

ANGLO - BELGIAN RELATIONS

Past and Present

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PREFACE

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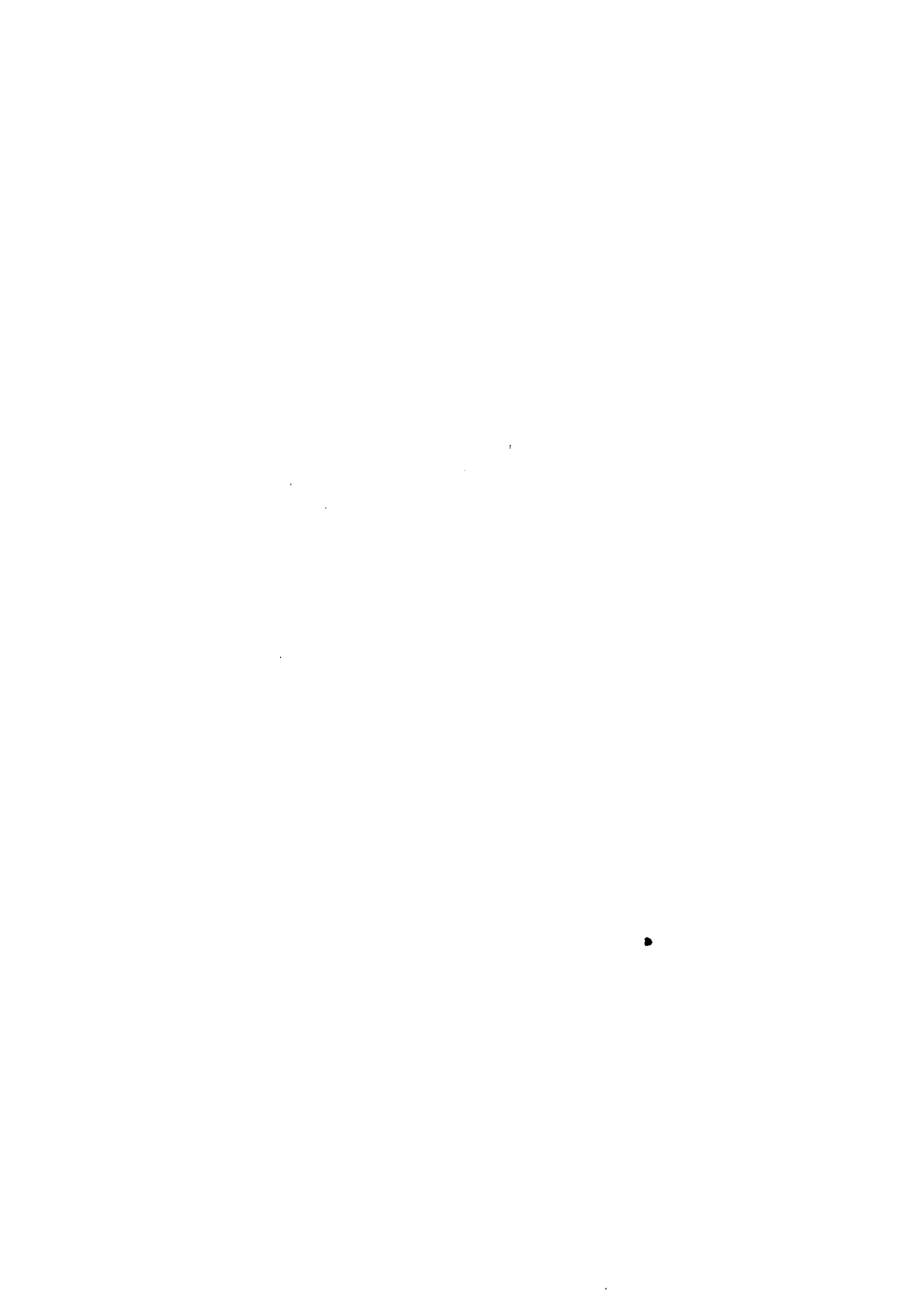
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ANGLO-BELGIAN RELATIONS

I

GENERAL SURVEY

Anglo-Belgian relations have been the subject of many articles, in which both their political and their economic aspects were discussed. But so far no consistent statement of the whole course of development from the Middle Ages to the present day has appeared, although such a statement may be valuable both to the British and to the Belgian public. We have tried to fill that gap by an unpretentious pamphlet, founded on a comparative study of the accepted authorities and destined for the general reader. New facts and original views will no doubt be produced by further research; meanwhile a simple summary of what is known at present may be useful. Our aim has been to take a wide and comprehensive view of Belgium past and present, to inquire into that country's history, in order to understand her place among the family of nations and to make such an inquiry acceptable by approaching Continental problems

from the side which most affects the interests and traditions of a people of islanders. The English are, as a nation, deeply attached to the practice of free institutions and to local government, therefore they ought to be interested in Belgium as the cradle of municipal autonomy in the West. They are fond of their religious freedom, and should remember that the greatest battles of Protestantism were fought in the Netherlands. Most of all they rely on sea-power for their safety, therefore they are concerned about the mastery of the harbour of Antwerp and of the southern shore of the North Sea.

Belgium interests an Englishman, primarily as a factor in his foreign policy. Whether the Belgians are Teutonic or Latin, freemen or slaves, Christians or infidels, is important chiefly to themselves. But it does matter to England that their land borders on the North Sea near the Channel, and contains the large harbour of Antwerp, whence, to use Napoleon's martial metaphor, a loaded pistol can be levelled at the heart of England. A fast steamer sails from Ostend to Dover in three hours, and an airship in less. As one of the leading historians of England has put it, the inhabitants of this land must either be near allies, or the most dangerous enemies to Great Britain. It is therefore essential to her safety that the nation at large should learn the lessons of history and should realise what Anglo-Belgian relations

have been in the past and what they ought to be in the future. To this question this little book is to be devoted.

Let us then try to discover a point from which to start. Quarrels and friendships due to geographical vicinity belong to history only in so far as they concern political units, and the Anglo-Belgian alliance could not begin before England became the insular, maritime Power with which we are familiar, or before Belgium achieved some measure of political coherence. As long as the Sovereigns of London were Normans or Angevins who spoke French and cared chiefly about their Continental possessions, as long as the Belgian principalities belonged to several lords, there could be no full Anglo-Belgian alliance. Therefore, Edward III's attempt to gain a foothold in Brabant and Flanders at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War, curious and significant as it is, should be treated as a preparation to our theme, for it occurred before the main lines of historical development had been laid down. No doubt King Edward himself cherished high hopes of his dynastic claims in the Low Countries. He not only married a Belgian queen, Philippa, daughter of the Count of Hainault, but he saw to it that two of his sons, Lionel Duke of Clarence, and John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, should be born on the Continent. Lionel was a native of Antwerp. John of Gaunt, as his

name shows, was born at Ghent in Flanders. Through his wife and his two younger sons, Edward therefore kept contact with three of the most important Belgian principalities. His alliance with the rich and powerful cities of Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres, and his friendship with the merchant and captain of Ghent, Jacques Van Artevelde, who advised him to take the title of King of France, are matters of common knowledge. Yet that alliance was not destined to bear any lasting fruit, because the English claim on French territory was doomed to ultimate failure, and because the growth of a Belgian State was to be the work of a princely dynasty, and not the achievement of cities ruled by burghers like the city of Ghent.

The foundation of Edward III's policy on the Continent was economic, and the main commercial interest that bound his insular possessions to the Netherlands was the export of wool grown in Great Britain, to be worked and woven on the looms of the towns of Flanders, Brabant, etc. Any interruption in the wool trade meant ruin to the sheep owner and shipper on the British side of the sea, and unemployment and starvation to the weavers and fullers on the other side. The two countries remained dependent on one another for this trade down to the close of the sixteenth century, and the connection was only severed slowly and with difficulty. England gradually succeeded in attracting Flemish weavers, and in setting up

looms that worked the native materials. The Belgians, on their part, substituted Spanish for English wool, to keep their artisans at work when British supplies failed to reach them. But for several centuries the merchants of London and Belgium were linked as closely together by their common business as their Sovereigns were by dynastic ties and political alliances. As long as the English Kings pursued the elusive hope of building up a Continental empire in France, as long as their statesmen were not content to remain what nature has made them, a people of islanders, England was not herself, and the Anglo-Belgian alliance could not begin. The century which saw the failure of Henry V's French ambitions is the fifteenth ; it is also that in which the rise of a united Belgian State took place. The process of this unification was exactly similar to that of most modern States. Just as England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland at first were four independent Crowns gradually brought together under one King, so Belgium was in the fifteenth century a combination of States that were slowly brought under one allegiance. The dynasty of Burgundy ruled various duchies, counties, and lordships that were called Lower Burgundy after their Sovereigns, or Low Countries (*i.e.* Netherlands) from their position. The three more important principalities were the County of Flanders, the Duchy of Brabant, and the Episcopal Principality of Liège ; the latter,

though governed by its Bishop, was indirectly a dependency of the same dynasty, as the Dukes of Brabant were its protectors or *avoués*. The smaller principalities of the south, such as Hainault, Namur, and Luxemburg, were more or less dependent on the three larger ones. As for the northern principalities (Holland, Friesland, etc.), they have since passed under a different political system.

Three geographical features of the country have remained unchanged to this day : first, the predominance of Brussels, which was from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards the favourite residence of the Belgian or Lower Burgundian Court and the seat of many central institutions ; secondly, the commercial supremacy of the city of Antwerp, on the Scheldt ; thirdly, the strategic importance to England of the Flemish coast of the North Sea. Those three cardinal facts form the immovable centre round which the fortunes of Belgium have since revolved.

Many readers are probably tempted to object that they have never heard of such a power as that just described, in the fifteenth century. The answer is that they have heard of it, only under a different name. The dynasty that welded those dominions into one is known to historians as the House of Burgundy, from its original French fief, but it rose to greatness through its possession of the Netherlands and its alliance with England during the Hundred

Years' War. It had its favourite residence in Brussels, where its precious collection of manuscripts is preserved to this day, under the name of the Burgundian Library (Bibliothèque de Bourgogne). The scenes of Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Henry VI* show how several representatives of this line, who were next to Kings in power and wealth, stood between the French and English Crowns, supporting now one, now the other, and deciding the issues of war and peace between them. As the English withdrew from the Continent to their island, the Dukes of Burgundy became more confirmed in the British alliance and in their opposition to France. The year of the conclusion of the treaty of friendship between Charles the Bold of Burgundy and Edward IV (1465) is rightly considered as the beginning of that close connection that has lasted, with only a few breaks and changes, to this day.

Although the Dukes of Burgundy never reached the official title of Kings, their Courts vied with Royal Courts in splendour and in power. One of the greatest European orders of knighthood, the Order of the Golden Fleece, was founded in Bruges in Flanders by Duke Philip the Good, on the occasion of his marriage with Isabella of Portugal in 1429-30. The origin of the symbol of the Golden Fleece, that was hung on a collar round the necks of the knights, is explained in a delightful variety of ways. One account is that the fleece, like the woolsack

on which English Chancellors take their seat in the House of Lords, signifies the woollen trade, and that the knights, who formed a consultative body in the State, were to be reminded by this of the importance of weavers and fullers. Motley believed that the Golden Fleece was meant at the same time for the Lamb of God, mystically, and for the material prosperity of the country. A more romantic if less edifying explanation is that the fair hair of Duke Philip's mistress, Marie de Rambrugghe, was the original golden fleece. Whether the locks of a Portuguese bride were dark or golden we have not been able to ascertain. What is very characteristic is that this order of knight-hood, originally created to assist in the government of Belgium, should have disappeared from the land of its birth, and should survive to-day in Austria and Spain, two countries the Sovereigns of which at one time reigned over the Low Countries. As long as the Dukes of Burgundy ranked among the potentates of Europe, they were powerful and valuable allies to the British Crown. The alliance began during the reign of the Lancastrian King Henry IV; it suffered interruption under his son Henry V and his grandson Henry VI, to be formally renewed in 1465 by the Yorkist King Edward IV, whose sister became Sovereign of the Belgian principalities in 1468 through her marriage at Bruges with Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. Through many

changes of fortune and of persons, the alliance came down to the sixteenth century, in which the Tudor King Henry VIII became the ally of the Emperor Charles V, who was the nephew of Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon.

Charles, himself a native of Ghent, during the first part of his reign considered his Belgian or Lower Burgundian territories as the principal source of his power, and in securing their full independence from France and Germany he perfected the work of the Burgundian Dukes.

As long as Belgium remained the most important part of Charles V's domains, and until it was succeeded by Spain in his political system, the advantages of this combination to England were obvious. Without having to support a garrison in Western Europe, it kept the southern coast of the North Sea out of the hands of those great nations that happened to be a danger to its safety, at one time France, at another Spain, as at present Germany, and it gained a free hand for its insular and maritime policy.

No less obvious was the advantage to the Belgian nation, who were able to face their powerful neighbours on terms of equality. The earliest form of that alliance, which may be called the Anglo-Burgundian, persisted as long as the unity of the Netherlands remained unbroken. The Emperor Charles V, the last ruler of Belgium, who was for a long time

popular and at home in the country, still held between his uncle and ally, the English King Henry VIII, and the French King Francis I, a position comparable to that of his ancestor Philip the Good between the two rival Powers.

Charles's native city of Ghent was then one of the largest towns of Western Europe, and his commercial capital, Antwerp, was, according to an old proverb, the jewel of the universe: the world is a ring, and Antwerp the diamond therein. This period of wealth and splendour came to an end with the unity of the country, and was destroyed by the civil strife and the external troubles that were the consequence of the wars of the Reformation in the second half of the sixteenth century. The sources of the power and riches of the three States that were the chief foundations of modern Belgium, viz., Flanders, Brabant, and Liège, lay in their cities, which were extremely numerous for such a small territory. No doubt their mutual rivalry was an obstacle to political union, but the municipal system of government also quickened many vital impulses, and, by limiting the action of the central authorities, it paved the way for the introduction of government by consent. Foreign visitors to Belgium marvelled at the large number of the towns, at their splendour, and at the preponderating part played by them not only in economic and administrative activity, but in intellectual and artistic production, in religion, indeed in all forms of social energy.

