

There is a fortnightly service of steamers between Antwerp and Boma and Banana. There is also frequent steam communication with Liverpool, Hamburg, Rotterdam, and Lisbon. In 1899 there entered at Boma and Banana 192 seagoing vessels of 369,645 tons, and cleared 197 vessels of 375,715 tons. Of the tonnage entered, 191,843 was Belgian; 79,037, British; and 65,682, German. Of the tonnage cleared 189,933 was Belgian; 85,588 was British; and 67,113, German. During the same year 440 coasting vessels of 19,832 tons entered, and 451 vessels of 20,557 tons cleared from the same ports.

Internal Communications

From the mouth of the Congo to the beginning of the rapids, which render the river unnavigable—a distance of about a hundred miles—the State maintains a fleet of seven steamers, in which passengers and goods are transported from the larger ocean-going steamers to Matadi, the point of departure of the railway. Matadi can, however, be approached by ships of considerable burden. Before the railway, all merchandise and goods for the interior had to be carried by porters from the coast to Stanley Pool. This method was both costly and inconvenient. The journey took three weeks. In 1887 the King granted to the Congo Industrial and Commercial Company a concession to construct a railway from the lower river to Stanley Pool, and, after a survey had been made, a Congo Railway Company was founded in Brussels in July 1889, with a capital of 25 million francs, of which the Belgian Government subscribed 10 million. The moving spirit in this great enterprise was Colonel Thys. The work was begun almost immediately, but nearly insuperable difficulties were encountered, both engineering and financial. The line was finally completed in March 1898, and formally opened to traffic in the following July—nine years after its practical inception. The length of the line is 260 miles, and its inland terminus is at Ndolo on Stanley Pool, a short distance from Leopoldville. There is a weekly service of three passenger trains in each direction, two days being occupied on the journey. The trains do not run during the night. The single through fare for Europeans is £20, and the freight charges are proportionately high, judged by European standards, though considerably below the charges which had to be paid before the railway was built. The cost of constructing and equipping the railway was 68 millions of francs. Other railways which are projected are a short line from Boma to the Lukulu river, for the purpose of open-

ing up the Mayombe province; a line or lines of railway between the navigable waters of the Upper Congo and Lake Tanganyika, with subsidiary lines which would develop the rich provinces of Manyema, Urua, and Katanga; and a railway in the Upper Welle district, for the purpose of opening up the north-eastern provinces and affording rapid access to the leased territories on the Upper Nile.

Waterways

It is, however, in the splendid navigable waterways of the main Congo stream and its tributaries that the Free State has found, and will continue to find, its most powerful instrument in the development of its resources. * * * The State maintains on these waterways a fleet of steamers which in 1900 numbered 26 vessels, for the purpose of preserving authority, provisioning the stations, promoting trade, and operating the postal service. Private trading companies, French, Belgian, and Dutch, and several Missionary Societies also maintain steamers on the inland waters, and the number is being rapidly increased since the docks have been built at Ndolo and the railway offers increased facilities for transport. Away from the railway and the waterways, transport is still mainly effected by porters.

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1910 ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA

[European Reaction to Leopold's Abuses]†

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The discussions which from time to time took place in the Belgian parliament on the affairs of the Congo State were greatly embittered by the charges brought against the state administration. The administration of the state had indeed undergone a complete change since the early years of its existence. A decree of the 1st of July 1885 had, it is true, declared all "vacant lands" the property of the state (*Domaine privé de l'état*),¹ but it was not for some time

† *The Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 11th ed. (New York: The Encyclopædia Britannica Co., 1910), 6:920–22. After recounting the history of the formation of the Congo Free State for several pages, following word-for-word the account of the 10th edition (see above), this entry then disclaims for a change of regime. See the selection by Alan Simmons in this Norton Critical Edition for an analysis of the influence *Heart of Darkness* may have had on the Congo reform movement. Notes are the Editor's.

