

Doyle Arthur Conan

# The Crime of the Congo



Arthur Doyle

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## The Crime of the Congo

### 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 unctuous 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 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 concessionnaires. 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 concessionnaire 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.

# 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 1879 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 your own cities in Europe. Know you not the military man among you, the lawyer and the merchant, the banker, the artist, or the poet? It is the same in Africa, **MORE ESPECIALLY ON THE CONGO, WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE SO DEVOTED TO TRADE.**”

“During the few days of our mutual intercourse they gave us a high idea of their qualities – industry, after their own style, not being the least conspicuous.”

“As in the old time, Umangi, from the right bank, and Mpa, from the left bank, despatched their representatives with ivory tusks, large and small, goats and sheep, and vegetable food, clamorously demanding that we should buy from them. Such urgent entreaties, accompanied with blandishments to purchase their stock, were difficult to resist.”

“I speak of eager native traders following us for miles for the smallest piece of cloth. I mention that after travelling many miles to obtain cloth for ivory and redwood powder, the despairing natives asked: ‘Well, what is it you do want? Tell us, and we will get it for you.’”

Speaking of English scepticism as to King Leopold’s intentions, he says:

“Though they understand the satisfaction of a sentiment when applied to England, they are slow to understand that it may be a sentiment that induced King Leopold II. to father this International Association. He is a dreamer, like his *confrères* in the work, because the sentiment is applied to the neglected millions of the Dark Continent. They cannot appreciate rightly, because there are no dividends attaching to it, this ardent, vivifying and expansive sentiment, which seeks to extend civilizing influences among the dark races, and to brighten up with the glow of civilization the dark places of sad-browed Africa.”

One cannot let these extracts pass without noting that Bolobo, the first place named by Stanley, has sunk in population from 40,000 to 7,000; that Irebu, called by Stanley the populous Venice of the Congo, had in 1903 a population of fifty; that the natives who used to follow Stanley, beseeching him to trade, now, according to Consul Casement, fly into the bush at the approach of a steamer, and that the unselfish sentiment of King Leopold II. has developed into dividends of 300 per cent. per annum. Such is the difference between Stanley’s anticipation and the actual fulfilment.

Untroubled, however, with any vision as to the destructive effects of his own work, Stanley laboured hard among the native chiefs, and returned to his employer with no less than 450 alleged treaties which transferred land to the Association. We have no record of the exact payment made in order to obtain these treaties, but we have the terms of a similar transaction carried out by a Belgian officer in 1883 at Palabala. In this case the payment made to the Chief consisted of “one coat of red cloth with gold facings, one red cap, one white tunic, one piece of white baft, one piece of red points, one box of liqueurs, four demijohns of rum, two boxes of gin, 128 bottles of gin, twenty red handkerchiefs, forty singlets and forty old cotton caps.” It is clear that in making such treaties the Chief thought that he was giving permission for the establishment of a station. The idea that he was actually bartering away the land was never even in his mind, for it was held by a communal tenure for the whole tribe, and it was not his to barter. And yet it is on the strength of such treaties as these that twenty millions of people have been expropriated, and the whole wealth and land of the country proclaimed to belong, not to the inhabitants, but to the State – that is, to King Leopold.

With this sheaf of treaties in his portfolio the King of the Belgians now approached the Powers with high sentiments of humanitarianism, and with a definite request that the State which he was forming should receive some recognized status among the nations. Was he at that time consciously hypocritical? Did he already foresee how widely his future actions would differ from his present professions? It is a problem which will interest the historian of the future, who may have more materials than we upon which to form a judgment. On the one hand, there was a furtive secrecy about the evolution of his plans and the despatch of his expeditions which should have no place in a philanthropic enterprise. On the other hand, there are limits to human powers of deception, and it is almost inconceivable that a man who was acting a part could so completely deceive the whole civilized world. It is more probable, as it seems to me, that his ambitious mind discerned that it was possible for him to acquire a field of action which his small kingdom could not give, in mixing himself with the affairs of Africa. He chose the obvious path, that of a civilizing and elevating mission, taking the line of least resistance without any definite idea whither it might lead him. Once faced with the facts, his astute brain perceived the great material possibilities of the country; his early dreams faded away to be replaced by unscrupulous cupidity, and step by step he was led downward until he, the

man of holy aspirations in 1885, stands now in 1909 with such a cloud of terrible direct personal responsibility resting upon him as no man in modern European history has had to bear.

It is, indeed, ludicrous, with our knowledge of the outcome, to read the declarations of the King and of his representatives at that time. They were actually forming the strictest of commercial monopolies – an organization which was destined to crush out all general private trade in a country as large as the whole of Europe with Russia omitted. That was the admitted outcome of their enterprise. Now listen to M. Beernaert, the Belgian Premier, speaking in the year 1885:

“The State, of which our King will be the Sovereign, will be a sort of international Colony. There will be no monopolies, no privileges... Quite the contrary: absolute freedom of commerce, freedom of property, freedom of navigation.”

Here, too, are the words of Baron Lambert, the Belgian Plenipotentiary at the Berlin Conference:

“The temptation to impose abusive taxes will find its corrective, if need be, in the freedom of commerce... No doubt exists as to the strict and literal meaning of the term ‘in commercial matters.’ It means ... the unlimited right for every one to buy and to sell.”

The question of humanity is so pressing that it obscures that of the broken pledges about trade, but on the latter alone there is ample reason to say that every condition upon which this State was founded has been openly and notoriously violated, and that, therefore, its title-deeds are vitiated from the beginning.