The reason for this was that Belgian nationality and life were fundamentally civic, more so than any other Western life to the north of the Alps. This appears undeniably even in the organisation of the University and of public charity. The University of Louvain belonged to the city within the precincts of which it had its seat no less than it belonged to the Sovereign and to the Church, through their representative, the Chapter of St. Peter's. Notwithstanding the extension of the powers of the Crown, the Corporation of Louvain still had the appointment of some of the professors down to the dissolution of the University at the end of the eighteenth century. Similarly, the great reform of the poor law which was carried out under Charles V was due to the initiative of the city of Ypres, which undertook the suppression of beggary by obliging paupers to work. These are typical instances of the energy of municipal authorities whose self-reliance retarded the progress of centralisation in the modern State and prevented the establishment of complete absolutism. Nowhere else were the cities so prosperous, so industrious, or so tenacious of their local traditions.

The earliest form of the alliance lasted then about a century; in the second period, the British dominions grew larger and more powerful, while Belgium became smaller and weaker. The northern counties of the Netherlands, with Holland at their head, separated from the south,

and the attention of English statesmen was henceforth divided between the Protestant Republic and the Catholic southern principalities. But their attitude towards the two parts of the Low Countries was not the same. They supported the Dutch Republic against France, the old aggressor, but they also felt jealous of Dutch colonial trade and naval power, which they tried to undermine and destroy. The annexation of Ceylon, Guiana, and South Africa to the British Empire was the ultimate result of that struggle. England felt no such jealousy with regard to Belgium, who owned neither navy nor colonies, and she was fairly consistent in defending Belgian territory against encroachment.

But this could not be done in the second period, as it was in the first, with few military expeditions on the Continent, or without loss and expense. From Queen Elizabeth, who, in spite of her preference for diplomatic methods, was most reluctantly forced into Continental wars, by the advice of her Ministers and by the appeals of her Protestant subjects, down to the Dutch King William III and his successor, Queen Anne, English blood had to be shed and English treasure squandered in the land that acquired the melancholy distinction of becoming the cockpit of Europe. These losses were not compensated by any corresponding gains. And here we see the point where the foreign policy of England touches the internal

policy of Belgium. That connection between the home affairs of the Netherlands and the security of England had not escaped Elizabethan statecraft. It was an axiom with the Queen herself that the autonomy of the Belgian provinces was a necessity to her kingdom, as it withheld from the Spanish Crown the full command of the financial and military resources of the Low Countries. Philip II, an absolute monarch in Spain, was hampered in the administration of those countries by charters and privileges to which his subjects clung defiantly. He could raise no supply without the consent of the three estates, clergy, nobility, and towns, and his governors had to bargain and argue with a tenacious and restive opposition about every State measure.

Students of history know how tragic and inspiring was the battle fought in the sixteenth century by the Netherlands against the political and religious tyranny of the mightiest of Continental rulers, but the effect of the struggle is often imperfectly realised. It is believed that Philip II completely succeeded in stifling the independent spirit of the Belgian provinces and in turning them into Spanish territories, dependencies of Spain, under the same absolute system of government. This view is not in agreement with the facts. Notwithstanding religious despotism, notwithstanding the Inquisition's power over the minds and con-

sciences of men, the Belgians managed to maintain their national spirit and to preserve their time-honoured institutions ; their charters and privileges survived, at any rate in Brabant, which had now risen to be the paramount province. The Spanish and, later, the Austrian Sovereigns used devious methods to force absolutism on their subjects ; they strengthened the authority of the Central Government and extended its power over some branches of the administration, such as the Army, the Treasury, and the Courts of justice. But the municipalities and some of the principalities, such as Brabant and Hainault, preserved a considerable amount of freedom, especially in economic matters. Their success was due partly to the exhaustion of the Crown of Spain and partly to English and Dutch advocacy of their local privileges. Here again we find the treaties of the close of the Reformation period foreshadowing the international agreements of the nineteenth century. The Prince who, as Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders, Hainault, and Namur, and Duke of Luxemburg, etc., was the Sovereign of the Southern Netherlands, was far away in Madrid or in Vienna, and was represented in Brussels by a Governor-General. By a strange anomaly, which shows that Belgium had not ceased to be a separate State, this officer kept a Court and was surrounded by the diplomatists of foreign Powers. Not only did representatives of England and Holland

hold fortresses and keep garrisons on his territory, but they claimed a right to a share of the revenue, and conducted negotiations with the representatives of the aristocracy and the burghers in the assemblies of their States. At one time, in the early eighteenth century, they even assumed the government of the country through a committee, known to historians as the Anglo-Batavian Conference, of which the Duke of Marlborough was a member. History probably affords few examples of such an intricate and self-contradictory system where the elements of the federal Republic, of the hereditary Monarchy, and of foreign military occupation are inextricably mixed together. One part of the system, at any rate, was sprung from the soil, and warranted the persistence of a national consciousness and of national institution—that is the maintenance of provincial and municipal privileges, often infringed but never destroyed by the Government, the meeting of provincial estates and municipal councils, and the voting of supplies of money for public purposes.

The natives of Belgium not only possessed the machinery of government, laws and finances of their own, and complete staffs of officers to administer them ; they not only enjoyed some control over military affairs, through the contributions made by them to the support of the standing army, but they also possessed some military organisation of their own. The old

municipal militias, or brotherhoods of armed men, similar to the train bands of the City of London, had survived from the Middle Ages, and though their discipline and equipment might be inferior to those of the regular troops, they could man the ramparts of their towns and look with some confidence on the standing armies of soldiers that were small in number, if formidable by reason of their organisation.

It is necessary to dwell at some length upon these particulars, because the handbooks composed outside Belgium naturally take no notice of them and are therefore unintentionally misleading. In these handbooks the Brabanders, Flemings, and Walloons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are represented as people who have lost their original nationality, who belong to the Kings of Spain and to the Austrian Emperors. The fact that they preserved their time-honoured charters and institutions, that Brabant kept even a kind of written Constitution, the *Joyeuse Entrée*, is overlooked, so that their sudden resurrection as an autonomous community in 1830 is regarded as a portent or as an historical freak, instead of being explained as the resumption of a normal growth out of the roots of a past that has been temporarily disturbed, though never completely torn up. Instead of keeping a large standing army, British statesmen of the eighteenth century cast about for means of preserving the Belgian coast and the mouth

of the Scheldt at a smaller cost to England. The result of their efforts is seen in a number of expedients, the best known of which is the Barrier Treaty of 1715, while their final outcome has been that Belgian neutrality that survived to the year 1914.

What was the Barrier Treaty? It was an agreement between the Sovereign of Belgium, on the one hand, and England and Holland, on the other, to provide for the defence of the southern frontier of Belgium against France. The Belgian Government had to contribute fortresses and money, the Dutch found the garrisons. The underlying assumption was that Great Britain and Holland had a vital interest in the integrity of Belgium, and that Belgium was powerless to help herself without their assistance. In these premises we can see the germ of the future independence and neutrality of Belgium; for if that country could have maintained and organised its own fortifications and armies, the Maritime Powers would gladly have saved themselves the burden of protecting it.

The solution of the problem, as many statesmen of the seventeenth (Richelieu) and of the eighteenth century perceived, especially in Holland, lay in the independence of Belgium, on the basis of her own institutions. How vigorous the wish for complete independence had remained was suddenly discovered at the close of the eighteenth century, when a republic

was founded in Brussels under the name of the United Belgian States, in obvious imitation of the newly-founded United States of North America, although in a very different spirit. This creation bore testimony to the people's ardent attachment to their traditions. We shall not try to explain the causes and vicissitudes of the rising which took place a few years after the American Revolution. It is called the Brabant Revolution, and was intensely conservative in character. The Sovereign of Belgium, known as Emperor Joseph II of Austria, was a ruthless reformer, who had determined to improve the condition of his subjects without regard to their laws, their habits, or their wishes. His soldiers were defeated, his rule was overthrown, and the time-honoured privileges and institutions were restored in the old way. We owe the present tricolour flag of Belgium to that rebellion of conservatives; the black and yellow are the old colours of Brabant, the red was added later on. In more than one respect the United Belgian States of 1790 were identical with the Belgium of to-day. An aide-de-camp to the Duke of York, who commanded the army in Belgium, General Sir Harry Calvert, wrote in 1794 from Tournai to William Pitt: "I can assure you, from observation, that they [the Belgians] are generally, and particularly towards the frontier, an industrious, worthy people; that they abhor anarchy, and are zealous

admirers of their Constitution, which, however, they conceive, in many instances, to have been very much infringed upon."

That love of liberty was stronger still in the Episcopal Principality of Liège, which had been since the sixteenth century a more or less independent State, closely connected with the other Belgian provinces. It bore its share of all their political and economic trials, but retained its mediæval institutions much longer than they did. Sovereign power was held in the Principality by the Bishop and by "the sense of the country," as was the established phrase—that is, by a consultative body on which all towns, down to the smaller ones, were represented, while the city, *i.e.* the Municipality or Corporation of Liège, predominated. This dualistic Constitution survived, although the Sovereign's power was gradually extended. This power was limited, not only by the Third Estate, or cities, but also by the Chapter of St. Lambert's Cathedral, which by itself formed the whole Ecclesiastical or Spiritual Estate, and enjoyed extensive privileges. It had a right to be "advised" and heard on all affairs of importance. In a general way, the clergy, whose property had steadily increased, enjoyed many privileges, especially with regard to taxation. The nobility, a narrow and exclusive caste, had preserved some of its manorial rights. As a reaction against this backward political condition, the doctrines of the French

philosophers, which were themselves derived from the teaching of English thinkers of the eighteenth century, met with general favour. The privileges of the Prince-Bishops, especially their monopolies, and those of the clergy, appeared particularly excessive. Numerous books and periodicals were printed to spread the new ideas, the censorship found itself powerless to prevent their publication, and it was even possible in 1771 to issue the works of Voltaire in Liège under a false rubric. From that time the revolution was accomplished in the public mind, and the Episcopal Principality of Liège was conquered for the principles of government by consent and of political equality, as were the educated classes in other Belgian provinces.

One striking peculiarity of the Principality of Liège, which foreshadowed the part to be played by it, as by the rest of Belgium from 1830, was its permanent neutrality. It had its rise in the fifteenth century, and it should be noticed that it was proclaimed again in the sixteenth by the representatives of the country, while the Bishop was reluctant to approve. One reason for this was that it was used principally to limit his authority. It was a step towards government by the people; it was also a significant sign of the pacific leanings which have always been part of the traditions of Belgium.

The souls of our ancestors cannot be alto-

gether understood by means of the facts of history, and we would not venture to state that such words as freedom and patriotism meant to them what they now mean to us. Still we have been able to notice many proofs of the continuance of Belgian national consciousness. In the reign of Napoleon I, who ruled Belgium with great success, one of his *préfets* in charge of a Belgian *département* said on leaving his post : " These people are neither Austrian, nor English, nor anti-French ; they are Belgian."

After having dealt with our first or Anglo-Burgundian period, with the second, or that of the wars of the Reformation, and the Barrier system, we now pass to the third, or that of Belgian neutrality. This third period began after the interlude of fifteen years of Dutch rule, which proved a failure, for it was powerless to unite two nations that had for two centuries traversed separate roads. In 1830 the Belgians proclaimed their independence, elected an Assembly, to which they gave the American name of Congress, and drew up a Constitution (1831) containing a declaration of rights after the American and French models, and establishing a parliamentary monarchy, with an upper House, called a Senate, and a lower one, called a House of Representatives. These two names again are borrowed from the United States.

So many dozens of paper Constitutions have been produced in modern times that these

incidents would call for little comment but for the circumstance that this was the most liberal, and proved the longest lived, of all European Constitutions. The Belgians pride themselves on having maintained their local institutions longer and more successfully than any Continental nation, just as the English have done. They also have a right to boast of having set an example to the whole Continent in the practice of parliamentary government, and of having remained faithful to their self-ordained laws to this day. Having drawn up a Constitution, the National Congress proceeded to the election of a King, whose name had been suggested by Lord Palmerston, with the remark that "he would no more be English than he would be French, but that he would look to his own interests and to those of the State which he governed." Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg had married Princess Charlotte, the only child of George IV, and but for her untimely death would have held in England a position like that of the Prince Consort during Queen Victoria's reign; he was a naturalised British subject, though he had been born a German and had served in the Russian army. His conduct had been rightly forecast by Palmerston; he reigned as a Belgian prince and thoroughly justified the confidence placed in him. He was the trusted friend and adviser of his niece, Queen Victoria. The interview between the delegates of the Belgian revolutionists and the

ex-Russian General took place in London, and was somewhat picturesque. The Belgians handed him a copy of their Constitution, and he observed that it left the Crown practically powerless. Both parties agreed that the experiment was worth making, and thus a new European dynasty, destined to play an eventful part in the future, was established.

At this stage there was again a kind of Anglo-Belgian alliance, but one in quite a novel form, as Great Britain, together with the other Great Powers of Europe, guaranteed Belgium's neutrality. The consequences of that guarantee are much in evidence at the present time.

The cordial relations between the British Empire and the Belgian Kingdom have hardly been disturbed during the last eighty-four years, as the quarrel started by Roger Casement, then Consul of England, in the Congo about the treatment of natives was not properly a concern of the Belgian Government. The Congo was in those days a free State, owned by King Leopold II as an absolute monarch; it became a Belgian colony and passed under the control of the Belgian Crown and Parliament in consequence of a treaty. Whether Consul Casement's hostility to the Congo had its roots in the love for Germany that he displayed at a later stage of his career is not at present known to the public. No doubt we may expect more light on that question at some future date. Meanwhile it is obvious that if

the quarrel between England and Belgium had become more serious it would have brought great advantages to Germany.

