

1975 did his grave acquire a proper tombstone — arranged by his biographer, the historian John Hope Franklin.

Only after the funeral, apparently, did Williams's British fiancée learn that he had abandoned a wife and a fifteen-year-old son in the United States. In this deception and other ways, from his neglect of debts to his wanting a nonexistent doctoral degree, there was something of the leader about him. But, in a sense, this was the flip side of the extraordinary boldness that enabled him to defy a king, his officials, and the entire social order of the day. By contrast, for example, there was George Grenfell, a veteran British missionary whom Williams visited on the Congo River. He too had seen firsthand the full range of abuses, including Leopold's men employing buying chains of slaves, but, he wrote home within a few days of meeting Williams, he did not feel he could "publicly question the action of the State." And whatever Williams's elaboration of his own vision, virtually everything he wrote about the Congo would later be corroborated — absolutely — by others.

Williams's Open Letter was a cry of outrage that came from the heart. It gained him nothing. It lost him his patron, Harrington. It guaranteed that he could never work, as he had hoped, to bring American blacks to the Congo. It brought him none of the money he always needed, and in the few months he had left before his life ended in a foreign beach resort, it earned him little but calumny. By the time he went to the Congo in 1879, close to a thousand Europeans and Americans had visited the territory or worked there. Williams was the only one to speak out fully and passionately and repeatedly about what others denied or ignored. The years to come would make his work ever more prophetic.

WHERE THERE AREN'T NO TEN COMMANDMENTS

LEOPOLD established the capital of his new Congo state at the port town of Boma, just upriver from the Atlantic, where Stanley had finished his epic man-African trek in 1877. As the rains began, Boma was complete with a narrow-gauge railway — a steam engine pulling a couple of cars — that linked the bustling docks and trading-company warehouses to a cooler plateau above. There stood the government offices and homes for the Europeans who worked in them. Boma also boasted a Catholic church made of iron, a hospital for Europeans, a post office, a military base where cannon fired a salute to any newly arriving Viceroy and a two-story hotel. Three times a day — at 6 A.M., 11 A.M., and 8 P.M. — about seventy-five white officials took the trolley down the hill and through a plantation of banana trees for meals in the hotel dining room. The only European who ate elsewhere was the governor general, who took his meals in his dignified Victorian mansion, complete with a cupola, French windows, and covered porches. Every year, the king's birthday was celebrated with such events as a ceremonial review of troops, a target-shooting contest, and a concert by a Catholic black children's choir.

Ostentatious as his residence, guarded by African sentries with blue uniforms and red fringes, the Congo's governor general had the lion power that did a British, French, or German colonial governor. More than any other colony in Africa, the Congo was administered directly from Europe. The real headquarters of the État Indépendant du Congo were not in Boma but in suites of offices in Brussels, one on the grounds of the Royal Palace, the others next door or across the street. All the Congo's

high- and middle-level administrators were picked and promoted by the king himself, and a mini-cabinet of three or four Belgians at the top, in Brussels, reported to Leopold directly.

His one-man rule over this huge territory was in striking contrast to Leopold's ever more limited power at home. Once, in his later years, while he was talking in his study with several Cabinet ministers, his nephew and heir apparent, Prince Albert, opened a window, and a draft blew some papers onto the floor. Leopold ordered Albert to pick them up. "Let him do it," the king said to one of the ministers, who had hastily offered to do so instead. "African constitutional monarchs must learn to stoop." But in the Congo there was no stooping; Leopold's power was absolute.

At the lowest level, the king's rule over his colony was carried out by white men in charge of district and river stations throughout the vast territory; some of them were not visited by ambulances for months at a time. Far in the interior, provisions often lagged behind theory, but on paper, at least, even the least remote station chief was allotted a bottle of red wine per day and a plentiful supply of English marmalade, Danish butter, canned meats, soups and cereals, and fire gun and other plate from Fischer's of Strasbourg.

For these functionaries there was a plethora of medals, whose grades reflected the burgeoning hierarchy of imperial rule. For holders of the Order of the African Star, for instance, there were six classes, ranging from grand-cross and commander down to mere knight. The Royal Order of the Lion, created by Leopold to "recognize merit and acknowledge services rendered to Us," also had six classes. For African chiefs who collaborated with the regime, there was a special medal — bronze, silver, or gold-plated, depending on the degree of "service" rendered. It bore Leopold's profile on one side and, on the other, the Congo state coat of arms and the words *LOYALTY AND DEVOTION*.

The white officials in Leopold's Congo were usually single men, many of whom took on one or more African concubines. But by the turn of the century a few officials began to bring their wives, and some of those who didn't turned to an enterprising British manufacturing agency that supplied mail-order brides from Europe.

Photographs of various Congo posts from the 1890s generally show the same pattern. From the long shadows, it appears to be late afternoon. The two or three white men in the picture wear suits and ties and elongated sun helmets, like a London bobby's cap in white. They are



Leopold as a young man.