At the time the professions of the King made the whole world his enthusiastic allies. The United States was the first to hasten to give formal recognition to the new State. May it be the first, also, to realize the truth and to take public steps to retract what it has done. The churches and the Chambers of Commerce of Great Britain were all for Leopold, the one attracted by the prospect of pushing their missions into the heart of Africa, the others delighted at the offer of an open market for their produce. At the Congress of Berlin, which was called to regulate the situation, the nations vied with each other in furthering the plans of the King of the Belgians and in extolling his high aims. The Congo Free State was created amid general rejoicings. The veteran Bismarck, as credulous as the others, pronounced its baptismal blessing. “The New Congo State is called upon,” said he, “to become one of the chief promoters of the work” (of civilization) “which we have in view, and I pray for its prosperous development and for the fulfilment of the noble aspirations of its illustrious founder.” Such was the birth of the Congo Free State. Had the nations gathered round been able to perceive its future, the betrayal of religion and civilization of which it would be guilty, the immense series of crimes which it would perpetrate throughout Central Africa, the lowering of the prestige of all the white races, they would surely have strangled the monster in its cradle.

It is not necessary to record in this statement the whole of the provisions of the Berlin Congress. Two only will suffice, as they are at the same time the most important and the most flagrantly abused. The first of these (which forms the fifth article of the agreement) proclaims that “No Power which exercises sovereign rights in the said regions shall be allowed to grant therein either monopoly or privilege of any kind in commercial matters.” No words could be clearer than that, but the Belgian representatives, conscious that such a clause must disarm all opposition, went out of their way to accentuate it. “No privileged situation can be created in this respect,” they said. “The way remains open without any restriction to free competition in the sphere of commerce.” It would be interesting now to send a British or German trading expedition up the Congo in search of that free competition which has been so explicitly promised, and to see how it would fare between the monopolist Government and the monopolist companies who have divided the land between them. We have travelled some distance since Prince Bismarck at the last sitting of the Conference declared

that the result was “to secure to the commerce of all nations free access to the centre of the African Continent.”

More important, however, is Article VI., both on account of the issues at stake, and because the signatories of the treaty bound themselves solemnly, “in the name of Almighty God,” to watch over its enforcement. It ran: “All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in these territories pledge themselves to watch over the preservation of the native populations and the improvement of their moral and material conditions of existence, and to work together for the suppression of slavery and of the slave trade.” That was the pledge of the united nations of Europe. It is a disgrace to each of them, including ourselves, the way in which they have fulfilled that oath. Before their eyes, as I shall show in the sequel, they have had enacted one long, horrible tragedy, vouched for by priests and missionaries, traders, travellers and consuls, all corroborated, but in no way reformed, by a Belgium commission of inquiry. They have seen these unhappy people, who were their wards, robbed of all they possessed, debauched, degraded, mutilated, tortured, murdered, all on such a scale as has never, to my knowledge, occurred before in the whole course of history, and now, after all these years, with all the facts notorious, we are still at the stage of polite diplomatic expostulations. It is no answer to say that France and Germany have shown even less regard for the pledge they took at Berlin. An individual does not condone the fact that he has broken his word by pointing out that his neighbour has done the same.

## II

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONGO STATE

Having received his mandate from the civilized world King Leopold proceeded to organize the Government of the new State, which was in theory to be independent of Belgium, although ruled by the same individual. In Europe, King Leopold was a constitutional monarch; in Africa, an absolute autocrat. There were chosen three ministers for the new State – for foreign affairs, for finances and for internal affairs; but it cannot be too clearly understood that they and their successors, up to 1908, were nominated by the King, paid by the King, answerable only to the King, and, in all ways, simply so many upper clerks in his employ. The workings of one policy and of one brain, as capable as it is sinister, are to be traced in every fresh development. If the ministers were ever meant to be a screen, it is a screen which is absolutely transparent. The origin of everything is the King – always the King. M. van Ectvelde, one of the three head agents, put the matter into a single sentence: “C’est à votre majesté qu’appartient l’État.” They were simply stewards, who managed the estate with a very alert and observant owner at their back.

One of the early acts was enough to make observers a little thoughtful. It was the announcement of the right to issue laws by arbitrary decrees without publishing them in Europe. There should be secret laws, which could, at any instant, be altered. The *Bulletin Officiel* announced that “Tous les Actes du Gouvernement qu’il y a intérêt à rendre publics seront insérés au *Bulletin Officiel*.” Already it is clear that something was in the wind which might shock the rather leathery conscience of a European Concert. Meanwhile, the organization of the State went forward. A Governor-General was elected, who should live at Boma, which was made the capital. Under him were fifteen District Commissaries, who should govern so many districts into which the whole country was divided. The only portion which was at that time at all developed was the semi-civilized Lower Congo at the mouth of the river. There lay the white population. The upper reaches of the stream and of its great tributaries were known only to a few devoted missionaries and enterprising explorers. Grenfell and Bentley, of the Missions, with Von Wissman, the German, and the ever-energetic Stanley, were the pioneers who, during the few years which followed, opened up the great hinterland which was to be the scene of such atrocious events.