The Belgian experiment suggested by English and French statesmanship in 1831 has stood the test of experience. An American author, Ch. W. Colby, considers that "not only did the Belgians fulfil their part of the bargain by abstaining from ambitious plots, but they also held up an example to Europe as a quiet, industrious community, which sought nothing more than to do its work in peace. . . . Belgium has justified its existence so far that to most Englishmen the conquest of her territory by foreign force would have seemed a worse crime than the partition of Poland." In Leopold II's opinion, Belgium's neutrality invested her with the character of a modern Delos, of a sacred soil the invasion of which meant a deliberate and open violation of the principles of international law. Such is the invasion from which Germany did not shrink in her attempt to upset the balance of Europe for her own profit.

II

ENGLAND AND THE LIBERATION OF THE BELGIAN PRINCIPALITIES

THE fate of the country that lies between the North Sea and the hills of the Ardennes has been chiefly governed by the numerous cities that flourished there during the whole course of its history. Nowhere is this more obvious than in its relations with England from the early Middle Ages downwards. Through the influence of their cities, Belgian rulers have again and again been brought into contact with the island kingdom from which they derived so many economic advantages. Therefore the period that preceded the alliance concluded in the fifteenth century between Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and King Edward IV, one of the turning points of European history, might be called the economic period.

It would be a mistake to imagine that such relations only became frequent after the Norman Conquest ; their date is much earlier. Perhaps the marriage of a daughter of Alfred, King of the West Saxons, with Baldwin II, Count of Flanders, is a sign of that early intimacy, but

we find undeniable evidence of it in the regulations of the market of London at the close of the tenth century. These regulations refer not only to merchants of Flanders, but also to those of Liège, of Huy, and of Nivelles. It is noteworthy that the men of Liège are mentioned apart from the "men of the German Emperor." All those merchants sailed in their own ships, bringing cargoes of wines and other merchandise which they exchanged for wool and hides. As they neared London, they hoisted their flags and were wont to intone the "Kyrie Eleison," either to give notice of their peaceful intentions or to be more easily identified by the watchmen. Except on rare occasions, their trade does not seem to have been disturbed by political quarrels; once, in 1049, for instance, the Emperor Henry III obtained the aid of Danish and English vessels to subdue the Count of Flanders, Baldwin V, whose independent spirit he resented.

The Norman Conquest brought to England a flood of warriors, artisans, and merchants from Flanders, and more than ever Flemish and English ships plied between the mouth of the Scheldt and the Zwin and the eastern shores of Britain. From England they exported wool, hides, and leathers, while they imported into it French and German wines, carved stones from Tournai, spices and cloth of gold from Lombardy, and woven materials from Belgium. The Conqueror's ambition, however, cast its

shadow over this prospect of friendship and prosperity. As he claimed to have some rights in the county of Flanders, Count Robert I, surnamed the Frisian, thought it wise to seek support abroad. He married one of his daughters to King Cnut of Denmark, with whom he signed a treaty of alliance against King William. At the same time, he offered a helping hand to William's rebellious son, Robert of Normandy. The young man spent some time at his Court, and a few years later he joined in the Crusade under another Belgian, Godfrey of Bouillon, whose fame has extended far beyond the horizon of the Netherlands.

The fleets of Flanders and of England often acted together in the course of the Crusades ; this was the case in 1107, when thousands of English, Danish, Flemish and Antwerp pilgrims were transported overseas. Flemish vessels bound for the Holy Land used first to call at an English port, thence to sail along with English vessels, thus sharing like risks and advantages.

Robert II of Flanders, surnamed of Jerusalem, and Baldwin VII, who were contemporaries to William Rufus and Henry I, were, like their predecessor Robert the Frisian, moved by the fear of English aggression, and therefore pursued a pro-French policy for some time. It should be remembered that they were vassals to the French Crown, which owed them its protection.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, when the King of France, Louis VI, wanted to force William, son of Duke Robert of Normandy, on the Flemings as the successor of Count Charles the Good, the last direct descendant of Baldwin I, the burghers of the towns rebelled against the claimant, whose upbringing and inclinations were French, and who was opposed to England. While the barons sided with the claimant, the merchants and the peasants united to uphold the rights of Thierry d'Alsace. The rebellion came to a sudden close through the death of William, who was killed at Alost in 1128, and King Louis had to recognise Thierry as Count of Flanders.

In the early twelfth century Flanders, Brabant, and the other principalities of the Netherlands suffered from over-population, which gave rise to economic troubles and caused a strong current of emigration, partly towards the island of Great Britain. In the west of England especially many traces of Flemish colonies are to be found : King Henry I settled one of these colonies in Pembrokeshire with the view of providing a bulwark against the Welsh. He probably used the services of fighting men from Brabant, whose military valour was highly esteemed, for he was on the friendliest terms with the Duchy of Brabant. He had obtained the hand of Adelia of Louvain, daughter of Duke Godfrey I, in 1119. This princess was celebrated for her beauty, and she is known to

English readers as the "fair maid of Brabant." Robert of Gloucester wrote that

"He knew no woman so fair as she
Was seen on middle earth."

Another chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, addressed her in Latin verses which we quote from Camden's translation :

"When Adeliza's name should grace my song,
A sudden wonder stops the Muse's tongue;
Your crown and jewels, when compared to you,
How poor your crown, how pale your jewels shew !
Take off your robes, your rich attire remove,
Such pomp may load you, but can ne'er improve,
In vain your costly ornaments are worn,
You they obscure, while others they adorn."

Adelicia was a patroness of learning and of letters, and to her Philippe de Thann dedicated his Bestiary. She did not cease to display great interest in her native country, the Duchy of Brabant, which was already asserting its complete independence of the Empire. She presented it with a richly embroidered standard, no doubt adorned with a figure of the lion which is still seen in the arms of Belgium. Adelicia had no children by King Henry I, and after his death she married William of Albin and thus became the ancestress of the present Dukes of Norfolk and of two English Queens, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard.

King Stephen (1135-1154) was more intimately connected with Belgian dynasties than his predecessors. His Queen, Matilda, was a

niece of Godfrey of Bouillon, and he not only fought in Flanders himself, but brought Flemish mercenaries over to Great Britain to take part in his own wars, under William of Ypres, who seems to have been, like the King himself, a lawless warrior in a lawless age.

As long as Normandy, which lay within easy distance of Flanders, belonged to the English Crown, *i.e.* down to the year 1204, the Counts of Flanders' attitude was a very cautious one. Being vassals to the French Crown, they could not help being dragged into the recurrent struggles between their overlords and the English Kings. Their feudal duties made it impossible to choose between the belligerent parties. Not even neutrality was allowed. Under this constraint, their policy was regulated by the policy of France towards them: they joined the Capetians or opposed them as they appeared to be their protectors or their foes. That is why we see Philippe d'Alsace, after being first favourable to England, suddenly enter into an alliance with the King of France against Henry II (1187). Baldwin V of Hainault, who became Baldwin VIII of Flanders, maintained his neutrality in order to favour Flemish trade with England, and he allowed his son, the future Emperor of Constantinople, Baldwin IX, an admirer of Richard Cœur de Lion, to become a vassal and pensioner to the English King. In his struggle against Philippe-Augustus, Richard also secured the assistance

of the Duke of Brabant and of the Bishop of Liège, and this induced a large number of knights from Hesbaye to take service in the English army. This system of alliances persisted down to the battle of Bouvines (1214), in which the Anglo-Guelph party were routed. Here the Count of Flanders, Ferrand of Portugal, fought by King John's side against his own overlord, Philippe-Augustus, and fell into his hands, while the Duke of Brabant saved himself by flight.

Were the Belgian principalities fated to be annexed by France? Would they have strength to resist the growing pressure of the Capetians' policy? Were the latter going to profit by the extension of the Flemish power beyond the right bank of the Scheldt, which had long ceased to be a real frontier between France and the Empire? For the feudal bond connecting Brabant and other lands beyond the Scheldt with their Imperial overlords had been very much loosened. There was a possibility at this time that the country between the North Sea and the Ardennes, the Central Francia which had been the heart of the Empire of Charlemagne, might pass under the sceptre of the Kings of France. What set a limit to the expansion of French influence was the rivalry between that country and England, in consequence of which the Belgian rulers gained greater freedom of action and were able to pursue an independent policy, aiming at pro-

moting the interests of their own subjects and at consolidating their own territories. More than ever before, and more than in any other country, the merchant class claimed a paramount influence in public affairs, and therefore the Belgian princes had to keep on good terms with the country from which the traders drew their raw materials. Not only the policy of Flanders, the most civilised part of Belgium in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but also that of the more backward Duchy of Brabant, and partly also that of the Principality of Liège, is governed principally by the interests of the wool trade.

The chronicles of the time do not contain many particulars of economic phenomena ; still we find in them occasional signs of the close connection between England and the Belgian lands. The vernacular chronicle of Lodewijk Van Velthem, a priest of Brabant, for example, narrates important events of English history : the rising of Simon de Montfort and the Barons, Queen Eleanor's captivity in the Tower of London, her attempt to escape, and her flight to Bruges. Through Van Velthem's writings the people of Flanders and Brabant became acquainted with the legendary romances of the Knights of the Round Table, which were rehearsed at the wedding of Edward I and Eleanor of Castile, and kept alive the traditions of chivalry at the Court of England.

Down to the middle of the fourteenth cen-

ture, when the alliance between Edward III and the manufacturing cities of Flanders was dissolved, England produced much raw wool, which was mostly exported to be woven into cloth in Belgian towns. This export trade was not only the foundation of the national prosperity, as the owners of the flocks, the shear men, the packers, and the seamen who conveyed the fleeces to market formed a considerable part of the population. It was also a necessary support for the royal authority, as the duties levied on the fleeces dispatched from British harbours formed a main part of the revenue of the Crown. The English did not begin to work the wool themselves before the fourteenth century, and even at a much later period they remained dependent on the foreign market for the sale of their staple commodity.

As for the towns of the Netherlands, they could not subsist without the raw materials that kept their looms busy and their commerce going: when the wool failed to reach them, they found themselves out of employment and reduced to starvation. Those Flemings whose business it was to purchase wool from England formed themselves into a company in the thirteenth century, under the name of the hanse of London. Their object was to protect each other against interlopers, and against the impositions of the islanders with whom they were dealing, in such matters as adulteration of goods, bad coins, and irregular payments.

Their chief weapon was the boycott. As they contributed largely to the royal revenue, it is not surprising to find King Henry III taking them under his protection in 1232. In 1236 the same King promised that they should not be disturbed if a war broke out between England and France, as long as the county of Flanders took no active part in it.

At the close of the thirteenth century, King Edward I was preparing for war against France, and, as King John had done a century before, he enlisted a number of rulers of the Netherlands and of Western Germany in his alliance. He gave his daughter Margaret in marriage to the son of Duke John I of Brabant, who succeeded his father as John II. The English Princess accepted the dedication of a Flemish rhymed chronicle by Jan Van Heelu of the battle of Worringen (1288), one of the military triumphs of her father-in-law. Through this poem she became acquainted both with the language and the history of the country of her adoption.

After 1295, at the time of the quarrels between the French King Philip the Fair and Edward I, the export of wool to the towns of Flanders, whose patricians had sided with France, was stopped. But that wool found an easy market in the land of Edward's son-in-law, Duke John of Brabant, who attracted English merchants to the port of Antwerp by granting special privileges, and even handed that port

over to Edward as a fief. Guy of Dampierre, Count of Flanders, strove to maintain a strictly neutral policy between his overlord Philip the Fair and the English King, who controlled the raw materials of the chief Flemish industry. He promised to give his daughter in marriage to King Edward's eldest son, but the bride was snatched away by the French, and the Count had to submit to all sorts of insults and humiliations from his overlord and finally broke with him in 1297. But his followers, the guild labourers and the peasants of the maritime region, were not adequately prepared for war, and Edward I was late in giving the assistance he had promised. Flanders was annexed to the domains of the French Crown, at least for a year or two.

The year 1302 was the date of the battle of Courtrai, which is remembered by French and Belgian historians alike as the greatest victory of the burghers over the knighthood and over the royal power. In this battle an army of weavers, fullers, and farmers, all on foot and armed with pikes, routed a host of mounted knights in armour and professional soldiers who were led by the French aristocracy. Though long celebrated as a national triumph of the Flemings, it was chiefly a victory of democracy, and it shook the confidence of the nobility and patricians in their superior armament and training. Four thousand gilt spurs, the conventional emblems of chivalry, were

gathered from the field. Hence the battle is often called the battle of the Spurs of Gold. The anniversary of the day is kept as a kind of national festival, and it was remembered in King Albert's historic appeal to his people in 1914.

The battle of Courtrai aroused intense interest throughout Europe. It is the subject of an English poem of the early fourteenth century, in which feudal France appears as completely crushed by a handful of fullers—a somewhat exaggerated view. How international the democratic movement of the period was is illustrated by a famous rhyme which is practically identical in Middle Flemish and in John Ball's English :

“ Toen Adam spat en Eva span,
Waar was toen de edelman ? ”

“ When Adam delved and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman ? ”

Thus spoke on both sides of the sea the artisans and labourers, when they raised their protest against the tyranny of caste. But the victory of the commoners bore no lasting fruit : the army of the “ fleurs de lys,” supported by the patricians in the cities, recovered the advantage, and a violent reaction set in in favour of the aristocracy. The oppressed democrats turned towards the English King Edward III, who was putting forward a claim to the French Crown, and the Burgomaster of Bruges, William de Deken, approached him in order to make

him assume the style of King of France. Edward was too busy with the Scottish war to supply the Flemings with the assistance that they needed. King Philippe de Valois suddenly invaded their country and inflicted a crushing defeat on the democratic party in the battle of Cassel (1328). De Deken was taken prisoner, carried to Paris, sentenced to death, and drawn and quartered.

A fresh wave of democracy arose in Flanders and in the neighbouring lands at the beginning of the Hundred Years' War : it was the result of the economic disturbances caused by the war.

When discussing the events of those days, we must remember that while the English Crown acted in the name of a united community, whose opinions were focussed by Parliament, there was no such unity among the Belgian States, although the Duchy of Brabant and the County of Flanders acted together for a time.