Henry Morton Stanley in the "Safari Cap" he designed for exploring in the tropics.



1907. One of a number of scenes where Leopold compares notes with the ruler of Tabora, who renounced his protectorate of Anvers.



1906.



1909.

seated on wicker chairs, a dog at their feet, in front of a tent or simple thatched-roof building, smoking. Behind them stand their smoking African servants, holding some endless of their master a serving tray a novel-strap over an arm, a bottle ready to pour. Wine glasses or tea cups rest on a table, symbols of the comfort of leisure. The white men are always dressed in white.

1908

Underpinning such scenes were a number of royal decrees from Brussels. The first and most important had been issued on the very day in 1885 that the existence of the Congo state was formally proclaimed; it declared that all "vacant land" was the property of the state. There was no definition of what vacant land meant. All over the world, of course, land that had been but often been deliberately left to its fallow while crops are planted somewhere else — especially in the tropics, where heavy weath-ers knock nutrients out of the soil.

Leopold was after whatever could be quickly harvested. In that sense, he treated both vacant and government land as his property, claiming a right to all its products. He made no distinction between the tools of an African peasant and wild or village "vegetables" that could feed his mill — it was all his.

He did not, however, have the resources to exploit the entire territory as another set of decrees carved parts of the Congo into several giant *Machos*, whose "vacant land" was leased out for long periods at concession to private companies. These concession companies had shareholders — largely, though not entirely Belgian — and stockholding discretion that included many high Congo state officials. But in each of these the state — which in effect meant Leopold himself — usually kept 50 percent of the shares. In setting up this structure, Leopold was like the manager of a venture capital syndicate today. He had essentially found a way to attract other people's capital to his investment schemes while he retained half the proceeds. In the end, what with various taxes and fees the companies paid the state, it came to more than half.

Unlike a venture capitalist in the marketplace, however, the king deployed troops and government officials as well as investment funds. He used them ruthlessly to shut out of the territory most businesses in which he did not have a piece of the action. The Dutch trading firm on whose members Wilhelms had traveled found itself facing stiff competition for ivory from Congo state officials who stopped in boats, in one case with

gorilla. Once, according to a history of the company, "a man of siege was proclaimed for a certain region which made it closed territory for traders. When the state of siege was lifted, all the ivory had disappeared."

The king, meanwhile, continued to claim that making a profit was the furthest thing from his mind. "I thank you for having done justice yesterday to the calumnies spread by enemies of the Congo state, to the accusation of secrecy and the spirit of gain," he wrote to the prime minister after a parliamentary debate in 1891. "The Congo state is certainly not a business, it's gather ivory on certain of its lands, that is only to lessen its deficit."

And if Africans were made to help out in the ivory-gathering, why that was, Heaven forbid, was not to make a profit, but to rescue these besighted people from their idolatry. Talk of the buy native accompanied the entire European land grab in Africa, just as it had been used to justify the conquest of the Americas. To an American reporter, Leopold once declared, "In dealing with a race composed of cannibals for thousands of years it is necessary to use methods which will bar their illenses and make them realize the necessity of work."

As the ripen began, the week whose name Leopold printed most lightly was sitting all the ivory that could be found. Congo state officials and their African auxiliaries swept through the country on ivory raids, shooting elephants, buying tusks from villagers for a pittance, or simply confiscating them. Congo people had been hunting elephants for centuries, but now they were forbidden to sell or deliver ivory to anyone other than an agent of Leopold. A draconian refinement of the ivory-gathering method, which set five prices for tusk that was to come, was a commission structure the king imposed in 1890, whereby his agents in the field got a rate of the ivory's market value — but on a sliding scale. An agent received only 6 percent of the value of any ivory purchased at eight francs per kilo, but the commission climbed, in stages, to 10 percent for ivory bought at four francs per kilo. The European agents thus had a powerful incentive to force Africans — if necessary, at gunpoint — to accept extremely low prices.

Almost none of these Belgian brass actually reached any Congolese elephant hunters. They received only small amounts of cloth, beads, and the like, or the brass rubs that the state decreed as the territory's main currency. For Africans, transactions in money were not allowed. Money in free circulation might undermine what was essentially a command economy.

The commands were above all for labor. At the beginning, the state most wanted porters. Like Stanley, any official who ventured away from the river system and into the bush — to collect ivory set up new posts, put down a rebellion — needed long columns of porters to carry everything from machine-gun ammunition to all that evil wine and pist. Three tens of thousands of porters were usually paid for their work, if only sometimes the food necessary to keep them going, but most of them were conscript. Even children were put to work: one observer noted seven- to nine-year-olds each carrying a load of twenty-two pounds.