But the work of the explorer had soon to be supplemented and extended by the soldier. Whilst the Belgians had been entering the Congo land from the west, the slave-dealing Arabs had penetrated from the east, passing down the river as far as Stanley Falls. There could be no compromise between such opposite forces, though some attempt was made to find one by electing the Arab leader as Free State Governor. There followed a long scrambling campaign, carried on for many years between the Arab slavers on the one side and the Congo forces upon the other – the latter consisting largely of cannibal tribes – men of the Stone Age, armed with the weapons of the nineteenth century. The suppression of the slave trade is a good cause, but the means by which it was effected, and the use of Barbarians who ate in the evening those whom they had slain during the day, are as bad as the evil itself. Yet there is no denying the energy and ability of the Congo leaders, especially of Baron Dhanis. By the year 1894 the Belgian expeditions had been pushed as far as Lake Tanganyika, the Arab strongholds had fallen, and Dhanis was able to report to Brussels that the campaign was at an end, and that slave-raiding was no more. The new State could claim that they had saved a part of the natives from slavery. How they proceeded to impose upon all of them a yoke, compared to which the old slavery was merciful, will be shown in these pages. From the time of the fall of the Arab power the Congo Free State was only called upon to use military force in the case of mutinies of its own black troops, and of occasional risings of its own tormented “citizens.” Master of its own house, it could settle down to exploit the country which it had won.

In the meantime the internal policy of the State showed a tendency to take an unusual and sinister course. I have already expressed my opinion that King Leopold was not guilty of conscious hypocrisy in the beginning, that his intentions were vaguely philanthropic, and that it was only by degrees that he sank to the depths which will be shown. This view is borne out by some of the earlier edicts of the State. In 1886, a long pronouncement upon native lands ended by the words: "All acts or agreements are forbidden which tend to the expulsion of natives from the territory they occupy, or to deprive them, directly or indirectly, of their liberty or their means of existence." Such are the words of 1886. Before the end of 1887, an Act had been published, though not immediately put into force, which had the exactly opposite effect. By this Act all lands which were not actually occupied by natives were proclaimed to be the property of the State. Consider for a moment what this meant! No land in such a country is actually occupied by natives save the actual site of their villages, and the scanty fields of grain or manioc which surround them. Everywhere beyond these tiny patches extend the plains and forests which have been the ancestral wandering places of the natives, and which contain the rubber, the camwood, the copal, the ivory, and the skins which are the sole objects of their commerce. At a single stroke of a pen in Brussels everything was taken from them, not only the country, but the produce of the country. How could they trade when the State had taken from them everything which they had to offer? How could the foreign merchant do business when the State had seized everything and could sell it for itself direct in Europe? Thus, within two years of the establishment of the State by the Treaty of Berlin, it had with one hand seized the whole patrimony of those natives for whose "moral and material advantage" it had been so solicitous, and with the other hand it had torn up that clause in the treaty by which monopolies were forbidden, and equal trade rights guaranteed to all. How blind were the Powers not to see what sort of a creature they had made, and how short-sighted not to take urgent steps in those early days to make it retrace its steps and find once more the path of loyalty and justice! A firm word, a stern act at that time in the presence of this flagrant breach of international agreement, would have saved all Central Africa from the horror which has come upon it, would have screened Belgium from a lasting disgrace, and would have spared Europe a question which has already, as it seems to me, lowered the moral standing of all the nations, and the end of which is not yet.

Having obtained possession of the land and its products, the next step was to obtain labour by which these products could be safely garnered. The first definite move in this direction was taken in the year 1888, when, with that odious hypocrisy which has been the last touch in so many of these transactions, an Act was produced which was described in the *Bulletin Officiel* as being for the "Special protection of the black." It is evident that the real protection of the black in matters of trade was to offer him such pay as would induce him to do a day's work, and to let him choose his own employment, as is done with the Kaffirs of South Africa, or any other native population. This Act had a very different end. It allowed blacks to be bound over in terms of seven years' service to their masters in a manner which was in truth indistinguishable from slavery. As the negotiations were usually carried on with the capita, or headman, the unfortunate servant was transferred with small profit to himself, and little knowledge of the conditions of his servitude. Under the same system the State also enlisted its employees, including the recruits for its small army. This army was supplemented by a wild militia, consisting of various barbarous tribes, many of them cannibals, and all of them capable of any excess of cruelty or outrage. A German, August Boshart, in his "Zehn Jahre Afrikanischen Lebens," has given us a clear idea of how these tribes are recruited, and of the precise meaning of the attractive word "libéré" when applied to a State servant. "Some District Commissary," he says, "receives instructions to furnish a certain number of men in a given time. He puts himself in communication with the chiefs, and invites them to a palaver at his residence. These chiefs, as a rule, already have an inkling of what is coming, and, if made wise by experience, make a virtue of necessity and present themselves. In that case the negotiations run their course easily enough; each chief promises to supply a certain number of slaves, and receives presents in return. It may happen,

however, that one or another pays no heed to the friendly invitation, in which case war is declared, his villages are burned down, perhaps some of his people are shot, and his stores or gardens are plundered. In this way the wild king is soon tamed, and he sues for peace, which, of course, is granted on condition of his supplying double the number of slaves. These men are entered in the State books as 'libérés.' To prevent their running away, they are put in irons and sent, on the first opportunity, to one of the military camps, where their irons are taken off and they are drafted into the army. The District Commissary is paid £2 sterling for every serviceable recruit."

Having taken the country and secured labour for exploiting it in the way described, King Leopold proceeded to take further steps for its development, all of them exceedingly well devised for the object in view. The great impediment to the navigation of the Congo had lain in the continuous rapids which made the river impassable from Stanley Pool for three hundred miles down to Boma at the mouth. A company was now formed to find the capital by which a railway should be built between these two points. The construction was begun in 1888, and was completed in 1898, after many financial vicissitudes, forming a work which deserves high credit as a piece of ingenious engineering and of sustained energy. Other commercial companies, of which more will be said hereafter, were formed in order to exploit large districts of the country which the State was not yet strong enough to handle. By this arrangement the companies found the capital for exploring, station building, etc., while the State – that is, the King – retained a certain portion, usually half, of the company's shares. The plan itself is not necessarily a vicious one; indeed, it closely resembles that under which the Chartered Company of Rhodesia grants mining and other leases. The scandal arose from the methods by which these companies proceeded to carry out their ends – those methods being the same as were used by the State, on whose pattern these smaller organizations were moulded.