1. Private domain of the state (French).

that this decree was so interpreted as to confine the lands of the natives to those they lived upon or "effectively" cultivated. Their rights in the forest were not at first disputed, and the trade of the natives and of Europeans was not interfered with. But in 1891—when the wealth in rubber and ivory of vast regions had been demonstrated—a secret decree was issued (Sept. 21) reserving to the state the monopoly of ivory and rubber in the "vacant lands" constituted by the decree of 1885, and circulars were issued making the monopoly effective in the Aruwimi-Welle, Equator and Ubangi districts. The agents of the state were enjoined to supervise their collection, and in future natives were to be obliged to sell their produce to the state. By other decrees and circulars (October 30 and December 5, 1892, and August 9, 1893) the rights of the natives and of white traders were further restricted. No definition had been given by the decree of 1885 as to what constituted the "vacant lands" which became the property of the state, but the effect of the later decrees was to assign to the government an absolute proprietary right over nearly the whole country; a native could not even leave his village without a special permit. The oppressive nature of these measures drew forth a weighty remonstrance from the leading officials, and Monsieur C. Janssen, the governor, resigned. Vigorous protests by the private trading companies were also made against this violation of the freedom of trade secured by the Berlin Act, and eventually an arrangement was made by which certain areas were reserved to the state and certain areas to private traders, but the restrictions imposed on the natives were maintained. Large areas of the state domain were leased to companies invested with very extensive powers, including the exclusive right to exploit the produce of the soil. In other cases, e.g. in the district of Katanga, the state entered into partnership with private companies for the exploitation of the resources of the regions concerned. The "concession" companies were first formed in 1891 under Belgian law; in 1898 some of them were reconstituted under Congo law. In all of them the state had a financial interest either as shareholder or as entitled to part profits.

This system of exploitation of the country was fruitful of evil, and was mainly responsible for the bad treatment of the natives. Only in the lower Congo and a narrow strip of land on either side of the river above Stanley Pool was there any freedom of trade. The situation was aggravated by the creation in 1896, by a secret decree, of the *Domaine de la couronne*,² a vast territory between the Kasai and Ruki rivers, covering about 112,000 sq. m. To administer this domain, carved out of the state lands and treated as the private

2. Domain of the crown (French).

property of Leopold II, a *Fondation*³ was organized and given a civil personality. It was not until 1902 that the existence of the *Domaine de la couronne* was officially acknowledged. The *Fondation* controlled the most valuable rubber region in the Congo, and in that region the natives appeared to be treated with the utmost severity. In the closing years of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th the charges brought against the state assumed a more and more definite character. As indicated, they fell under two main heads. In the first place the native policy of the Congo government was denounced as at variance with the humanitarian spirit which had been regarded by the powers as one of the chief motives inspiring the foundation of the Congo State. In the second place it was contended that the method of exploitation of the state lands and the concessions system nullified the free trade provisions of the Berlin Act. Reports which gave colour to these charges steadily accumulated, and gave rise to a strong agitation against the Congo State system of government. This agitation was particularly vigorous in Great Britain, and the movement entered on a new era when on the 20th of May 1903 the House of Commons agreed without a division to the following motion:—

"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 request 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 accordance with this request the 5th marquess of Lansdowne, then secretary of state for foreign affairs, issued a despatch on the 8th of August 1903 to the British representatives at the courts of the powers which signed the Berlin Act, drawing attention to the alleged cases of ill-treatment of natives and to the existence of trade monopolies in the Congo Free State, and in conclusion stating that His Majesty's government would "be glad to receive any suggestions which the governments of the signatory powers might be disposed to make in reference to this important question, which might perhaps constitute, wholly or in part, the subject of a reference to the tribunal at the Hague." This despatch failed to evoke any response from the powers, with the single exception of Turkey, but the public agitation against the Congo State régime continued

3. Foundation (French).

to grow in force, being greatly strengthened by the publication in February 1904 of a report by Mr Roger Casement,⁴ then British consul at Boma, on a journey which he had made through the middle Congo region in 1903 (described as the "Upper" Congo in the report). The action on the part of the British government resulted in considerable correspondence with the Congo government, which denied the charges of systematic ill-treatment of the natives and controverted the contention that its policy constituted an infringement of the Berlin Act. In July 1904, however, King Leopold issued a decree appointing a commission of inquiry to visit the Congo State, investigate the condition of the natives, and if necessary recommend reforms. * * *