The Dukes of Brabant were practically independent, notwithstanding their nominal tie with the Holy Roman Empire, and they shaped their course according to the needs of their cities, chief among which were Louvain and Brussels, and according to the carefully laid plans of the one great and successful dynasty of Belgium. The Dukes were closely connected with the ruling family of England : their one large harbour, Antwerp, lay far up the mouth

of the Scheldt and was therefore safe from attack, and their land frontier was on all sides covered by small States as a protection against foreign invasions. But the County of Flanders was then, as Belgium is now, open to attack by land and by water. Moreover, its Counts were vassals and often close friends of the Kings of France, and they were frequently involved in wars with their rebellious subjects, the fullers and weavers of Ypres, Bruges, and Ghent. Whenever France was at war with England (and that was very often), the French overlord would call upon his vassal of Flanders for assistance, and England would take measures against the Flemish merchants who came to Great Britain to buy wool for their looms and to sell cloth of Ypres and Ghent. While the Count followed his liege lord in battle, the citizens were exercised about the blockade of their harbours and the stoppage of their imports and exports. There was no way out of the dilemma : peace and friendship with France meant loss of the sea-borne trade of Flanders, friendship with England meant painful and ruinous wars against France.

In 1336 the Count of Flanders, Louis de Nevers, no doubt in obedience to an order from the French King, ordered all commerce with England to be interrupted, and thereby roused the resentment of the cities. The arrest of English merchants in Flanders rendered reprisals inevitable. Edward replied by for-

bidding the export of wool and by prohibiting the sale of foreign cloth throughout the realm. By so doing he struck a double blow at Flemish trade: he kept raw materials from reaching the manufacturing cities of Flanders and at the same time closed one of their principal markets. This policy was extremely wise in promoting English interests while damaging the subjects of the Count. From his accession, Edward had endeavoured to introduce the clothmaking industry into his dominions. He had already granted valuable privileges to those artisans from the Netherlands who would settle in England, and the prohibition of the export of wool promoted the growth of a manufacturing trade that was half a century later to compete with that of Flanders. In this way England worked at least part of the wool that she produced, and was no longer compelled to sell it to her neighbours, so that she suffered much less from the interruption of commercial intercourse. Moreover, Edward maintained the prohibition for the County of Flanders only. The subjects of the Duke of Brabant were allowed to obtain supplies from his kingdom, and he even promised to transfer the wool staple from its former seat in Bruges to the harbour of Antwerp in Brabant. The Flemings were closely blockaded, German merchants were kept out of the port of Bruges, at the Zwin, and the King of Castile was asked to break off his connection with the County.

In 1338 a revolutionary government was established in Ghent in consequence of a rising of both artisans and patricians. Jacques van Artevelde, a wealthy landowner, probably interested in the cloth trade, headed the rising and, after vainly trying to maintain the town's neutrality between the warring kingdoms, finally entered an alliance with Edward III, who had landed in Antwerp with supplies of wool and money, after obtaining the consent of the Duke of Brabant. There was neither law nor precedent to justify an open alliance between a mediæval city and a foreign ruler against the city's lawful Sovereign. Such an exceptional occurrence can only be accounted for by the paramount position of the cities in the Netherlands. It was an assertion in the foreign policy of Flanders of the interests of the townsmen, who managed to decide the fate of the whole County.

The alliance was unjustifiable from the feudal point of view, and by entering into it Van Artevelde's party became rebels against their Count and against his French overlord. In order to overcome their scruples, Edward took Jacques Van Artevelde's advice and adopted the title of King of France in 1339. At the same date he made an abortive attempt to invade France from Flanders. From this time the alliance hung fire, chiefly because the English people did not give sufficient support to the enterprises of their King, who found himself unable to provide the supplies of wool and money

promised by him and to bring provisions to the Flemish country, which could not, as usual, obtain grain from Brabant, Hainault, and Artois, and was therefore reduced to starvation. Another difficulty was that the artisans could not desert their looms indefinitely to fight for the English King. Edward therefore had to seek the friendship of feudal lords, who had regular levies of knights and varlets at their command. These he found in Brittany, so that the centre of political and military interest drifted southwards. His friend Jacques Van Artevelde fell a prey to the civil dissensions of his townspeople and was murdered in 1345.

Although Philip Van Artevelde, his son and Queen Philippa's godson, was taken to London by his widowed mother, he did not stand as near to the English Kings as his father had done. Like his father, he led the burghers of Ghent against the French and lost his life in the struggle (1382), but he seems to have been a spokesman of the poorer artisans rather than of the whole community of the city at whose head his father had placed himself. He was contemporary with the democratic rebellion which disturbed the peace of England under King Richard II.

We owe the narrative of these events to a countryman and servant of Queen Philippa, the chronicler Jean Froissart, who was born in 1338 at Valenciennes in the county of Hainault, and who was therefore a contemporary of Chaucer's master, Lionel of Antwerp, and of

Philip Van Artevelde. Like Adelia of Louvain, Queen Philippa of Hainault was a protectress of literature: Froissart declares that he was "made" by her.

One very Belgian characteristic of the chronicler's was the catholic width of his international sympathies: he travelled widely over Western Europe, and was welcomed at the Courts of lords and princes of various nationalities. He was as much at home in England and in France as in his own country, and he shows no sign of local patriotism or understanding for the aims of the Flemish woolweavers. All his sympathy and admiration went to the rulers whom he served and to the courtiers amongst whom his life was spent. The teacher and model whom he followed was Jean le Bel, a Canon of Liège, who served King Edward in his Scottish wars. Another, shorter narrative of Edward III's visit to the Continent is found in Jan Boendaele's rhymed account in Flemish: *Van den derden Edewaerde*.

The close of the fourteenth century was in Belgium the eve of the Burgundian period. While retaining many economic and other relations with England, the Belgian principalities were drawn more and more towards the French sphere of influence, so that they detached themselves politically from England. But a change was impending which was prepared by that very House of Burgundy which was initially hostile to the English Power.

III

THE ANGLO-BURGUNDIAN ALLIANCE

IN 1384, two years after the last of the Arteveldes had died, vainly hoping for English help, which came too late to be of any use to the burghers of Ghent, a new dynasty gained a foothold in Flanders. A younger son of the French House of Valois, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, laid the foundation of the modern Belgian State by his accession to the County of Flanders in the right of his wife. He initiated a system of dynastic marriages intended to lead to the union of all the Netherlands, which was continued after his death by John the Fearless, who became more independent of France as he grew more powerful in the Low Countries, where he established the centre of his authority.

While remaining politically associated with France, the Low Countries continued in close economic connection with England, so much so that the Flemish towns compelled John the Fearless to conclude a separate commercial treaty with her (1405-1406), which was followed by a series of truces that were renewed from year

to year. The Duke's mother, Margaret of Male, took an active part in the Anglo-Burgundian negotiations.

John's son and successor, Philip the Good, surnamed the Great Duke of the West, was one of the most powerful potentates of his day, for he was the first prince that united all the crowns of Belgium, and was, at the same time, Duke of Brabant, of Limburg, and of Luxemburg, and Count of Flanders, of Hainault, and of Namur, Protector of Liège, etc.

Historians usually refer to the Duke by the style of his original French fief of Burgundy; hence the name of Lower Burgundy applied to the Low Countries; but this should not blind us to the fact that he created the unity of the Belgian nation, and his favourite residence was in Brussels. He was the first of his house to become familiar with the Flemish language, which was taught to him by order of his father, John the Fearless. Though John himself could not speak Flemish, he asserted his national claims by the choice of a Flemish motto: *Ik hou* [I hold].

Philip's shifty policy has brought his memory into disrepute; he is accused of perjury and treachery, but his defects have been greatly exaggerated. His main line of conduct was really neutrality, as he pursued the unification of his Belgian and Burgundian possessions which had been his father's aim. Before the events that led up to the battle of Agincourt,

he ordered his vassals to take no part in the contest then brewing between England and France. The estrangement between the dynasty of Burgundy and their French homeland was accentuated by the murder in 1419 of John the Fearless. Philip the Good purchased the County of Namur in 1421, inherited Brabant in 1430, and in 1433 wrested the Counties of Hainault, Holland, and Zeeland from his cousin Jacqueline of Bavaria by one of the most unscrupulous and romantic transactions in history.

The heiress to three of the most important territories of the Netherlands which were coveted by the ambitious Duke, Jacqueline was not only a mark for political intrigues, but was also the victim of a passionate and impulsive temperament which drove her to the most desperate adventures and made her an object of curiosity to poets and antiquarians. She had four husbands: the first was the French Dauphin who died from the effects of poison after two years of married life. Left a widow at sixteen, she next married Duke John IV of Brabant, from whom she expected support in the defence of her territories. But in this she was disappointed; they quarrelled, and finally the Pope annulled the marriage. Next after the Brabander, the Englishman Humphrey of Gloucester, brother to Henry V and guardian to his orphan heir, Henry VI, found favour in her eyes, obtained her hand, and made an expedition into her possessions of Hainault.

This adventure is wrongly considered by some historians as a betrayal of English interests, since it provoked a quarrel with Philip the Good and therefore endangered the Anglo-Burgundian alliance. They forget that the permanent union of Hainault, Brabant, and Holland with the Crown of England was contemplated in the marriage treaty, which must be regarded as one of the many attempts made in the past to secure a dominion for English rulers on the Continent. The Anglo-Burgundian alliance had been broken in 1435 by Duke Philip the Good, who suddenly, after having prohibited the import of English cloth (1428 and 1434), sided with the French in the manner described by Shakespeare in the First Part of *Henry VI*.

An outburst of resentment followed in England; merchants of Flanders, Hainault, and Picardy were massacred by the people of London, and many pamphlets were published demanding the prohibition of imports from the Netherlands. In one of these pamphlets, however, an agreement, founded on a kind of reciprocity, was suggested. This was entitled the "*Libell of Englishe Policye*" (1436) and contained, among other matters, the following prophecy:

"Thus muste Flaundres for need have unitee
And pees with us, it wol none other be,
Within short while, and ambassiatours
Wolde ben heer soon to treet for her socours."

When, in March, 1436, Philip the Good officially declared war on England with an eye

to the conquest of Calais, another "libel" dwelt on "the stultities of the Flemish deserting a real friend for a stranger's sake."

While these arguments and quarrels were in progress, Henry VI granted the County of Flanders to Humphrey of Gloucester, the husband of Jacqueline. But the brother of Henry V was not destined to rule in the Netherlands any more than Lionel of Antwerp or John of Gaunt, the Belgian-born sons of Edward III, had been, and a short and unsuccessful war sounded the knell of the hopes of Humphrey and Jacqueline.

Philip, on his part, was not more successful than his enemies: he suffered a demoralising defeat, and returned to the pursuit of his original ambition, the work of unification in Lower and Upper Burgundy. For this purpose he restored the commercial relations which had previously existed between England and the Netherlands. He was effectively assisted in this by his wife, Isabella of Portugal, the lady in whose honour the Golden Fleece was probably instituted. Isabella was a granddaughter of John of Gaunt through her mother, and therefore a cousin to Henry VI, on whom she was careful to call on her voyage from Portugal to Flanders. All her characteristic persistence was employed in the negotiations, and she succeeded, as early as 1438, in having an embassy dispatched for the restoration of trade relations. A truce was concluded and, after various

incidents, led to the desired commercial peace in 1443. This was the beginning of a closer alliance which was to have a lasting effect in the Netherlands at the very time when the dynasty that had welded them into one was on the point of disappearing.

In pursuance of his system of dynastic alliances, Duke Philip arranged a marriage between his son Charles the Bold and the English Princess Margaret of York. This union, which took place in 1468, put a seal on the Anglo-Burgundian league to which the shrewd Philip the Good had been a fickle and intermittent party; it is also important through its later effect on English history, for the bride was a staunch and fervent supporter of the House of York, to which she belonged. Her husband provided Edward IV with the means of acquiring the Crown, and after Edward's death, being herself a widow and Regent of the Netherlands, she used her position to countenance the impostures of Simnel and Warbeck.

John Paston the Younger, one of the English gentlemen that attended Margaret's wedding, gave an account of the festivities in a letter sent from Bruges to his mother, in which he expressed his wonder at the luxury witnessed by him at the Court of the Great Duke of the West, at the processions, pageants and tournaments, in which knights and citizens vied with one another in the display of gold and silver jewels, of precious stones, silks, and damasks.

“ By my troth,” he wrote, “ I heard never of so great plenty as there is . . . And, as for the Duke’s Court, as for lords, ladies and gentlewomen, knights, squires and gentlemen, I heard never of none like to it, save King Arthur’s Court, . . . they are the goodliest fellowship that ever I came among, and best can behave themselves, and most like gentlemen.”

Behind the show and display there was a conscious political purpose ; the Dukes were indeed the equals of kings, and by courtly ceremonies they kept up the spirit of loyalty and military efficiency among their followers. The love of pageantry favoured by the Burgundians in the fifteenth century has left a permanent impress on modern Belgian life. It is derived from the same decorative feeling which is prevalent of the painting of Rubens and of many of the Flemish artists. In the heyday of its original splendour it was only one of the signs of national prosperity. Commercial interests do not appear to have suffered very much from the wars of the time, until the English began to work more of their wool themselves and to export less in the raw state. Finally they sent to the Continent great quantities of cloth woven in their country which found a market in Belgian territory. There is no doubt that the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, from its beginnings, through its many breaks and changes, and down to the Reformation period, was largely founded upon commercial necessities, just as had been the

understanding between Edward III and Jacques Van Artevelde.

According to the practice of the Middle Ages, both the export of raw wool and that of finished cloth were carried on by companies of merchants. What the hanse of London had done in the service of the business men of Bruges was done for England by the merchants of the Staple of Calais, who held a monopoly for selling English fleeces to Continental customers, and by the company of Merchant Adventurers, whose centre was first in Bruges, and later in Antwerp, and who sold English cloth on the markets of the Continent.

When the two Governments quarrelled, they resorted to blockades or other vexatious measures against foreign traders, and finally, in 1496, they concluded a treaty of commerce known by the name of "Intercursus Magnus," and considered as the most liberal among the commercial treaties of the time. Arguments about tolls, duties, and fisheries were no less characteristic of fifteenth century politics than were pompous interviews of princes, tournaments, and chapters of the Golden Fleece and of the Garter.

