

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.

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wretched negroes, however, who are still under the sole sway of their traditions, have that horrible belief that victory is only decisive when the vanquished has been annihilated. The soldiers of the State, who are recruited necessarily from among the natives, do not immediately forsake those sanguinary habits that have been transmitted from generation to generation. The example of the white officer and wholesome military discipline gradually inspire in them a horror of human trophies of which they previously had made their boast. It is in their leaders that they must see living evidence of these higher principles, taught that the exercise of authority is not at all to be confounded with cruelty, but is, indeed, destroyed by it. I am pleased to think that our agents, nearly all of whom are volunteers drawn from the ranks of the Belgian army, have always present in their minds a strong sense of the career of honour in which they are engaged, and are animated with a pure feeling of patriotism; not sparing their own blood, they will the more spare the blood of the natives, who will see in them the all-powerful protectors of their lives and their property.

Justifying himself
GEORGE WASHINGTON WILLIAMS

An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo†

Good and Great Friend,

I have the honour to submit for your Majesty's consideration some reflections respecting the Independent State of Congo, based upon a careful study and inspection of the country and character of the personal Government you have established upon the African Continent.

In order that you may know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I implore your most gracious permission to address you without restraint, and with the frankness of a man who

† From John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), pp. 243-54. Williams (1849-91) was an African American minister, journalist, lawyer, legislator, historian, and Civil War veteran. In 1890, the same year that Conrad traveled up the Congo River, Williams journeyed to the Congo Free State under the sponsorship of an American railroad magnate and, after two months of travel, reached Stanley Falls. There he wrote his "Open Letter" to Leopold II, with whom he had spoken in Belgium before beginning his expedition. Williams reports that he had "been interested in the success of the Congo State" because he felt it would advance "the overthrow of the African Slave-Power and the spread of civilization," but he informed his patron that what he found there convinced him of the "deceit, obtusiveness, ignorance and cruelty of the State of the Congo" (quoted in Franklin, pp. 266, 195).

feels that he has a duty to perform to *History, Humanity, Civilization* and to the *Supreme Being*, who is himself the "King of Kings."

Your Majesty will testify to my affection for your person and friendship for your African State, of which you have had ample practical proofs for nearly six years. My friendship and service for the State of Congo were inspired by and based upon your publicly declared motives and aims, and your personal statement to your humble subscriber:—humane sentiments and work of Christian civilization for Africa. Thus I was led to regard your enterprise as the rising of the Star of Hope for the Dark Continent, so long the habitation of cruelties; and I journeyed in its light and laboured in its hope. All the praiseful things I have spoken and written of the Congo country, State and Sovereign, were inspired by the firm belief that your Government was built upon the enduring foundation of *Truth, Liberty, Humanity* and *Justice*.

It afforded me great pleasure to avail myself of the opportunity afforded me last year, of visiting your State in Africa; and how thoroughly I have been disenchanted, disappointed and disheartened, it is now my painful duty to make known to your Majesty in plain but respectful language. Every charge which I am about to bring against your Majesty's personal Government in the Congo has been carefully investigated; a list of competent and veracious witnesses, documents, letters, official records and data has been faithfully prepared, which will be deposited with Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, until such time as an International Commission can be created with power to send for persons and papers, to administer oaths, and attest the truth or falsity of these charges.

I crave your Majesty's indulgence while I make a few preliminary remarks before entering upon the specifications and charges.

Your Majesty's title to the territory of the State of Congo is badly clouded, while many of the treaties made with the natives by the "Association Internationale du Congo," of which you were Director and Banker, were tainted by frauds of the grossest character. The world may not be surprised to learn that your flag floats over territory to which your Majesty has no legal or just claim, since other European Powers have doubtful claims to the territory which they occupy upon the African Continent; but all honest people will be shocked to know by what grovelling means this fraud was consummated.

There were instances in which Mr. HENRY M. STANLEY sent one white man, with four or five Zanzibar soldiers, to make treaties with native chiefs. The staple argument was that the white man's heart had grown sick of the wars and rumours of war between one chief and another, between one village and another; that the white man was at peace with his black brother, and desired to "confederate all