In the meantime King Leopold, feeling the weakness of his personal position in face of the great enterprise which lay before him in Africa, endeavoured more and more to draw Belgium, as a State, into the matter. Already the Congo State was largely the outcome of Belgian work and of Belgian money, but, theoretically, there was no connection between the two countries. Now the Belgian Parliament was won over to advancing ten million francs for the use of the Congo, and thus a direct connection sprang up which has eventually led to annexation. At the time of this loan King Leopold let it be known that he had left the Congo Free State in his will to Belgium. In this document appear the words, "A young and spacious State, directed from Brussels, has pacifically appeared in the sunlight, thanks to the benevolent support of the Powers that have welcomed its appearance. Some Belgians administer it, while others, each day more numerous, there increase their wealth." So he flashed the gold before the eyes of his European subjects. Verily, if King Leopold deceived other Powers, he reserved the most dangerous of all his deceits for his own country. The day on which they turned from their own honest, healthy development to follow the Congo lure, and to administer without any previous colonial experience a country more than sixty times their own size, will prove to have been a dark day in Belgian history.

The Berlin Conference of 1885 marks the first International session upon the affairs of the Congo. The second was the Brussels Conference of 1889-90. It is amazing to find that after these years of experience the Powers were still ready to accept King Leopold's professions at their face value. It is true that none of the more sinister developments had been conspicuous, but the legislation of the State with regard to labour and trade was already such as to suggest the turn which affairs would take in future if not curbed by a strong hand. One Power, and one only, Holland, had the sagacity to appreciate the true situation, and the independence to show its dissatisfaction. The outcome of the sittings was various philanthropic resolutions intended to strengthen the new State in dealing with that slave trade it was destined to re-introduce in its most odious form. We are too near to these events, and they are too painfully intimate, to permit us to see humour in them; but the historian of the future, when he reads that the object of the European Concert was "to protect effectually the aboriginal inhabitants of Africa," may find it difficult to suppress a smile. This was the last European

assembly to deal with the affairs of the Congo. May the next be for the purpose of taking steps to truly carry out those high ends which have been forever spoken of and never reduced to practice.

The most important practical outcome of the Brussels Conference was that the Powers united to free the new State from those free port promises which it had made in 1885, and to permit it in future to levy ten per cent. upon imports. The Act was hung up for two years owing to the opposition of Holland, but the fact of its adoption by the other Powers, and the renewed mandate given to King Leopold, strengthened the position of the new State to such an extent that it found no difficulty in securing a further loan from Belgium of twenty-five millions of francs, upon condition that, after ten years, Belgium should have the option of taking over the Congo lands as a colony.

If in the years which immediately succeeded the Brussels Conference – from 1890 to 1894 – a bird's-eye view could be taken of the enormous river which, with its tributaries, forms a great twisted fan radiating over the whole centre of Africa, one would mark in all directions symptoms of European activity. At the Lower Congo one would see crowds of natives, impressed for the service and guarded by black soldiers, working at the railway. At Boma and at Leopoldville, the two termini of the projected line, cities are rising, with stations, wharves and public buildings. In the extreme southeast one would see an expedition under Stairs exploring and annexing the great district of Katanga, which abuts upon Northern Rhodesia. In the furthest northeast and along the whole eastern border, small military expeditions would be disclosed, fighting against rebellious blacks or Arab raiders. Then, along all the lines of the rivers, posts were being formed and stations established – some by the State and some by the various concessionnaire companies for the development of their commerce.

In the meantime, the State was tightening its grip upon the land with its products, and was working up the system which was destined to produce such grim results in the near future. The independent traders were discouraged and stamped out, Belgium, as well as Dutch, English and French. Some of the loudest protests against the new order may be taken from Belgian sources. Everywhere, in flagrant disregard of the Treaty of Berlin, the State proclaimed itself to be the sole landlord and the sole trader. In some cases it worked its own so-called property, in other cases it leased it. Even those who had striven to help King Leopold in the earlier stages of his enterprise were thrown overboard. Major Parminter, himself engaged in trade upon the Congo, sums up the situation in 1902 as follows: “To sum up, the application of the new decrees of the Government signifies this: that the State considers as its private property the whole of the Congo Basin, excepting the sites of the natives' villages and gardens. It decrees that all the products of this immense region are its private property, and it monopolizes the trade in them. As regards the primitive proprietors, the native tribes, they are dispossessed by a simple circular; permission is graciously granted to them to collect such products, but only on condition that they bring them for sale to the State for whatever the latter may be pleased to give them. As regards alien traders, they are prohibited in all this territory from trading with the natives.”