More than once, quarrels broke out between Belgium and England on economic and maritime questions, as the two countries had now become rivals in many European markets, and their mutual relation completely altered. England no longer was merely the producer of the

“sovereign treasure wherewith it was said to keep the whole world warm”; from a producer of raw materials she became a manufacturing country, like Belgium, and this was a fertile cause of trouble and rivalry about markets for woven cloth, for she sought her chief market on Belgian soil. Still, at the same time, the political interest of English monarchs commanded them to keep on friendly terms with the Lower Burgundian or Netherlandish State which separated from Burgundy proper after the death of Charles the Bold and the extinction of the male line at the battle of Nancy.

The growing power of France, and especially her attempts to incorporate all the Burgundian territories, filled the English with apprehension, for they threatened to turn the richest part of Europe and the chief market of English commerce into a mere French province. When in 1477 the French King Louis XI proposed to Edward IV to share the Belgian countries with him and offered to bear most of the cost of the enterprise, the King of England made a significant reply: “Those cities of Flanders are powerful and large, and the country would be hard to hold if it were conquered, and it is the same in Brabant. Moreover, the English would not much like a war in that quarter, because of the traffic of their merchandise.” Thus commercial and political reasons concurred in securing peace on both shores of the North Sea and in keeping England friendly

towards Lower Burgundy, which was then being sorely tried by civil and foreign disturbances. That friendship is one of the main facts of fifteenth century history.

Concerning the vicissitudes of the Anglo-Burgundian alliance it is curious to turn to Shakespeare's historical plays, and to gather from them how the events of the time were reflected in the chronicles which he followed.

In *Henry V* there is a passing allusion to John the Fearless, whose brother fell at Agincourt. In the First Part of *Henry VI* his son Philip the Good, the founder of United Belgium, appears as a wavering ally, who is won over by the enchanting words of Joan of Arc and reconciled to the King of France under the walls of Rouen. The fourth Burgundian Sovereign of Belgium, Charles the Bold, is mentioned several times in the Third Part of *King Henry VI* as the Yorkist King Edward IV's brother-in-law and protector. When King Edward escapes from the confinement in which he had been placed by Warwick the King-maker, he takes ship to Flanders, where Duke Charles helps him and enables him to return with an army and claim the city of York.

In the dramatist's pages, the identity of the country and rulers thus alluded to is veiled behind a variety of names. Belgia is clear enough, Flanders and Burgundy are somewhat confusing, but the name Wallon, inserted between those of Artois and Picardy as if it were

that of a definite territory, can hardly have been clear to the poet himself.

Our account of Anglo-Belgian relations would not be complete without a reference to the printer Caxton, who spent thirty years of his life as Governor of the Company of the English Merchant Adventurers before entering the service of the Yorkist Duchess Margaret of Burgundy (1421). The art of printing had been in the hands of a lay brotherhood associated with the mystic movement, the Brethren of the Common Life. Caxton, who was employed by the Duchess as a copyist, seems to have learnt his art at Bruges, at the press of Colard Mansion. He brought it to England after having spent five and thirty years in Belgium, and translated many books from French and Flemish originals. We cannot forget that we are indebted to his industry for the version of Reynard Fox now current in England. It is to be regretted that this version is an inferior one and does scant justice to the charm and distinction of the original poem.

IV

QUEEN ELIZABETH AND THE REBELLION IN THE NETHERLANDS

THE Anglo-Burgundian alliance was firmly rooted in the common interests of the two allies, who were bound together by the ties of commerce and by the necessity of self-defence against a common enemy. As for the exchange of ideas, we can gain a better knowledge of it as historical sources become more plentiful and tell us more about the close connection existing in the sixteenth century between the two countries.

The friendship between Sir Thomas More and Erasmus is well known, as is the great part played by both humanists in social progress and their decisive influence on the thought of the Renaissance. No less known is the Dutch scholar's praise of the English realm, "the home and citadel of virtue and learning." Gradually a steady interchange of intellectual, social, and religious influences took place between the two countries, and in the great wars of religion, especially during Queen Elizabeth's

reign, England quite naturally became the refuge of Protestants from the Low Countries, while the latter gave shelter to English Catholics. The Netherlands at that time occupied the position held in the nineteenth century by England, for they were the meeting ground of the main currents of commerce. Antwerp was then, as London is now, the chief banking centre and market of Europe. Unfortunately, the Netherlands also became the battlefield in which one of the bitterest and most momentous campaigns of the religious struggle was fought. In this struggle the focus of Protestant zeal was gradually shifted from Ghent, Brussels, and Antwerp to the northern cities of Leyden and Amsterdam, and finally it was the new Calvinistic Republic of Holland, not the old Belgian State, that remained the object of English friendship in the seventeenth century.

In our twentieth century we notice a sharp opposition between Holland, with its majority of Protestant citizens, and the Belgian nation, which is composed chiefly of Catholics. This division became final in 1585, when the city of Antwerp had to surrender to the army of King Philip II of Spain. The Protestants still remaining in Belgium left their country and went to settle in the northern provinces of the Netherlands, where they became gradually merged in the native population. That they fought and suffered for their faith, that they helped, as soldiers, statesmen, divines and

scholars, to build up the Republic, is only remembered by students, while the general reader is content to credit the Dutch nation, who were benefited by their work, with the whole of their achievements, and to forget that the land of their birth has after all had some share in producing and training them. From a more careful survey of events it will appear that the Reformation which triumphed in the Northern Netherlands after 1572—the date of the appointment of Prince William of Orange, surnamed the Silent, to be Stadtholder or Viceroy of the two provinces of Holland and Zeeland—had first arisen in the southern provinces. The old focus of democratic agitation, the city of Ghent, was the scene of the riots in which the images of saints that adorned churches and squares were ruthlessly destroyed by Calvinistic crowds, and the commercial capital of the Low Countries, Antwerp, was the chief centre of religious agitation. The political struggle between the servants of Philip II of Spain's autocratic system and the States General, who stood for the time-honoured privileges and charters of the land, was to a great extent carried on in Brussels. Brussels was the scene of the execution of the Count of Egmont, the warlike leader of the native aristocracy, and it was only after the Spanish Duke of Alva had relentlessly crushed all resistance by wholesale executions that the friends of the Reformation sought refuge in the north. Those stirring

events, which have been celebrated by the two greatest German poets, Goethe and Schiller, and by one of the great American historians, Motley, could not but influence Anglo-Belgian relations.

The English King Henry VIII was the uncle of a ruler of the Netherlands who was very national for a time, the Emperor Charles V, and was more than once his ally against the French. Their dynastic friendships and quarrels were largely due to differences about the trade in raw wool and finished cloth, in which both parties behaved like bargaining dealers in a shop and pretended to have no need of one another's goods. In reality, the two countries' need of one another was reciprocal: the wealth of Belgium largely depended on the business done on its soil by English merchants, and the Belgian market was so essential to English producers that one half of the nation was commonly said to be directly or indirectly supported by it. In spite of mutual complaints and occasional infringements, the agreements which had been reached answered the purpose for which they had been concluded. Charles V wished that the two States might be united and thus be enabled to assist one another against common dangers. In the latter part of Henry VIII's reign the friendship became overclouded through the presence in England of Belgian Calvinists, who fled from the Inquisition and who sometimes sent back preachers to spread

the new faith in the Netherlands. This stream of refugees was still more encouraged under King Edward VI, for Archbishop Cranmer welcomed immigrants from every country. Walloon (*i.e.* French-speaking) churches were set up in London and Canterbury.

The sudden revolution caused by the accession of the Catholic Queen Mary to the throne had but little effect on international politics, although for a period of four years (1554-1558) she was married to Philip II, the lawful Sovereign of the Netherlands. There seems to have been little love between those two consorts yoked together by political schemes, but they could at least agree on the treatment to be meted out to heretics. It may be noticed that nearly all the Protestants who suffered for their faith were burnt in the eastern and south-eastern countries, from which communication with the Continent was most easy, and which were to become hot-beds of Puritan zeal in a later age.

At the end of Queen Mary's short reign, many of her subjects who had fled overseas to escape from persecution returned to their native country. As was to be expected, their religious passions were more ardent than ever, and many had adopted the extreme doctrine of Calvinism, which was fast gaining ground in the Low Countries.

Queen Elizabeth's reign was no less decisive for the fate of Belgium and Holland than for England herself, but this was not due to

exceptional foresight or boldness on the Queen's part. She did not probe the depth of the stream that was carrying the world along, nor did she perceive the harbour whither it was hurrying. To her the revolt in the Netherlands was but "a bridle of Spain, which kept war out of our own gate." The hopes of such farseeing statesmen as William the Silent seemed Utopian to her. She expected that the Netherlands would be compelled to submit to the Roman Church, and only wished them to retain their old constitutional privileges so that the Spanish authorities might be limited in their action.

As early as 1563, she directly addressed the nobility of the Netherlands in a letter admonishing them to keep up the ancient and indissoluble friendship between England and the House of Burgundy, and she might boast with good reason that she had more friends in the Low Countries than had Philip II. At a period when the part taken by the merchant class in English public life was becoming more and more important, she was greatly concerned to preserve for England the valuable market of the Netherlands. English imports were then twenty times larger than in the early sixteenth century, but they suffered from the rioting and agitation called forth by the severity of the Inquisition. While, on the one hand, Queen Elizabeth was encouraging the rebels to resist, she was, on the other, advising the Spanish Government to yield to their protests and to

prepare for the restoration of the political system that had prevailed in the Low Countries under Charles V, that is to say, of the Burgundian government. Neither the ardour of the Reformers nor the ambitious policy of the Spanish King would allow of such a compromise.

The ruthlessness displayed by Philip II's agents against the Protestants caused many of them to emigrate from the Netherlands and to come to England, where Elizabeth allowed, and sometimes even encouraged, them to settle, as Edward VI had done before her. In 1561 over 400 refugees from Flanders and Brabant took up their residence in Sandwich, then a decayed town, where some of them manufactured "says, bays and other fine cloth," while others devoted themselves to fishing or agriculture. About the same time, some Walloons were admitted in Canterbury. Soon Norwich, Southampton, Maidstone, Colchester, Stanford, Halstead, Lynn, Dover, and London and its suburbs received a large number of immigrants from the Low Countries, who practised and sometimes introduced various trades, such as carpentry, the manufacture of felts or hats, tanneries, breweries, dyeing, the making of thread, lace, canvas, paper, soap, salt, brass plates for culinary utensils, needles, glasswork, and parchment. Newcastle-on-Tyne harboured Walloons from Liège who were makers of steel swords and edge tools. Some of the

refugees readily joined in commercial life, like Peter Houblon, whose grandson was the "father" of the Royal Exchange; others took part in literary activity, like Charles Utenhove of Ghent, a friend to Buchanan, and the author of a new year's poem addressed in 1563 to Queen Elizabeth. Utenhove wrote in humble strain:

"What may I, that nothing have, geve yow that nothing want?"

This one that yet yow want, I pray our God to yow to graunt."

The disturbances in the Netherlands were felt in commercial intercourse, as was inevitable, and bold corsairs from England and the Low Countries took the opportunity to chase and capture Spanish vessels without any let or hindrance from Queen Elizabeth. When Philip II demanded an escort for his transports carrying Spanish troops to the Low Countries by sea, the Queen flatly refused, and declared to her advisers that she would not lend herself to the King of Spain's "tormenting that poor people still more." Soon after, she permitted the English authorities to confiscate two million silver reals intended for the pay of the Duke of Alva's troops in the Netherlands, in reprisals for the confiscation of English ships by the Spaniards off Florida. As King Philip's stubbornness allowed of no compromise on the religious difficulty, there was no possibility of any political or economic pacification.

When the Duke of Alva arrived in the Low

Countries in 1567 the commercial crisis was at its worst, and regular trade with England had come to a standstill. Cardinal Granvelle had once suspended the *Intercourse*, but the people of Antwerp and the Lords of the Netherlands had forced him to restore it. Diplomatic relations between England and Spain, nevertheless, were still maintained, with alternations of coolness and reconciliations due to the greater or smaller fear of the French power. When the Duke of Alva witnessed the economic distress of the Low Countries, he did not hesitate to advise Philip II to restore commercial relations and the ancient Anglo-Burgundian alliance. In this he, no doubt, was reluctantly yielding to necessity, for he told his royal master that sovereigns were not bound to observe treaties, and that an agreement with England would after all be but a temporary makeshift. "Kings," he wrote, "are not fettered like ordinary gentlemen by their pledged word, their conduct is guided by superior principles." When he was, some time after, asked to make himself master of Queen Elizabeth's person, he refused to comply, alleging that he had not sufficient forces at his command. This task was some years later entrusted to Don Juan.

The interruption of the wool trade in 1568-1569 caused many disturbances in Norfolk and Suffolk, and also gave rise to economic distress in the Northumbrian towns, where the wool from the moors was marketed for transport across

the North Sea. A large part of England was therefore involved in the consequences of the economic crisis from which the Netherlands were suffering. Under the stress of danger, Queen Elizabeth had to abandon her ambiguous policy and to yield to the entreaties of her Protestant subjects and statesmen, who besought her to act before it was too late. She gave more secret assistance to the rebels overseas, who had now succeeded in establishing a government of their own in the northern provinces. Although she declined the offer of the sovereignty of the Low Countries, many Protestants on both sides of the North Sea often acted together during the most exciting years of their history. Soldiers and munitions were secretly dispatched from British harbours, an easy matter in those days, when the levying of troops and the making of war materials were not yet monopolised and controlled by the Governments. English crossbowmen landed in Flushing, dressed in blue coats adorned with red crosses of St. George. The rebels were led to believe that they were only the forerunners of a fuller force to be sent across by Queen Elizabeth.

