

The Unfortunate Congo Free State

New York Times (1857-Current file) Mar 30, 1902; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times pg. SM2

[go back...](#) - or - [Download a pdf](#) - or - [Next Article](#)

The unfortunate Congo Free State

It savors somewhat of Lse-majest to "go for" a sovereign, but as far as can be learned conditions in the faraway land of the Congo, over which Leopold, King of Belgium, supposedly holds supremacy, are of singularly unfortunate character. In the New York Times of March 17th, the Reve. De Witt Clinton Snyder, a missionary of the Congo Free State, who had just returned from Africa, explained what was the present status there. The Rev. Mr. Snyder had spent most of his time in the upper Kassa District. He stated that once this District had been very prosperous, when there was "free trade", but that King Leopold of Belgium, who owns personally the Congo Free State, had spoiled all this. The King had organized a syndicate with himself at the head. He gets half the shares and half of the profit of the sale of the rubber, which is the principle export. The reverend gentleman questions King Leopold's pose as a philanthropist and good man, and dubs him a fakir. (*Fakir - A Muslim religious mendicant.*) He also taxes the King with being the cause of the death of many natives, who object to trade restraints. To think that there are sufferers from protection in the Dark Continent is at least edifying.

In the Contemporary Review for this month there is a paper written by Emanuel D. Morel, the title of which is "The Belgian Curse in Africa". The article is bitter in its denunciation of the course adopted by King Leopold. It seems, he says as if in the Congo States there is a return on the part of Leopold to the methods of Louis XIV, L'Etat c'est moi. In 1876 a conference was held at Brussels. It was certainly the barbarism of Central Africa, which perturbed the sensitiveness of King Leopold. His majesty assured the world in general and scientists and explorers in particular, that he had not been guided by egotism, and should be made most happy if a civilizing movement should be inaugurated in Brussels. The King taking the

The Berlin conference made a strict rule that no import duty should be established at the mouth of the Congo for twenty years. In 1890 heavy drafts were made on the Belgians for expenses. There was a war with the Arabs of the upper Congo. The King prayed for permission to levy import duties. This action was commented on at the time by his associates in the enterprise. An indignation meeting was held in London in 1900, at which the hypocrisy of the of the philanthropic motives of the King were made clear. There were some ugly accusation, one of which was that Leopold was personally engaged in trade and buying or rather stealing ivory from the natives of the upper Congo and retaining the proceeds of the sales in the European markets. It was even insisted upon that the Belgians took part in the slave raiding. Mr. Morel writes: His majesty was himself tacitly encouraging the slave trade by receiving tribute in the shape of slaves which were promptly enrolled as soldiers in the Native States. The most damaging of declarations is the one made by an English Officer, who was in the Belgian service, and who left in disgust on account of unjust and cruel wars against natives, with the hopes of securing slaves and women to minister to the behests if the officers of your [the Belgian] Government. In Congo, according to Mr. Morel, the King's preserve contained not less than 800,000 square miles.

As to the regeneration of the Negro, that is being brought about, he says, by means of a Belgian cannibal army. As to the credit account of the Belgian business is splendid, and individual profits of his majesty are simply grand. In four years the Society Anversoise du Commerce au Congo put to the good 7,275,838 francs. An American stock boom is insignificant when compared to the Belgian affair. The shares of the Anversoise Company, for which 500 francs had been originally paid were selling not long ago for 13,730 francs. Everything being looked at in the light of rubber or ivory, the demand automobile tires and piano keys being constant

initiative, so arranged it that it that the Belgium commission had everything to say in the proposed civilizing business. It sounded fine on paper. There was to be a powerful Negro kingdom under a King's special guidance. Things went along for a time in a uncertain and tentative way. Then arose the trade rivalries. Bismarck, who suspected what was the Belgium plan called a general convention in Berlin in 1885. His majesty of Belgium had advance of this idea, that patriotism was a duty greater even than philanthropy. That mean the Belgium shareholders in the Congo business were becoming uneasy about their investments.

and the King sharing in the consistently tremendous profits, conditions in the Congo country are represented as being of the most shocking character. The Rev Mr. Snyder's strictures on the Congo Free State seem to be fully deserved, for Mr. Morel's conclusion is the Congo State, [which is King Leopold], must be called to account for its crimes against civilization, for its outrages upon humanity, for its violation of the act to which it owes existence, for the unparallel and irreparable mischief which it has committed.



Would you like to [go back...](#)
or return to home page? [click here.](#)