Everywhere there were stern orders – to the natives on the one hand, that they had no right to gather the products of their own forests; to independent traders on the other hand, that they were liable to punishment if they bought anything from the natives. In January, 1892, District Commissary Baert wrote: “The native of the district of Ubangi-Welle are not authorized to gather rubber. It has been notified to them that they can only receive permission to do so on condition that they gather the produce for the exclusive benefit of the State.” Captain Le Marinel, a little later, is even more explicit: “I have decided,” he says, “to enforce rigorously the rights of the State over its domain, and, in consequence, cannot allow the natives to convert to their own profit, or to sell to others, any part of the rubber or ivory forming the fruits of the domain. Traders who purchase, or attempt to purchase, such fruits of this domain from the natives – which fruits the State only authorizes the natives to gather subject to the condition that they are brought to it – render themselves, in my opinion, guilty of receiving stolen goods, and I shall denounce them to the judicial authorities, so that proceedings may be taken against them.” This last edict was in the Bangala district, but it was followed at once by

another from the more settled Equateur district, which shows that the strict adoption of the system was universal. In May, 1892, Lieutenant Lemaire proclaims: "Considering that no concession has been granted to gather rubber in the domains of the State within this district, (1) natives can only gather rubber on condition of selling the same to the State; (2) any person or persons or vessels having in his or their possession, or on board, more than one kilogramme of rubber will have a *procès-verbal* drawn up against him, or them, or it; and the ship can be confiscated without prejudice to any subsequent proceedings."

The sight of these insignificant lieutenants and captains, who are often non-commissioned officers of the Belgian army, issuing proclamations which were in distinct contradiction to the expressed will of all the great Powers of the world, might at the time have seemed ludicrous; but the history of the next seventeen years was to prove that a small malignant force, driven on by greed, may prove to be more powerful than a vague general philanthropy, strong only in good intentions and platitudes. During these years – from 1890 to 1895 – whatever indignation might be felt among traders over the restrictions placed upon them, the only news received by the general public from the Congo Free State concerned the founding of new stations, and the idea prevailed that King Leopold's enterprise was indeed working out upon the humanitarian lines which had been originally planned. Then, for the first time, incidents occurred which gave some glimpse of the violence and anarchy which really prevailed.

The first of these, so far as Great Britain is concerned, lay in the treatment of natives from Sierra Leone, Lagos, and other British Settlements, who had been engaged by the Belgians to come to Congoland and help in railway construction and other work. Coming from the settled order of such a colony as Sierra Leone or Lagos, these natives complained loudly when they found themselves working side by side with impressed Congolese, and under the discipline of the armed sentinels of the Force Publique. They were discontented and the discontent was met by corporal punishment. The matter grew to the dimensions of a scandal.

In answer to a question asked in the House of Commons on March 12th, 1896, Mr. Chamberlain, as Secretary of State for the Colonies, stated that complaints had been received of these British subjects having been employed without their consent as soldiers, and of their having been cruelly flogged, and, in some cases, shot; and he added: "They were engaged with the knowledge of Her Majesty's representatives, and every possible precaution was taken in their interests; but, in consequence of the complaints received, the recruitment of labourers for the Congo has been prohibited."

This refusal of the recruitment of labourers by Great Britain was the first public and national sign of disapproval of Congolese methods. A few years later, a more pointed one was given, when the Italian War Ministry refused to allow their officers to serve with the Congo forces.

Early in 1895 occurred the Stokes affair, which moved public opinion deeply, both in this country and in Germany. Charles Henry Stokes was an Englishman by birth, but he resided in German East Africa, was the recipient of a German Decoration for his services on behalf of German colonization, and formed his trading caravans from a German base, with East African natives as his porters. He had led such a caravan over the Congo State border, when he was arrested by Captain Lothaire, an officer in command of some Congolese troops. The unfortunate Stokes may well have thought himself safe as the subject of one great Power and the agent of another, but he was tried instantly in a most informal manner upon a charge of selling guns to the natives, was condemned, and was hanged on the following morning. When Captain Lothaire reported his proceedings to his superiors they signified their approbation by promoting him to the high rank of Commissaire-Général.

The news of this tragedy excited as much indignation in Berlin as in London. Faced with the facts, the representatives of the Free State in Brussels – that is, the agents of the King – were compelled to admit the complete illegality of the whole incident, and could only fall back upon the

excuse that Lothaire's action was *bona-fide*, and free from personal motive. This is by no means certain, for as Baron von Marschall pointed out to the acting British Ambassador at Berlin, Stokes was known to be a successful trader in ivory, exporting it by the east route, and so depriving the officers of the Congo Government of a ten per cent. commission, which would be received by them if it were exported by the west route. "This was the reason," the report continued, quoting the German Statesman's words, "that he had been done away with, and not on account of an alleged sale of arms to Arabs, his death being, in fact, not an act of justice, but one of commercial protection, neither more nor less."

This was one reading of the situation. Whether it was a true one or not, there could be no two opinions as to the illegality of the proceedings. Under pressure from England, Lothaire was tried at Boma and acquitted. He was again, under the same pressure, tried at Brussels, when the Prosecuting Counsel thought it consistent with his duty to plead for an acquittal and the proceedings became a fiasco. There the matter was allowed to remain. A Blue Book of 188 pages is the last monument to Charles Henry Stokes, and his executioner returned to high office in the Congo Free State, where his name soon recurred in the accounts of the violent and high-handed proceedings which make up the history of that country. He was appointed Director of the Antwerp Society for the Commerce of the Congo – an appointment for which King Leopold must have been responsible – and he managed the affairs of that company until he was implicated in the Mongalla massacres, of which more will be said hereafter.

It has been necessary to describe the case of Stokes, because it is historical, but nothing is further from my intention than to address national *amour propre* in the matter. It was a mere accident that Stokes was an Englishman, and the outrage remains the same had he been a citizen of any State. The cause I plead is too broad, and also too lofty, to be supported by any narrower appeals than those which may be addressed to all humanity. I will proceed to describe a case which occurred a few years later to show that men of other nationalities suffered as well as the English. Stokes, the Englishman, was killed, and his death, it was said by some Congolese apologists, was due to his not having, after his summary trial, announced that he would lodge an immediate appeal to the higher court at Boma. Rabinck, the Austrian, the victim of similar proceedings, did appeal to the higher court at Boma, and it is interesting to see what advantage he gained by doing so.