In 1575-1576 several envoys from the States General were at the Court of London. One of them, Philip of Marnix, Lord of Ste. Aldegonde, stands out as equally prominent in thought and in action, a learned scholar, a powerful writer, a great orator, a subtle diplomatist, and a self-

sacrificing servant of his ideals. His chief aim in life was religious ; he worked for the triumph of Calvinism, but this sectarian view was tempered by his association with the Prince of Orange, the advocate of toleration, whose policy he served. Therefore Marnix has, like William the Silent, become a symbol and a representative of the spirit of political and religious freedom in the eyes of the later generations. Marnix was born in Brussels in 1540 and died in Leyden in 1598. He was therefore one of the Protestants who owed their early training and character to Belgium, and who turned those gifts indirectly to account in the building up of the Dutch Republic. In his youth he turned himself into a perfect humanist by frequenting various Universities, such as Padua and Bologna, where his leanings towards the Reformation already appeared, and Geneva, where he sat under Calvin. At the latter place he accepted the Presbyterian system which was destined to become the National Church policy of the Northern Netherlands. On his return home he resumed his studies and accumulated vast stores of learning. The events of 1565 tore him from this labour of peace. When the aristocracy of the Low Countries unanimously combined to resist the government of Philip II, he adhered to the movement and even acted as a middle-man between its leaders and the Calvinist Church of Antwerp. On the Duke of Alva's arrival in the Netherlands in 1567, Marnix left his country

first for Bremen and afterwards for Friesland, where many of the Belgian Calvinists sought a refuge. The close friendship between Marnix and Prince William the Silent began a few years later (1571), to be ended only when the murderer's dagger took the Prince away from his "poor people." William of Orange realised the importance of pamphlets, songs, and other publications to keep the reading public in touch with his policy, and highly valued the services which Marnix was able to render. Marnix was a learned theologian, a master of invective, argument, and irony in the French and Dutch vernaculars, and an impassioned pamphleteer, and he acted as a kind of literary and political agent to the Prince. His labour and influence extended beyond his own country to France, Germany, and England. The reading of his books takes us back to the times when the Catholic and Protestant Churches would have scorned the very thought of peace and toleration, and when adherence to either doctrine might be visited with death.

As for tolerance amongst Protestant sects, Marnix seems not only to have approved of it, but even to have connected it with civil liberty and with the principle of government by consent, if we are to judge from his letter of advice to the Dutch Church of London, issued in 1568. In his letter he advised the Church to submit to the lawful Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth, as she ruled her subjects in virtue of mutual

constitutional oaths and promises, and was bound to them by reciprocal obligations, not by the mere tyranny of the sword, which serves only to enforce slavery. Accordingly, he always vigorously opposed the absolutist doctrines of the Professors of Law in Louvain, many of whom were devoted to the Spanish Government. His intimacy with the Prince has led to the belief that Marnix wrote the words of the hymn of the Netherlandish Revolution, which is only second to the "Marseillaise" among the war-songs of history, the "Wilhelmuslied" (1569). It became the national anthem of Holland after William of Orange had chosen it for his war march in 1572, it accompanied King William III to England after the Protestant succession was finally established, and it is still universally known and sung in the Netherlands.

In 1572 the Calvinists were able to return to their native land, as the Dutch corsairs, who had been sheltering on the English coast, gained possession of the harbour of Brill, and William, who was a rebel in fact and a loyal subject only in pretence, was appointed Stadtholder of the northern provinces, which were soon to separate from Belgium. Notwithstanding those partial successes, the prospect of successfully opposing Philip II was very doubtful, and they had to look eagerly abroad for allies, who were not at first to be found. Marnix was one of those who sailed to England to ask Queen Elizabeth to accept the overlordship of Holland and Zeeland

(1576.) Though the Queen had secretly lent assistance to the rising of the Dutch, she did not venture to go further, and she cautiously declined the sovereignty offered to her. Marnix became also known in Great Britain as a pamphleteer, for one of his most spirited and militant books, the "Beehive of the Holy Romish Church," was translated into English by a diplomatic agent, George Gilpin, and printed in 1579, with a dedication to Sir Philip Sidney, who was destined to lay down his life in Marnix's country while fighting for Marnix's cause. That pamphlet's popularity with the British public is attested by the fact that it passed through no fewer than five editions, the last of which appeared in 1636.

Though the Queen dismissed the envoys from the Netherlands without any hope of direct assistance, the Prince of Orange was right in saying to her agent, "In very truth, with our safety and preservation rests the secure repose of the realm of England." For this was the time when Philip II was secretly maturing his plans for the conquest of England. Their execution was entrusted to his natural brother Don Juan when he was appointed a Governor of the Low Countries, and he was to use them as a basis of operations, after having first pacified the people for that purpose. In 1578 Marnix helped to prepare a treaty by which the Queen's French suitor, the Duke of Anjou, was elected as "Defender of the liberty of the Netherlands

against the tyranny of the Spaniards and their supporters," and received a promise that, if the Low Countries decided to choose a new sovereign, they would prefer him to all others. In 1580 the Earl of Leicester and Marnix accompanied the Duke to the Netherlands, where the latter's ambitions suffered a shipwreck as decisive as that of his marriage scheme. Marnix's influence on the ideas and politics of the time was still exerted through his writings; he dwelt on the necessity of maintaining the balance of Europe, which was threatened by the lust for power of the Spaniards.

In 1585 came an event that struck all Londoners with awe and warned them of their own danger; this was the fall of Antwerp, captured by the Duke of Parma, notwithstanding the defence made by Marnix, who had been appointed Burgomaster of the city. The fall of the great commercial town, the bulwark of the revolution against political and religious despotism, was the sorest trial of Marnix's life. He was never quite forgiven for it, and spent the rest of his days chiefly in studious retirement. He was once more sent as an envoy to Queen Elizabeth in 1590, when an alliance against Spain was concluded between England and France. In 1585 the Earl of Leicester tried his own fortune in the Netherlands. He landed at Flushing with an army and was Stadtholder for a short time. English garrisons occupied the

island of Walcheren and the town of Bergen op Zoom. Meanwhile the capital event of the religious wars, the attack upon England's shores by the Spanish Armada, was being actively prepared. While the fleet itself was being collected in the harbours of Spain, a Catholic army for the invasion of England was being organised on the Flemish coast. Hundreds of flat-bottomed boats for transporting the troops were being built, and new canals were being cut to convey them to the sea. Soldiers and gentlemen from Spain, Italy, Germany and Burgundy gathered for the expedition. When the Armada reached Calais, the army of invasion was ready to sail, but it was blockaded by the Dutch navy and never left its ports. The destruction of the Armada was celebrated in songs and pamphlets on both sides of the North Sea: it was the crowning triumph of Protestant policy, and Marnix, who must have derived some comfort from it for his own disappointment in Antwerp, celebrated it in a pamphlet written in his most sarcastic vein and deriding the boastfulness and arrogance of the Spanish King.

The war between England and Spain lasted till 1604 and was signalised by the battle of Nieuport (1600), where English troops helped in Maurice of Nassau's victory, and by the famous siege of Ostend (1601-1604), which was held by the Dutch, English, and French, commanded, during the first eight months, by

Sir Francis Vere. Even after peace was made, some English and Scottish regiments stayed with the Dutch armies which continued the struggle against Spain to the year 1648, with twelve years' truce (1609-1622).

V

THE AGE OF RUBENS AND MARLBOROUGH

THE final defeat of Philip II's ambitions was also the death-knell of the unity of the Netherlands, which were henceforth broken up into two small nations that became completely estranged and were henceforth at war more than once. On this fatal separation in the old Burgundian State no comment is needed, except a reminder that Belgium never became a Spanish or Austrian province, though subject to Spanish and Austrian sovereigns.

In Anglo-Belgian relations the separation caused a complete change. The Southern or Catholic Netherlands, having lost their economic supremacy, were now only a secondary market for English trade. The Merchant Adventurers deserted Antwerp to settle in Hamburg, to the great despair of the traders of the former city, who preferred them to all other nations because the English were both buyers and sellers, while other foreigners carried cash out of the country. The Low Countries were reduced to the position of a large camp for the Spanish armies and were

thus being turned into the cockpit of Europe. They no longer were the meeting-point of the great commercial roads of Europe, their importance was merely strategic, and their integrity was not even considered indispensable by their own rulers, whose chief concern was the defence of the colonial empire of Spain. Therefore the Belgian territory, which no longer enjoyed its former maritime importance, was allowed to crumble away, and only its principal fortresses were looked upon as essential. To England the Spanish Netherlands were mainly a field for diplomatic intrigues and a sanctuary for the Papists. Never were the political systems of the two countries more dissimilar than in the seventeenth century, the age of Rubens and Van Dyke; never was the contrast between them more striking. While England was passing through the throes of civil war, rebellion, and revolution towards parliamentary monarchy, the Belgian people were being quickly driven towards an absolute rule, partly tempered by the survival of certain traditional privileges. They were ruined and exhausted, the towns that had been their pride and strength were restricted to narrow local interests. The central Government asserted its influence in all fields of activity; the University of Louvain fell more and more under its control, and, partly through the appointment of Royal professors, it became what Philip II had intended, the real "general seminary" and the training school

for the officers and agents of the Government. The Grand Council of Malines lost some of its powers to the Privy Council, which was an instrument of the Governor-General's.

At the same time, Belgium became the most Catholic country in Europe, the chief centre of the Catholic Renaissance, and therefore the sanctuary to which English Catholics fled from their Anglican Government, and in which they hatched plots for spreading their faith and printed books advocating their cause.

On Queen Elizabeth's death, her successor, James I, was in such haste to make peace with Spain that he gave offence to his Protestant subjects (1604); in the same year one of his own Ministers, Lord Salisbury, wrote to the English Ambassador in Brussels that "King James and all that loved the Gospel were much concerned about the strong and visible torrent, wherewith the ill-affected of the English State were carried into the Netherlands, only to satiate themselves upon idolatry and superstition." These suspicions of the English Government were amply justified in the following year, when Guy Fawkes, who had recently served in Belgium with the Spanish army, crossed to London to act his part in the Gunpowder Plot. If he had succeeded, his intention was to have returned to Flanders afterwards. The Court of Brussels, at that time governed by the Spanish ex-Cardinal and Archduke Albert, was naturally

accused of having fostered the plot, and as naturally repudiated the charge. But the Court's advocacy of the Papal interest was open and firm, and English Catholics are no less indebted to it for the maintenance of their hierarchy, their religious orders, and their schools than the Calvinists on either side of the North Sea were obliged to one another for similar assistance. The state of degradation into which Belgium had now sunk in consequence of wars and economic crises lasted about two hundred years, down to the Revolution of 1830. The dreary gloom of those two centuries of misery was relieved only by the meteoric greatness of Peter Paul Rubens, the most illustrious and the most representative of all Flemish artists, through his intense realism, his overflowing vitality, his bright colours and his massive and luxuriant forms. Rubens was brought to London by the part which he took in the mean political activities of his day. He had to conduct peace negotiations between England and Spain with the agents of Charles I at a time when the King tried to rule without the assent of Parliament. The Court of Brussels had to complain of the painter Gerbier, who acted for King Charles; he had a hand in several low intrigues in connection with the insurrection plotted in the Netherlands in 1632-3, and he was finally recalled and discharged in 1641, after the victory of the Parliament. In 1630 Rubens was knighted by Charles I, and his influence is felt

in English art to this day, not only through the magnificent canvases by his hand which are to be seen in many public and private galleries, but also through his pupil, Van Dyke. National self-respect should be measured neither by numbers of the population nor by square miles of territory, but by human achievement, and the achievement of Rubens ranks with the epic of Reynard Fox and with the poetry of Verhaeren in the national consciousness of educated Belgians. Apart from that bright spot, Belgian history from the Reformation to the battle of Waterloo is one long period of mourning, from which the nation slowly rose again to modern activity.

During this period the Dutch, carrying out the policy of commercial restriction and monopoly that was characteristic of the age, closed to navigation all the waterways through which the trade of Flemish and Brabant harbours had been wont to flow. All the seagoing trade of the Netherlands and of the German hinterland was in this way forced into the ports of Holland. The Spanish rulers of the Southern Netherlands had not the power to prevent the ruin of their cities, and the foreign nations that used to trade in those harbours had other interests to promote nearer home. The stillness of death settled upon regions that had once been among the foremost centres of business in Europe and were not destined to recover their prosperity for nearly two centuries.

Before 1701 the Spanish army had become so weak that it had to accept the assistance of Dutch troops. When the young Bourbon King Philip V ascended the throne of Spain, the Barrier fell into the power of the French, from whom it was wrested again by the Duke of Marlborough, who commanded the English and Dutch armies. As a result of his campaign of 1702 he was able to gain a footing in the region extending between the Meuse and the Rhine, and from thence to threaten the line of Belgian fortresses in French occupation. The capture of Liège (October 29th, 1702) was the crowning success of this year, and earned him the title of "retriever of the ancient honour of Britain." In the following year the Duke failed to cut into the line of fortresses mentioned above, because of the jealousy and hesitations of the Dutch. This delay allowed the French to complete their defensive system along the line of the series of fortresses connecting Namur and Antwerp (Tirlemont, Léau, Aarschot, etc.). His plans were once more thwarted by the Dutch generals, and it was not till 1706 that he was able to pierce the famous system of defences by his victory at Ramillies between Tirlemont and Namur. After it he made a solemn entry into Brussels (May 28th), where the States of Brabant recognised Charles VI as their legitimate Sovereign. Nearly all the fortresses of the Barrier in succession fell into the hands of

Marlborough. On this occasion the Emperor offered him the post of Governor-General of the Southern Netherlands.

The Duke was one of the many Englishmen who cherished the ambition of ruling the Belgian territories, but his plans were defeated by the distrust of the Dutch, till a compromise was finally arranged between the contending parties. An international Commission, called the Anglo-Batavian Conference, governed the country for a time, but without satisfying the natives, who raised loud complaints against the foreigners who assumed authority over them. It is characteristic of the Belgian temper, even in the sorest trials of its history, that the Dutch plenipotentiary Van den Bergh should have written that unless strong measures were taken the haughtiness and boldness of this people would not only increase, but even become a danger to the Dutch Republic.