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The report of the commission of inquiry was published, minus the minutes of the evidence submitted to the commissioners in November 1905. While expressing admiration for the signs which had come under its notice of the advance of civilization in the Congo State, the commission confirmed the reports of the existence of grave abuses in the upper Congo, and recommended a series of measures which would in its opinion suffice to ameliorate the evil. It approved the concessions system in principle and regarded forced labour as the only possible means of turning to account the natural riches of the country, but recognized that though freedom of trade was formally guaranteed there was virtually no trade, properly so called, among the natives in the greater portion of the Congo State, and particularly emphasized the need for a liberal interpretation of the land laws, effective application of the law limiting the amount of labour exacted from the natives to forty hours per month, the suppression of the "sentry" system, the withdrawal from the concession companies of the right to employ compulsory measures, the regulation of military expeditions, and the freedom of the courts from administrative tutelage. Simultaneously with the report of the commission of inquiry there was published a decree appointing a commission to study the recommendations contained in the report, and to formulate detailed proposals.

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The report of the reforms commission was not made public, but as the fruit of its deliberations King Leopold signed on the 3rd of June 1906 a number of decrees embodying various changes in the administration of the Congo State. By the advocates of radical reforms these measures were regarded as utterly inadequate, and even in Belgium, among those friendly to the Congo State system of administration, some uneasiness was excited by a letter which

4. See the selection by Roger Casement in this Norton Critical Edition.

was published along with the decrees, wherein King Leopold intimated that certain conditions would attach to the inheritance he had designed for Belgium. Among the obligations which he enumerated as necessarily and justly resting on his legatee was the duty of respecting the arrangements by which he had provided for the establishment of the *Domaine de la couronne* and the *Domaine privé de l'état*. It was further declared that the territories bequeathed would be inalienable.

The fears excited by this letter that King Leopold desired to restrict Belgium's liberty of action in the Congo State when the latter should become a Belgian colony were not diminished by the announcement in November 1906 of four new concessions, conferring very extensive rights on railway, mining and rubber companies in which foreign capital was largely interested. This was immediately before the opening in the Belgian chamber of a fresh debate in which the history of the Congo question entered on a new stage of critical importance not only from the national but the international point of view. It had become evident, indeed, that things could not continue as they were. In reply to an influential deputation which waited upon him on the 20th of November, Sir Edward Grey, speaking as the representative of the British government in his capacity as secretary of state for foreign affairs, expressed the desire "that Belgium should feel that her freedom of action is unfettered and unimpaired and her choice unembarrassed by anything which we have done or are likely to do"; but he added that if Belgium should fail to take action "it will be impossible for us to continue to recognize indefinitely the present state of things without a very close examination of our treaty rights and the treaty obligations of the Congo State."

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While [legislation was drafted to replace the absolutism of the king with parliamentary control], further evidence was forthcoming that the system complained of on the Congo remained unaltered, and that the "reforms" of June 1906 were illusory. Various revolts of the natives also occurred, and in some parts of the state complete anarchy prevailed. Not only in Great Britain and America did the agitation against the administration of the Congo State gain ground, but in Belgium and France reform associations enlightened public opinion. The government of Great Britain let it be known that its patience was not inexhaustible, while the senate of the United States declared that it would support President Roosevelt in his efforts for the amelioration of the condition of the inhabitants of the Congo. The attitude of the powers was at the same time perfectly friendly towards Belgium. In this manner the movement in favour of ending the baneful régime of Leopold II was strength-

ened. On the 10th of July 1907 the Belgian premier announced that negotiations with the Congo State would be renewed, and on the 28th of November following a treaty was signed for the cession of the Congo State to Belgium. This treaty stipulated for the maintenance of the *Fondation de la couronne*. This "government within a government" was secured in all its privileges, its profits as heretofore being appropriated to allowances to members of the royal family and the maintenance and development of "works of public utility" in Belgium and the Congo, those works including schemes for the embellishment of the royal palaces and estates in Belgium and others for making Ostend "a bathing city unique in the world." The state was to have the right of redemption on terms which, had the rubber and ivory produce alone been redeemed, would have cost Belgium about £8,500,000.