Rabinck was, as I have said, an Austrian from Olmutz, a man of a gentle and lovable nature, popular with all who knew him, and remarkable, as several have testified, for his just and kindly treatment of the natives. He had, for some years, traded with the people of Katanga, which is the southeastern portion of the Congo State where it abuts upon British Central Africa. The natives were at the time in arms against the Belgians, but Rabinck had acquired such influence among them that he was still able to carry on his trade in ivory and rubber for which he held a permit from the Katanga Company.

Shortly after receiving this permit, for which he had paid a considerable sum, certain changes were made in the company by which the State secured a controlling influence in it. A new manager, Major Weyns, appeared, who represented the new régime, superseding M. Lévêque, who had sold the permits in the name of the original company. Major Weyns was zealous that the whole trade of the country should belong to the Concessionnaire Company, which was practically the Government, according to the usual, but internationally illegal, habit of the State. To secure this trade, the first step was evidently to destroy so well-known and successful a private trader as M. Rabinck. In spite of his permits, therefore, a charge was trumped up against him of having traded illegally in rubber – an offence which, even if he had no permit, was an impossibility in the face of that complete freedom of trade which was guaranteed by the Treaty of Berlin. The young Austrian could not bring himself to believe that the matter was serious. His letters are extant, showing that he regarded the matter as so preposterous that he could not feel any fears upon the subject. He was soon to be undeceived, and his eyes were opened too late to the character of the men and the organization with which he

was dealing. Major Weyns sat in court-martial upon him. The offence with which he was charged, dealing illegally in rubber, was one which could only be punished by a maximum imprisonment of a month. This would not serve the purpose in view. Major Weyns within forty minutes tried the case, condemned the prisoner, and sentenced him to a year's imprisonment. There was an attempt to excuse this monstrous sentence afterward by the assertion that the crime punished was that of selling guns to the natives, but as a matter of fact there was at the time no mention of anything of the sort, as is proved by the existing minutes of the trial. Rabinck naturally appealed against such a sentence. He would have been wiser had he submitted to it in the nearest guard-house. In that case he might possibly have escaped with his life. In the other, he was doomed. "He will go," said Major Weyns, "on such a nice little voyage that he will act like this no more, and others will take example from it." The voyage in question was the two thousand miles which separated Katanga from the Appeal Court at Boma. He was to travel all this way under the sole escort of black soldiers, who had their own instructions. The unfortunate man felt that he could never reach his destination alive. "Rumours have it," he wrote to his relatives, "that Europeans who have been taken are poisoned, so if I disappear without further news you may guess what has become of me." Nothing more was heard from him save two agonized letters, begging officials to speed him on his way. He died, as he had foreseen, on the trip down the Congo, and was hurriedly buried in a wayside station when two hours more would have brought the body to Leopoldville. If it is possible to add a darker shadow to the black business it lies in the fact that the apologists of the State endeavoured to make the world believe that their victim's death was due to his own habit of taking morphia. The fact is denied by four creditable witnesses, who knew him well, but most of all is it denied by the activity and energy which had made him one of the leading traders of Central Africa – too good a trader to be allowed open competition with King Leopold's huge commercial monopoly. As a last and almost inconceivable touch, the whole of the dead man's caravans and outfits, amounting to some £15,000, were seized by those who had driven him to his death, and by the last reports neither his relatives nor his creditors have received any portion of this large sum. Consider the whole story and say if it is exaggeration to state that Gustav Maria Rabinck was robbed and murdered by the Congo Free State.

Having shown in these two examples the way in which the Congo Free State has dared to treat the citizens of European States who have traded within her borders, I will now proceed to detail, in chronological order, some account of the dark story of that State's relations to the subject races, for whose moral and material advantage we and other European Powers have answered. For every case I chronicle there are a hundred which are known, but which cannot here be dealt with. For every one known, there are ten thousand, the story of which never came to Europe. Consider how vast is the country, and how few the missionaries or consuls who alone would report such matters. Consider also that every official of the Congo State is sworn neither at the time nor *afterward* to reveal any matter that may have come to his knowledge. Consider, lastly, that the missionary or consul acts as a deterrent, and that it is in the huge stretch of country where neither are to be found that the agent has his own unfettered way. With all these considerations, is it not clear that all the terrible facts which we know are but the mere margin of that welter of violence and injustice which the Jesuit, Father Vermeersch, has summed up in the two words, "Immeasurable Misery!"

### III

## THE WORKING OF THE SYSTEM

Having claimed, as I have shown, the whole of the land, and therefore the whole of its products, the State – that is, the King – proceeded to construct a system by which these products could be gathered most rapidly and at least cost. The essence of this system was that the people who had been dispossessed (ironically called “citizens”) were to be forced to gather, for the profit of the State, those very products which had been taken from them. This was to be effected by two means; the one, taxation, by which an arbitrary amount, ever growing larger until it consumed almost their whole lives in the gathering, should be claimed for nothing. The other, so-called barter by which the natives were paid for the stuff exactly what the State chose to give, and in the form the State chose to give it, there being no competition allowed from any other purchaser. This remuneration, ridiculous in value, took the most absurd shape, the natives being compelled to take it, whatever the amount, and however little they might desire it. Consul Thesiger, in 1908, describing their so-called barter, says: “The goods he proceeds to distribute, giving a hat to one man, or an iron hoe-head to another, and so on. Each recipient is then at the end of a month responsible for so many balls of rubber. No choice of the objects is given, no refusal is allowed. If any one makes any objection, the stuff is thrown down at his door, and whether it is taken or left, the man is responsible for so many balls at the end of the month. The total amounts are fixed by the agents at the maximum which the inhabitants are capable of producing.”