Owing to the traditional neutrality of Liège and to the industry and political activity of its citizens, the spirit of independence asserted itself in this principality more than in any other part of Belgium, and it became a sanctuary of liberty. It sheltered many Belgians who were dissatisfied with the Spanish policy or banished by the Government of Brussels. As it had done in the sixteenth century, it welcomed conspirators who were plotting against the Spanish rule; for some time it harboured Henri de Bergh and other noblemen who were vainly

striving for the overthrow of the hateful system to which the Low Countries were subjected and for the expulsion of the "Spanish blood-suckers." The agents of England favoured this scheme for some time. In this way the principality of Liège indirectly helped to check the attempt made by foreigners to introduce absolute government into the Spanish Netherlands, and to keep alive some ideal of patriotism, in spite of all the breaches made in the century old institutions of the country by the servants of the Court of Madrid.

VII

THE BARRIER SYSTEM

THE Barrier Treaty (1715) settled the status of Belgium without regard to the wishes or interests of its inhabitants, and chiefly with a view to safeguard the independence and prosperity of their neighbours the Dutch and the English. As the nominal and lawful rulers were too far away and too inefficient to hold their Belgian possessions against France, who had already nibbled away a large border of the Netherlands, they admitted Dutch garrisons to share in the defence of the southern line of fortresses, called the Barrier, because they were intended to bar the French army's progress. Belgium contributed money and fortresses for her defence against France, which was the common interest of all parties concerned. England guaranteed Belgium's existence as a State against France and acknowledged as her lawful Sovereign Charles VI, the Austrian representative of the Hapsburg family. The chief gainers by the arrangement were the Dutch, who obtained a strong frontier and commercial

privileges at the expense of their brethren of the Southern Netherlands. In these various respects the Barrier Treaty was an imperfect anticipation of the conditions that prevailed between 1831 and 1914, in the halcyon days of Belgian peace and liberty. Although the treaty was sanctioned by the Whig party in England, which was bound to the Dutch by the necessity of protecting the Protestant succession against the Jacobites, the clients of France, it was not favourable to English trade, as the Tories were careful to point out in the House of Commons. Political alliances with Holland were perpetually disturbed by commercial jealousy.

As for the Southern Netherlands themselves, the change in their international status went with a change of allegiance and of name : they were henceforth called Austrian because their sovereigns were the Emperors who had their capital in Austria. The only State that was left unaffected by this change was the principality of Liège, which remained under its own bishops and retained a remote feudal connection with the Empire, so that its overlords were the very sovereigns who held the rest of the Belgian provinces as part of their hereditary dominions. If we take all the facts into consideration, it seems hardly correct to call the Netherlands Austrian at all. For what was the Sovereign who resided in Vienna to a nation whose defence was entrusted to a foreign army ? The English Kings, who guaranteed its status, even against

its legitimate rulers, were unconsciously paving the way for the future neutrality of Belgian soil. England counteracted the influence of Holland, which tried to establish exclusive supremacy over Belgium ; it also defended the latter's international position, and thus laid the foundation for the restoration of its full independence.

If we compare the status of guaranteed neutrality of 1831-39 with the stipulations of the Barrier Treaty, we notice some striking analogies as well as some obvious differences. Both arrangements were international, one involving three Powers, Austria, England, and Holland ; the other five, France, England, Austria, Prussia, and Russia ; both had the peace and balance of Europe for their object, and especially safeguarded the insular and colonial power of Great Britain. They differed mainly in their treatment of the Belgians, who were artificially ruined and humiliated by the Barrier Treaty, while they became prosperous and free under the system of guaranteed neutrality of 1831-39. Europe herself enjoyed safer and cheaper peace after the Belgians had been encouraged to arm for national defence and to develop their national resources. In the eighteenth as in the nineteenth century, the Belgian problem was the most delicate and intricate problem of European policy.

At the time of George II the Austrian Netherlands remained neutral both in the war of 1733

and in that of 1756, and the advisability of making that neutrality permanent suggested itself to many of the leading statesmen of the time. "Of all the conditions to be stipulated for the Netherlands," wrote the Austrian Minister Trautmannsdorf in 1795, "this would no doubt be the most important and profitable." The Belgian nation enjoyed whatever peace and prosperity it could snatch from adverse political circumstances; it shared directly or indirectly in overseas trade, both by investing capital in it and by the foundation of an India Company called the Company of Ostend (1722). This Company obtained the services of English sailors and officers, but it aroused the jealousy of its Dutch and British competitors, and after being suspended for seven years (1727) it was dissolved in 1731. Charles VI, wishing to secure his whole inheritance to his daughter and to safeguard "the welfare of Europe," sacrificed Belgian expansion to his dynastic ambitions.

The War of the Austrian Succession again turned Belgium into a battlefield, but it at least bore welcome fruit in freeing the country from the hateful annual tribute due to Holland for the maintenance of the Barrier. The fortresses of which the latter was composed were dismantled during the war of 1780 between England and Holland, so that Belgium was henceforth able to command within its own territory and to organise its defence on the basis of Antwerp.

Though it was involved against its will in

great international struggles, Belgium always preserved its national consciousness and never suffered absorption by any of its neighbours. Nor did it ever falter in its passionate attachment to its own traditions and ideals; it faithfully cherished the memory of the proud municipal life which was perpetuated by splendid town halls and belfries, in which the charters of the cities were carefully kept. When the Emperor Joseph II decreed the introduction of a centralised form of government he found himself faced by a vigorous resistance. His novelties appeared as unbearable infringements of time-honoured institutions: not only the holders of obsolete privileges, but all the advocates of the new doctrines of liberty and equality, *i.e.* of national self-government, united against him, and the old fire of rebellion was fanned afresh.

The Brabant Revolution, which broke out in 1787, is memorable for having emulated the American War of Independence, from which it borrowed the title of the short-lived Republic of the United Belgian States, and for having first adopted the Belgian tricolour, black, yellow, and red. While favoured by King Frederick William II of Prussia, in order to embarrass the Emperor Joseph II, it was not encouraged by the English Government, who preferred the sovereignty of Austria as a better safeguard for their national interests. They thought that the connection with a distant Great Power made

Belgium a more efficient buffer State against the surrounding Powers than it would have been as a small and separate country. They even imagined that from the fifteenth century downward Belgium's traditional task had been to act as a strategic barrier between the maritime Powers and France on the one hand, and between the same Powers and the Empire on the other.

The trouble came to a head when the French General Dumouriez decided to turn Belgium into a republic in 1792. Pitt looked upon this scheme as an annexation in disguise. Lord Grenville in 1797 vainly offered to France to restore all her colonies to her in exchange for the freedom of Belgium and the Milanese territory. But the Low Countries were far too important to France, for they permitted her to subdue Holland and to blockade England. Although Belgium is not often mentioned in the history of the world-war between Napoleon and England, yet one of the principal stakes in the game was the possession of Antwerp, which was intended by Napoleon, as it had previously been by Louis XIV, to be one of his principal bulwarks against Britain. The expedition sent from England to recover the city (1809) failed miserably in the swampy island of Walcheren. When at last the country had been wrested from the French, it was re-united to the Northern Netherlands under the sceptre of the representative of the dynasty of Orange, now raised to royal dignity. This union had been recom-

mended by the English Government in 1795 as the best way out of the Belgian difficulty, while Austrian statesmen preferred either Belgian neutrality or the annexation of a line of French fortresses to the Southern Netherlands.

Nevertheless, the union proved merely temporary, for it entailed many inconveniences for the two nations which it artificially bound together. The Kingdom of the Two Netherlands was in 1815 intended to be a formidable barrier against France, as had been the wish of Pitt, and the allied diplomatists imagined that they would strengthen it by decreeing the complete amalgamation of both territories under the new kingship of the House of Orange. The southern half of the Low Countries was treated as a conquest of the allies and annexed to Holland. The old line of fortresses was rebuilt from Ypres to Luxemburg, very nearly where it had been before, England undertaking to bear half of the cost of reconstruction. Soon that Power and Prussia reserved for themselves the right of occupying those strongholds in case of a French attack.

The Belgians did not effectively amalgamate with their new fellow-citizens, the Dutch, from whom they differed in religion, in manners, and partly in language, and they sank their party differences in a common resistance to foreign rule. England, who had been instrumental in bringing them under the Crown of the House of Orange, accepted the separation

as inevitable, and largely contributed to the breaking up of that great barrier which was one of the chief creations of the Congress of Vienna. She even blockaded the Dutch coasts in order to avoid the international complications with which Europe was threatened in consequence of the rising in Brussels.

VII

GUARANTEED NEUTRALITY

ALTHOUGH the establishment of the Belgian kingdom was the common work of the five Great Powers, it was chiefly advocated by French diplomacy, represented by Prince Talleyrand, whose object was to cover the approach towards Paris across the northern frontier of France, and by English statesmanship, whose spokesman was Lord Palmerston. The old Belgian passion for independence which filled revolutionists like Rogier and Van de Weyer, and, much more, Belgium's traditional attachment to peace, also contributed towards this settlement of the balance of Europe. We shall see how in 1831 the Powers applied to Belgium the system that prevailed in Switzerland since 1815. Thus the two principal countries of transit in Europe became in a sense lands common to all nations and safeguards of European peace. There was no longer a barrier in the narrow interests of one or two States, and France, recovering her place in the European Concert, thenceforth assisted in maintaining a renovated Belgium

which was freed from humiliating obligations. Some remnants of the old line of fortresses built against France were nevertheless preserved, as the country of Napoleon was still suspected of annexationist aims, but several citadels were dismantled in 1835, and Belgium was left free to organise her defence in her own way.

Neutrality itself no longer was a shackle, but it became an essential condition of life and a promise of comparative safety. It agreed with the country's attitude since the Middle Ages and secured its future, which was protected from international struggles by a solemn and unanimous pledge of the Great Powers. In fact, the new kingdom lived a peaceful and prosperous life for more than eighty years before it had the tragic honour of delaying the waves of German aggression in 1914. There was, after the Revolution of 1830, by which it was created, a twofold influence from England upon it. One was the example of parliamentary government, which established internal peace and prosperity; the other was the guarantee of neutrality, strengthened by the personal authority of King Leopold I, the friend of English rulers and statesmen, and a connection of the Royal Family of Hanover and Saxe-Coburg. Many principles of the Belgian Constitution are derived from those of English institutions. A limited monarchy was established with a Parliament of two Houses, and it became an example to the whole Continent in

copying the British parliamentary system. Although the Constitution, which was voted before ever the King was elected, is that of an hereditary monarchy, yet it has borrowed most of its nomenclature and some of its principles from the Constitution of the United States. Such names as Congress, Senate, House of Representatives, have an American ring, and a few articles in the Constitution read like an adaptation of the corresponding American articles. The enthusiasm of some of the Belgian revolutionists for the New World went so far that at one time they even thought of electing as the head of the new State a President in the person of Lafayette, "the greatest citizen of the Two Worlds."

The Revolution had now succeeded in creating a State, a Constitution, and a dynasty. It still had to determine the relations between this new unit and the old European peoples, especially the Great Powers. That the permanent neutrality of Belgium might bring great advantages to all her neighbours and save them from heavy expenses on fortresses and garrisons had long been felt by European statesmen, who thought of her chiefly as a battlefield where the bones of English, French, Dutch and German soldiers had been bleaching in their thousands. The Continental Powers, having to keep large standing armies in any case, might not care quite so much, but Great Britain's policy was to devote her revenue chiefly to her

navy and colonies, and she therefore had a very special interest in keeping Belgian territory free from future entanglements. While the Belgians themselves might more or less be trusted to keep the peace, each of the Great Powers lived in perpetual fear of the ambitions and intrigues of the others, and they all felt that only a very binding and unambiguous understanding could secure their common aim, which was peace, from the mutual hostility which threatened to lead to war. Fortunately, a precedent had been established in Switzerland shortly after Napoleon's defeat. Like Belgium, that enviable community of mountaineers had for centuries pursued a policy of neutrality between the warring Powers, and had finally succeeded in inducing them to grant it a formal guarantee of perpetual neutrality, each promising to abstain from aggression and to help the Swiss if they were attacked. This guarantee, which has been kept by all parties to this day, was applied to Belgium, without any modification, in 1831 and in 1839. The five Powers which made that promise were, going from East to West, Russia, Austria, Prussia, France and Great Britain. There was neither a German Emperor nor a King of Italy in those days, as those two nations had not yet achieved their unity. A large amount of commentary has been put forth by international lawyers on the various problems connected with neutrality. As the neutrality is now

destroyed, the commentary is obsolete, except as an historical curiosity. Even if the old treaty should be revived in some new form, it would derive an altered character from altered circumstances. We must therefore make up our minds that history has moved, and that the old treaty has served its time after a creditable career of more than three-quarters of a century. We must also trust to the inventiveness of modern statesmen to discover a new combination that will be equally effective and long-lived. But as students of history we cannot part with Belgian neutrality without paying a tribute to its beneficent influence throughout that period of time. It has been a happy link between European and Belgian interests, and the diplomats who established it after the example of another buffer State also knew how to interpret the national spirit as it asserted itself in the past. Their work would not have been so lasting and successful if it had not been founded on the tradition of centuries and on the fundamentally pacific character of the people. Its ultimate failure should not blind us to the great services rendered by them to the Belgian people, whose peaceful progress was secured for a length of time unexampled in history, and to the four nations that border on Belgium, for Holland, who never was a party to it, shared in its benefits to the full. No doubt the merit for such far-reaching and intricate combinations is widely distributed among the many who have

borne a part in them. But the credit is principally due to the representatives of France and of England, whose names must for ever be associated with the memory of Belgian independence — Prince Talleyrand and Lord Palmerston.

While the neutrality treaty, as a mere formal agreement, was equally binding on all parties, and remained unaltered from 1831-39 to 1914, the facts and interests that caused it to be signed and upheld varied greatly in time and space. Russia and Austria, extending at the other end of Europe, were not very directly concerned. France and Prussia, as near Continental and military Powers, watched one another jealously; and Britain, as a naval and insular State, kept an eye on both, and supported each in turn to keep the other in check. In this game of chess, the object of which was to maintain the balance of Europe, Belgium's part was to sit still, and to provide so well for her own defence that no Continental neighbour should be tempted to attack and invade her.

