should be some punishment for those who by their injustice and violence have dragged Christianity and civilization in the dirt. Surely, also, there should be compulsory compensation out of the swollen moneybags of the three hundred per cent. concessionaires for the widows and the orphans, the maimed and the incapacitated. Justice cannot be satisfied with less. An International Commission, with punitive powers, may be exceptional, but the whole circumstances are exceptional, and Europe must rise to them. The fear is, however, that it is the wretched agents on the spot, the poor driven bonus-hunters who will be offered up as victims, whereas the real criminals will escape. The curse of blood and the scorn of every honest man rest upon them already. Would that they were within the reach of human justice also! They have been guilty of the sack of a country, the spoliation of a nation, the greatest crime in all history, the greater for having been carried out under an odious pretence of philanthropy. Surely somehow, somewhere, they will have their reward!

## APPENDIX

### NOTE 1—THE CHICOTTE

Chicotting is alluded to in Congo annals as a minor punishment, freely inflicted upon women and children. It is really a terrible torture, which leaves the victim flayed and fainting. There is a science in the administration of it. Félicien Challaye tells of a Belgian officer who became communicative upon the subject. "One can hardly believe," said the brute, "how difficult it is to administer the chicotte properly. One should spread out the blows so that each shall give a fresh pang. Then we have a law which forbids us to give more than twenty-five blows in one day, and to stop when the blood flows. One should, therefore, give twenty-four of the blows vigorously, but without risking to stop; then at the twenty-fifth, with a dexterous twist, one should make the blood spurt." ("Le Congo Français," Challaye.) The twenty-five lash law, like all other laws, has no relation at all to the proceedings in the Upper Congo.

Monsieur Stanislas Lefranc, Judge on the Congo, and one of the few men whose humanity seems to have survived such an experience, says:

"Every day, at six in the morning and two in the afternoon, at each State post can be seen, to-day, as five or even ten years ago, the savoury sight which I am going



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to try to depict, and to which new recruits are specially invited.

“The chief of the post points out the victims; they leave the ranks and come forward, for at the least attempt at flight they would be brutally seized by the soldiers, struck in the face by the representative of the Free State and the punishment would be doubled. Trembling and terrified, they stretch themselves face down before the captain and his colleagues; two of their companions, sometimes four, seize them by their hands and feet and take off their waistcloth. Then, armed with a lash of hippopotamus hide, similar to what we call a cow-hide, but more flexible, a black soldier, who is only required to be energetic and pitiless, flogs the victims.

“Every time the executioner draws away the chicotte a reddish streak appears upon the skin of the wretched victims who, although strongly built, gasp in terrible contortions.

“Often the blood trickles, more rarely fainting ensues. Regularly and without cessation the chicotte winds round the flesh of these martyrs of the most relentless and loathsome tyrants who have ever disgraced humanity. At the first blows the unhappy victims utter terrible shrieks which soon die down to low groans. In addition, when the officer who orders the punishment is in a bad humour, he kicks those who cry or struggle. Some (I have witnessed the thing), by a refinement of brutality, require that, at the moment when they get up gasping, the slaves should graciously give the military salute. This formality, not required by the regulations, is really a part of the design of the vile institution which aims at debasing the black in order to be able to use him and abuse him without fear.”—“Le Régime Congolais,” Liège, Lefranc.