But is it not clear that no natives, especially tribes who, as Stanley has recorded, had remarkable aptitude for trade, would do business at all upon such terms? That is just where the system came in.

By this system some two thousand white agents were scattered over the Free State to collect the produce. These whites were placed in ones and twos in the more central points, and each was given a tract of country containing a certain number of villages. By the help of the inmates he was to gather the rubber, which was the most valuable asset. These whites, many of whom were men of low *morale* before they left Europe, were wretchedly paid, the scale running from 150 to 300 francs a month. This pay they might supplement by a commission or bonus on the amount of rubber collected. If their returns were large it meant increased pay, official praise, a more speedy return to Europe, and a better chance of promotion. If, on the other hand, the returns were small, it meant poverty, harsh reproof and degradation. No system could be devised by which a body of men could be so driven to attain results at any cost. It is not to the absolute discredit of Belgians that such an existence should have demoralized them, and, indeed, there were other nationalities besides Belgians in the ranks of the agents. I doubt if Englishmen, Americans, or Germans could have escaped the same result had they been exposed in a tropical country to similar temptations.

And now, the two thousand agents being in place, and eager to enforce the collection of rubber upon very unwilling natives, how did the system intend that they should set about it? The method was as efficient as it was absolutely diabolical. Each agent was given control over a certain number of savages, drawn from the wild tribes, but armed with firearms. One or more of these was placed in each village to ensure that the villagers should do their task. These are the men who are called “capitas,” or head-men in the accounts, and who are the actual, though not the moral, perpetrators of so many horrible deeds. Imagine the nightmare which lay upon each village while this barbarian squatted in the midst of it. Day or night they could never get away from him. He called for palm wine. He called for women. He beat them, mutilated them, and shot them down at his pleasure. He enforced public incest in order to amuse himself by the sight. Sometimes they plucked up spirit and killed him. The Belgian Commission records that 142 *capitas* had been killed in seven months in a single district. Then came the punitive expedition, and the destruction of the whole community. The

more terror the capita inspired, the more useful he was, the more eagerly the villagers obeyed him, and the more rubber yielded its commission to the agent. When the amount fell off, then the capita was himself made to feel some of those physical pains which he had inflicted upon others. Often the white agent far exceeded in cruelty the barbarian who carried out his commissions. Often, too, the white man pushed the black aside, and acted himself as torturer and executioner. As a rule, however, the relationship was as I have stated, the outrages being actually committed by the capitas, but with the approval of, and often in the presence of, their white employers.

It would be absurd to suppose that the agents were all equally merciless, and that there were not some who were torn in two by the desire for wealth and promotion on the one side and the horror of their daily task upon the other. Here are two illustrative extracts from the letters of Lieutenant Tilkens, as quoted by Mr. Vandervelde in the debate in the Belgian Chamber: “The steamer *v. d. Kerkhove* is coming up the Nile. It will require the colossal number of fifteen hundred porters – unhappy blacks! I cannot think of them. I ask myself how I shall find such a number. If the roads were passable it would make some difference, but they are hardly cleared of morasses where many will meet their death. Hunger and weariness will make an end of many more in the eight days’ march. How much blood will the transport make to flow? Already I have had to make war three times against the chieftains who will not take part in this work. The people prefer to die in the forest instead of doing this work. If a chieftain refuses, it is war, and this horrible war – perfect firearms against spear and lance. A chieftain has just left me with the complaint: ‘My village is in ruins, my women are killed.’ But what can I do? I am often compelled to put these unhappy chieftains into chains until they collect one or two hundred porters. Very often my soldiers find the villages empty, then they seize the women and children.”

To his mother he writes:

“Com. Verstraeten visited my station and highly congratulated me. He said the attitude of his report hung upon the quantity of rubber I would bring. My quantity rose from 360 kilos in September to 1,500 in October, and from January it will be 4,000 per month, which gives me 500 francs over my pay. Am I not a lucky fellow? And if I continue, in two years I shall have reached an additional 12,000 francs.”

But a year later he writes in a different tone to Major Leussens:

“I look forward to a general rising. I warned you before, I think, already in my last letter. The cause is always the same. The natives are weary of the hitherto *régime*— transport labour, collection of rubber, preparation of food stores for blacks and whites. Again for three months I have had to fight with only ten days’ rest. I have 152 prisoners. For two years now I have been carrying on war in this neighbourhood. But I cannot say I have subjected the people. They prefer to die. What can I do? I am paid to do my work, I am a tool in the hands of my superiors, and I follow orders as discipline requires.”

Let us consider now for an instant the chain of events which render such a situation not only possible, but inevitable. The State is run with the one object of producing revenue. For this end all land and its produce are appropriated. How, then, is this produce to be gathered? It can only be by the natives. But if the natives gather it they must be paid their price, which will diminish profits, or else they will refuse to work. Then they must be made to work. But the agents are too few to make them work. Then they must employ such sub-agents as will strike most terror into the people. But if these sub-agents are to make the people work all the time, then they must themselves reside in the villages. So a capita must be sent as a constant terror to each village. Is it not clear that these steps are not accidental, but are absolutely essential to the original idea? Given the confiscation of the land, all the rest must logically follow. It is utterly futile, therefore, to imagine that any reform can set matters right. Such a thing is impossible. Until unfettered trade is unconditionally restored, as it now exists

in every German and English colony, it is absolutely out of the question that any specious promises or written decrees can modify the situation. But, on the other hand, if trade be put upon this natural basis, then for many years the present owners of the Congo land, instead of sharing dividends, must pay out at least a million a year to administer the country, exactly as England pays half a million a year to administer the neighbouring land of Nigeria. To grasp that fact is to understand the root of the whole question.