The years that followed the consolidation of the kingdom of Belgium were halcyon days so far as Anglo-Belgian relations were concerned. Leopold I, called, in a familiar jest, the uncle of Europe, was not only the uncle but also the trusted adviser of Queen Victoria, especially after her widowhood in 1861. There were many commotions, wars, and disasters in other parts of Europe, but neither the British shores nor

the Belgian frontiers were ever in immediate danger, and the internal development of both countries was fairly steady and regular. There was some hesitation in the young kingdom's economic policy. She opened negotiations with France in order to secure commercial advantages, and a Customs Union was even contemplated in 1842; but England intervened and induced Belgium to give up the scheme, as it later refused to join the Zollverein. It thus maintained its neutrality against everyone, ready, in the event of being attacked on any side, to unite with whichever party considered it in its interest to defend Belgium and her neutrality.

Anglo-Belgian relations were by no means confined to diplomacy and trade. In the field of literature, the romantic movement that flourished in Antwerp and Ghent soon after the Revolution was largely fed by imitation of two British authors who were at that time the idols of Continental readers, Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron. The romances of Scottish history were successfully emulated by the great Flemish novelist Conscience. The imitators of Byron's reflective and descriptive poetry are less eminent; one of the best known among them was the Flemish poet Ledeganck.

During the 'forties, when England was disturbed by the Chartist agitation, and in 1848, when many thrones were shaken or overthrown on the Continent, Belgium remained perfectly loyal to her elected Sovereign, and taught her

neighbours the value of freedom in pacifying and strengthening a political community.

A danger of a different kind seemed to threaten her very existence after the *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon, which roused the keenest apprehension in Great Britain. Napoleon's chief aim was to secure the hegemony on the Continent for France, and he therefore wished to annex Belgium. The consciousness of the French peril lay heavily on Leopold I's kingdom. While war was brewing in the East, the French Emperor declared to the Belgian Government that he would not look upon treaties as binding in the West if they were torn up in the East. At the Congress of Paris he denounced the Belgian Press, which in his opinion enjoyed too much freedom and gave too warm a welcome to French refugees. He spoke of it as Louis XIV spoke of the Press of Holland before invading that country. From 1855 onwards Belgium contemplated a new system of defence, the centre of which was to be a large entrenched camp near Antwerp. This made the old fortresses on the southern frontier useless or even dangerous. Most of them were therefore dismantled. Napoleon III raised a protest against their disappearance, maintaining that he lost a support for his armies in the unlikely event of his being compelled to enter Belgium. His diplomacy had to be more and more carefully watched and checked. This was done with perfect success by the united efforts of English and Belgian statesmen, who

seem to have acted throughout in perfect friendship and confidence to one another. Their greatest achievement was the development of the port and fortress of Antwerp.

To understand this vital question properly we have to go back in history a little. We have already pointed out that the closing of the Scheldt to navigation never was in agreement with the desires or interests of British trade, and that the Barrier Treaty of 1715 had therefore been criticised in the House of Commons. In 1780 the opening of the Scheldt to commerce was contemplated by the merchants of London because the ports of Holland were closed against them by war. An attempt to free the Scheldt from Dutch domination was made in 1784 by the Austrian Government, but it did not succeed. It was reserved for the French to lay the foundations of Antwerp's future prosperity by creating a great port there for military purposes and by digging the oldest dock in the harbour, known to this day as Bassin Carnot. The English met the threat in 1809 by sending the ill-fated Walcheren expedition under Lord Chatham, which failed to take Antwerp and ended in complete disaster. When at last Napoleon was defeated, the London Government insisted that the Scheldt must be kept open for navigation, and made this a condition of the union between Holland and Belgium. At the same time Antwerp was fortified, according to a plan for the defence of Belgium drawn up in

1814 by the Duke of Wellington. It was then part of the second line of defence, while the old barrier fortresses along the southern frontier formed a first line. An attempt made in 1813 to establish a toll on shipping was promptly stopped by the Antwerp merchants. In 1830, when the Dutch were driven out of the Southern Netherlands, they blockaded the Scheldt, but at the peace treaty of 1839 they were unable to restore the trade restrictions of the preceding century, and they only established a toll on every ship sailing up or down. No mention was made in the treaty of peace of 1839 of a possibility of redeeming this toll, which was thus allowed permanently to hinder the growth of the city and to cramp its activity. It was detrimental to foreign shipping as well, and especially to the English merchant flag, which predominated over all the others. The Belgian Government decided to encourage foreign ship-owners by refunding the money out of their own treasury, but, nevertheless, their situation remained humiliating and onerous. The promise of an improvement came with the progress of free trade, and especially with the treaties by which various European waterways, such as the Sound, the Elbe, and the Danube, were freed from commercial restrictions. Another reason for raising the prosperity of Antwerp was its strategic importance to England in case of a Continental war. It was understood between 1840 and 1880 that, if Belgium were invaded,

she would make no attempt to hold her whole territory, but that the army—then a very small one—would fall back on Antwerp, which was to become the temporary capital, and there to await the further course of events in a strong defensive position.

The importance of England and Belgium to one another began to be realised about 1858, when Napoleon III entered upon his Italian wars, which increased French territory by the annexation of Savoy and Nice. It was commonly feared that Belgium, once a part of the Napoleonic Empire, and, with Switzerland, the only country with a partly French-speaking population not ruled from Paris, might become the next prey of French Imperialism. After 1859, considerable sums were spent in building a strong wall and a belt of forts round Antwerp, which could be strengthened by flooding the surrounding country. While it thus gained in military importance, its commercial prosperity was also increased with the assistance of the English Government. The final step towards the liberation of the Scheldt was taken in 1863, when Holland was induced to accept a capital sum as the purchase price of the toll. The various seafaring nations contributed to that sum in proportion to their trade on the river. Belgium paid one-third of the whole, and England's share was approximately £360,000. The merit of this important transaction is divided between Lord Russell and Mr. Gladstone on

the English side, and on the other between the Prime Minister Charles Rogier and the Belgian Minister in London, Sylvain Van de Weyer, a friend of Queen Victoria. Henceforth British ships were able to sail up the Scheldt without let or hindrance, and the prosperity of Antwerp and of the English navigation there increased by leaps and bounds; thus the commercial bond of union between the two nations grew in the same way as did their political understanding.

A decisive test of Anglo-Belgian friendship occurred at the outbreak of the Franco-German War of 1870. After the beginning of hostilities, the *Times* printed the draft of a treaty submitted to Prussia by Napoleon in 1867 providing that France should annex Belgium under certain contingencies. Five days after, Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet decided to obtain pledges from both the belligerents. Treaties were signed on August 9th by which Great Britain undertook, in the event of a violation of Belgian neutrality by either Power, to co-operate with the other for the defence of that country. Mr. Gladstone's action was thought by some British statesmen to have been lacking in decision. Robert Morier, the English Minister to Darmstadt, expressed the view that his Government ought from the first to have announced its resolution to uphold Belgian neutrality, and to have thus shown to Europe its unshakable determination to prevent any nation attacking it. The storm passed over,

and Belgium enjoyed unprecedented prosperity in consequence of the preservation of peace during that fateful period.

After the war the diplomatic horizon remained clear for some time, and the Belgian people entered upon the literary movement that blossomed out about 1880 and that gave to the world the masterpieces of Verhaeren and Maeterlinck. The artistic and literary school of that date owed much to English examples and teaching. The love of Flemish tradition and of Flemish art was ingrained in English Catholics, who retained a familiar acquaintance with Louvain and Bruges, the cities from which their Church had been supported and recruited in the painful days of the seventeenth century. When the Oxford Movement turned men's minds to the life and faith of the Middle Ages, the works of the Flemish primitive painters were sought as examples of pure artistic feeling and practice ; the most authoritative book on Hubert and John Van Eyck is due to an English author, Mr. James Weale.

The pre-Raphaelite brotherhood derived some of their inspiration from Belgium, and Ford Madox Brown studied painting in Antwerp. It would be possible to collect more signs of that influence of Belgium's great past on English art and letters during the Victorian era, but about 1880 the stream set in the opposite direction.

Edmond Picard, one of the founders of the artistic and literary school of that period, was, like William Morris, a Socialist leader, and, also like Morris, he advocated the revival of art as one part of a general transformation of society. The religious and mediæval sources of Maeterlinck's poetry and thought lay very near to the sources of the Oxford Movement, and his symbolism bears a close analogy to the pre-Raphaelites' love of allegory and legend. The drama which brought him European fame, *La Princesse Maleine*, bears obvious marks of being derived from Shakespeare.

It is a far cry from that peaceful interchange of æsthetic ideas and impulses to the political tragedy that nearly destroyed the old-established Anglo-Belgian friendship and might have altered the course of the war of 1914. Without presuming to believe that the veil in which our recent history is shrouded can be yet lifted, we can all see how international relations were complicated from 1884 onward by King Leopold II's creation of the Congo Free State, now the Belgian colony whose soldiers fought the Germans in East Africa.

The King may literally be said to have created his colony out of nothing, for the nation was absorbed in business pursuits and in party politics, and cared little about what happened in the Congo State, which was a foreign, distant, and independent country, though ruled by the Belgian monarch. Only very slowly was the

nation's indifference shaken by the reports of geographical discovery and political success, by the personal adventures of individual Belgians, and by the appeals of missionaries for support and assistance. As the Coburg dynasty had observed the Constitution with scrupulous care, and had never tried to step beyond the limits of their parliamentary powers, the nation felt no inclination to pry into the Sovereign's colonial adventures, which were literally no business of the public. When attacks on the Sovereign's rule in Africa began to be launched from various quarters, and when the Casement report appeared in 1904, Belgian opinion, which was no better informed than newspaper opinion generally is, divided itself according to its own prejudices. The Radical and Socialist parties, which had Republican leanings, eagerly seized the opportunity to weaken the authority of the Crown and indulged in unbounded invective against Leopold II. As Press offences could only be tried by a jury, and as jurymen thought that sharp criticism of the royal policy did no great harm and might perhaps be useful, the King was quite defenceless. But the very violence of this personal defamation called forth a natural reaction. Supporters of the monarchical principle felt it their duty to protest against attacks from abroad, prompted by motives that were at least doubtful, and used at home to undermine the central authority in the State. Fortunately for all parties con-

cerned, the British Government declared their readiness to trust the Parliament of Brussels to redress all grievances in the Congo, provided the personal rule of the Sovereign came to an end, and provided the officers in the colony were rendered responsible to the representatives of the Belgian people. The act of annexation was passed in 1908, and the quarrel thus ended in a triumph for democratic principles and an agreement between the two nations, neither of whom sacrificed its dignity or its views.

VIII

CONCLUSION

It requires no great effort to discover the bearing of the facts collected in the preceding pages on the events of 1914-1918; in the light of those facts, recent occurrences display an undeniable similarity to older history and appear as the outcome of geographical conditions and of a fairly continuous tradition. The main difference between the tragedy of the twentieth century and those of preceding ages lies in the stronger position occupied by Belgium to-day. Whether we look at its foundation in international law, at its economic and political developments, or at its artistic and intellectual achievement, it now has a stronger claim to live and to expand than ever it had before. By a strange but logical turn of history, this small country, which was the cradle of municipal freedom in the Middle Ages, has become the champion of peace and liberty in the twentieth century, and its right to self-government has become the test case on which the universe takes sides in the most widespread war ever waged on our planet.

Looking at the narrower problem before us, that of the points of difference and similarity between Belgium and England, we can see that there are marked contrasts between their lines of evolution down to the nineteenth century. At the close of the Middle Ages Belgium was the wealthiest and most prosperous country and its Burgundian dynasty the most powerful in Europe, till it was overthrown by the mad ambition of Charles the Bold. England was then wasting her strength in ruinous and demoralising internal struggles. In the sixteenth century the position became reversed. After having reached the summit of political and economic success, Belgium was drawn into a heroic fight against the Spanish despotism by which she was being smothered, and was left weakened in every respect, especially through her separation from the Northern Netherlands. Meanwhile England was rapidly advancing on the road to progress and was laying the foundations of her maritime and commercial power in the Elizabethan period. During the last two centuries of the modern period the contrast became more and more striking. Belgium was continually weakened through the dynastic interests of her sovereigns and through the lust for conquest of her French and Dutch neighbours; England steadily consolidated her international position in spite of political and religious troubles within the kingdom. A certain likeness in the evolution of both countries appears in

the nineteenth century. The progress of both is mainly due to industrial and commercial enterprise, and to the prevalence of the influence of the towns in political life. Perhaps this may be the cause of the similarity of some institutions, such as the parliamentary form of government. This similarity is the more curious, as in Belgium the towns, after playing an all-important part in the Middle Ages, gradually lapsed into insignificance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while in England they shared with the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in the national government.

While such notable differences should not be overlooked by those who wish to compare the past of both countries, the points of analogy are undeniable. But they appear chiefly in international affairs, or, if we may so call it, in their external history. How far they reacted on their internal evolution it is impossible to decide in the present state of historical research. Both countries have met or walked the same road during several decisive moments of European history. The Hundred Years' War began with the alliance between the Flemish cities under Jacques Van Artevelde's leadership and the King of England and it closed with the famous Anglo-Burgundian alliance. Philip II's political and religious despotism had to face not only Elizabeth's cautious diplomacy, the hatred of her Protestant subjects, and the greed of her traders, but also the ardent patriot-

ism of the Belgians and their faithful love of their time-honoured institutions. The ambitions of Louis XIV and those of Napoleon caused England to take a leading part in the defence of Belgium as a barrier. Finally, the aggressive policy of Germany and her invasion of the small sanctuary of freedom and peace have renewed the old Anglo-Belgian alliance.

Whenever a European Power has threatened to upset the balance for her selfish advantage, the two States naturally came together. We may therefore say that in some way history has repeated itself, and that Belgium rightly looks upon England as an historic ally and hereditary friend and the strongest security of her independence. Economic interests have often helped to bring about or to strengthen political alliances, and, in more recent times, the two nations have been conscious of common hopes and ideals, and of a love of freedom utterly opposed to Prussianism. Gladstone expressed his regard for the Belgians in 1856, when Napoleon III threatened the liberty of the Press which is inscribed in their Constitution, in the following words: "The history of Belgium is that of a very small portion of Europe. But though small physically and viewed on the map, morally it occupies a large position. The spirit of their forefathers dwells in unbroken force within the bosoms of the Belgian people."

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