Even those politicians least disposed to criticize the actions of the king protested vigorously against the provisions concerning the *Fondation*. It was recognized that the chamber would not vote the treaty of cession unless those provisions were modified. Negotiations between Leopold II and the Belgian premier followed. While they were in progress the British government again expressed its views, and in very monitory language. They were conveyed in a passage in the king's speech at the opening of parliament on the 29th of January, and in a statement by Sir Edward Grey in the House of Commons on the 26th of February. Sir Edward Grey affirmed that the Congo State had "morally forfeited every right to international recognition," and quoted with approval Lord Cromer's statement that the Congo system was the worst he had ever seen. The foreign secretary declared, in reference to the negotiations for the transfer of the Congo to Belgium, that any semi-transfer which left the controlling power in the hands of "the present authorities" would not be considered by Great Britain as a guarantee of treaty rights. On the same day that Sir Edward Grey spoke a parliamentary paper was issued (*Africa No. 1*, 1908) containing consular reports on the state of affairs in the Congo. The most significant of these reports was from Mr. W. G. Thesiger, consul at Boma, who in a memorandum on the application of the labour tax, after detailing various abuses, added, "The system which gave rise to these abuses still continues unchanged, and so long as it is unaltered the condition of the natives must remain one of veiled slavery." Eight days later (on the 5th of March) an additional act was signed in Brussels annulling the clauses in the treaty of cession concerning the *Fondation*, which was to cease to exist on the day Belgium assumed the sovereignty of the Congo and its property to be absorbed in the state domains. Leopold II, however, was able to obtain generous compensation for the surrender of the *Fondation*. Certain frag-

ments of the domain, including an estate of 155 sq. m. in Africa, a villa at Ostend, and some land at Laeken, were kept by the king, who further retained a life interest in property on the Riviera and elsewhere. Belgium undertook at her own charges and at an estimated cost of £2,000,000 to complete "the works of embellishment" begun in Belgium with funds derived from the *Fondation* and to create a debt of £2,000,000 chargeable on the funds of the colony, which sum was to be paid to the king in fifteen annual instalments—the money, however, to be expended on objects "connected with and beneficial to the Congo." The annuities to members of the royal family were to be continued, and other subsidies were promised. But the most important provision was the agreement of Belgium to respect the concessions granted in the lands of the *Fondation* in November 1906 to the American Congo Company and the *Compagnie forestière et minière*, companies in which the Congo State had large holdings.

* * * Public opinion in Belgium was disturbed and anxious at the prospect of assuming responsibility for a vast, distant, and badly administered country, likely for years to be a severe financial drain upon the resources of the state. But, though those who opposed annexation formed a numerous body, all political parties were agreed that in case of annexation the excesses which had stained the record of the Free State should cease.⁵

KING LEOPOLD II - *Belgian ruler*

[The Sacred Mission of Civilization]†

white man's burden?
Our refined society attaches to human life (and with reason) a value ~~unknown to barbarous communities~~. When our directing will is implanted among them its aim is to triumph over all obstacles, and results which could not be attained by lengthy speeches may follow philanthropic influence. But if, in view of this desirable spread of civilisation, we count upon the means of action which confer upon us dominion and the sanction of right, it is not less true that our ultimate end is a work of peace. Wars do not necessarily mean the ruin of the regions in which they rage; our agents do not ignore this fact, so from the day when their effective superiority is affirmed, they feel profoundly reluctant to use force. The

5. On 14 November 1908, the Belgian legislature approved legislation to assume administrative control of the Congo, and the Congo Free State ceased to exist.

† From Guy Burrows, *The Land of the Pygmies* (London, 1898), p. 286.