And one more point before we proceed to the dark catalogue of the facts. Where did the responsibility for these deeds of blood, these thousands of cold-blooded murders lie? Was it with the capita?

He was a cannibal and a ruffian, but if he did not inspire terror in the village he was himself punished by the agent. Was it, then, with the agent? He was a degraded man, and yet, as I have already said, no men could serve on such terms in a tropical country without degradation. He was goaded and driven to crime by the constant clamour from those above him. Was it, then, with the District Commissary? He had reached a responsible and well-paid post, which he would lose if his particular district fell behind in the race of production. Was it, then, with the Governor-General at Boma? He was a man of a hardened conscience, but for him also there was mitigation. He was there for a purpose with definite orders from home which it was his duty to carry through. It would take a man of exceptional character to throw up his high position, sacrifice his career, and refuse to carry out the evil system which had been planned before he was allotted a place in it. Where, then, was the guilt? There were half a dozen officials in Brussels who were, as shown already, so many bailiffs paid to manage a property upon lines laid down for them. Trace back the chain from the red-handed savage, through the worried, bilious agent, the pompous Commissary, the dignified Governor-General, the smooth diplomatist, and you come finally, without a break, and without a possibility of mitigation or excuse, up the cold, scheming brain which framed and drove the whole machine. It is upon the King, always the King, that the guilt must lie. He planned it, knowing the results which must follow. They did follow. He was well informed of it. Again and again, and yet again, his attention was drawn to it. A word from him would have altered the system. The word was never said. There is no possible subterfuge by which the moral guilt can be deflected from the head of the State, the man who went to Africa for the freedom of commerce and the regeneration of the native.

## IV

### FIRST FRUITS OF THE SYSTEM

The first testimony which I shall cite is that of Mr. Glave, which covers the years 1893 up to his death in 1895. Mr. Glave was a young Englishman, who had been for six years in the employ of the State, and whose character and work were highly commended by Stanley. Four years after the expiration of his engagement he travelled as an independent man right across the whole country, from Tanganyika in the east to Matadi near the mouth of the river, a distance of 2,000 miles. The agent and rubber systems were still in their infancy, but already he remarked on every side that violence and disregard of human life which were so soon to grow to such proportions. Remember that he was himself a Stanleyman, a pioneer and a native trader, by no means easy to shock. Here are some of his remarks as taken from his diary.

Dealing with the release of slaves by the Belgians, for which so much credit has been claimed, he says (*Cent. Mag.*, Vol. 53):

“They are supposed to be taken out of slavery and freed, but I fail to see how this can be argued out. They are taken from their villages and shipped south, to be sold as soldiers, workers, etc., on the State stations, and what were peaceful families have been broken up, and the different members spread about the place. They have to be made fast and guarded for transportation, or they would all run away. This does not look as though the freedom promised had any seductive prospects. The young children thus ‘liberated’ are handed over to the French mission stations, where they receive the kindest care, but nothing justifies this form of serfdom. I can understand the State compelling natives to do a certain amount of work for a certain time; but to take people forcibly from their homes, and despatch them here and there, breaking up families, is not right. I shall learn more about this on the way and at Kabambare. If these conditions are to exist, I fail to see how the anti-slavery movement is to benefit the native.”

With regard to the use of barbarous soldiers he says:

“State soldiers are also employed without white officers. This should not be allowed, for the black soldiers do not understand the reason of the fighting, and instead of submission being sought, often the natives are massacred or driven away into the hills. . . . But the black soldiers are bent on fighting and raiding; they want no peaceful settlement. They have good rifles and ammunition, realize their superiority over the natives with their bows and arrows, and they want to shoot and kill and rob. Black delights to kill black, whether the victim be man, woman, or child, and no matter how defenceless. This is no reasonable way of settling the land; it is merely persecution. Blacks cannot be employed on such an errand unless under the leadership of whites.”

He met and describes one Lieutenant Hambursin, who seems to have been a capable officer:

“Yesterday the natives in a neighbouring village came to complain that one of Hambursin’s soldiers had killed a villager; they brought in the offender’s gun. To-day at roll-call the soldier appeared without his gun; his guilt was proved, and without more to do, he was hanged on a tree. Hambursin has hanged several for the crime of murder.”

Had there been more Hambursins there might have been fewer scandals. Glave proceeds to comment on treatment of prisoners:

“In stations in charge of white men, Government officers, one sees strings of poor emaciated old women, some of them mere skeletons, working from six in the morning till noon, and from half-past two till six, carrying clay water-jars, tramping about in gangs, with a rope round the neck, and connected by a rope one and a half yards apart. They are prisoners of war. In war the old women are always caught, but should receive a little humanity. They are naked, except for a miserable patch of cloth of several parts, held in place by a string round the waist. They are not loosened from the rope for any purpose. They live in the guard-house under the charge of black native sentries, who delight in slapping and ill-using them, for pity is not in the heart of the native. Some of the women have babies, but they go to work just the same. They form, indeed, a miserable spectacle, and one wonders that old women, although prisoners of war, should not receive a little more consideration; at least, their nakedness might be hidden. The men prisoners are treated in a far better way.”

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