"A file of poor devils, chained by the neck, carried my trunk and boxes toward the deck," a Congo state official wrote matter-of-factly in his memoirs. At the next stop on his journey more porters were needed for an overland trip. "There were about a hundred of them, trembling and fearful before the command, who walked by whirling a whip. For each stocky and broad-backed fellow, how many were skeletons dried up like mummies, their skin worn out . . . scarred with deep scars, covered with suppurating wounds . . . No matter, they were all up to the job."

Porters were needed most at the points where the river system was blocked by rapids, particularly — until the railroad was built — for the three-week trek between the port town of Matadi and Stanley Pool. This was the pipeline up which supplies passed to the interior and down which ivory and other riches were carried to the sea. Moving upstream from the upper section of the river was the most labor-intensive job of all: one steambot could comprise three thousand porter loads. Here is how Ekstrand Pissard, a Belgian senator, described a caravan of porters he saw on the route around the big rapids in 1891:

Unusually we saw these porters . . . black, miserable, with only a horribly filthy loin-cloth for clothing, dirty and bare head supporting the load — bow, kibe, ivory sack . . . bare, most of them sickly, drooping under a burden increased by disease and insufficient food — a handful of rice and some stinking dried fish; pitiful walking corpses, beam of burden with thin monkey legs, with drawn features, eyes fixed and vacant from preoccupations with keeping their balance and from the daze of exhaustion. They come and go like dots by the thousands . . . requisitioned by the State armed with its powerful rifles, handed over by death whose slaves they are and who make off with their skins, crawling with heat traces, belly forward, an arm raised to steady the

load, the wheel leaning on a long walking-stick, dusty and sweaty, sweat spreading over across the recesses and ridges down every fibre and their web of Sappho, dying along the road or, the journey over, leading off to the busy overwork in their villages.

The death toll was particularly high among porters forced to carry loads long distances. Of the three-headed porters conscripted in 1931 by District Commissioner Paul Lemaire for a fiscal march of more than six hundred miles to set up a new post, not one returned.

Stanislas Lefranc, a devout Catholic and monarchist, was a Belgian procurator who had come to the Congo to work as a registrar. Early one Sunday morning in Leopoldville, he heard the wail of many children screaming desperately.

On tracing the howls to their source, Lefranc found "some thirty victims, of whom several were seven or eight years old, lined up and waiting their turn, watching, terrified, their companions being flogged. Most of the victims, in a paroxysm of grief . . . kicked so frightfully that the soldiers ordered to hold them by the hands and feet had to lift them off the ground. . . . 25 times the whip dashed down on each of the children." The evening before, Lefranc learned, several children had hanged in the presence of a white man, who then ordered that all the arrogant boys in town be given fifty lashes. The second installment of twenty-five lashes was due at six o'clock the next morning. Lefranc managed to get those stopped, but was told not to make any more promises that interfered with discipline.

Lefranc was seeing in use a central tool of Leopold's Congo, which in the minds of the territory's people, soon became as closely identified with white rule as the steamboat or the rifle. It was the *diacre* — a strap of raw, sun-dried hippopotamus hide, cut into a long sharp-edged coil-screw strip. Usually the *diacre* was applied to the victim's bare buttocks. In blows would have pronounced scars, more than twenty-five strokes could mean excruciating pain, and a hundred or more — not an uncommon punishment — were often fatal.

Lefranc was to see many more *diacre* beatings, although his descriptions of them, in pamphlets and newspaper articles he published in Belgium, provoked little reaction.

The station chief selects the victims. . . . Trembling, begged, they lie face down on the ground. . . . Two of their companions, sometimes five, seize them by the feet and hands, and remove their coats and shirts. . . . Each time that the wretches lift up the *diacre*, a reddish stripe appears on the skin of the painful victims, who, however firmly held, gasp in frightful convulsions. . . . At the first blow the unhappy victims let out horrible cries which soon become faint groans. . . . In a refinement of evil, some officers, and I've witnessed this, demand that when the sufferer gets up, panting, he must graciously give the military salute.

The open horror Lefranc expressed succeeded only in causing him a reputation as an oddball or troublemaker. He "shows an astonishing ignorance of things which he ought to know because of his work. A medical agent," the acting governor general wrote in a personal excommunication. In an attempt to quiet his complaints, Lefranc wrote, officials ordered that executions at his post be carried out in a new location instead of next to his house.

Except for Lefranc, few Europeans working for the regime left records of their shock at the sight of officially sanctioned terror. The white men who passed through the territory as military officers, stevedore captains, or state or concession company officials generally accepted the use of the *diacre* as unthinkingly as headlamps of thousands of other men in uniform would accept their assignments, a half-century later, to staff the Nazi and Soviet concentration camps. "Monsters exist," wrote Primo Levi of his experience at Auschwitz. "But they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are . . . the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions."

What made it possible for the functionaries in the Congo to so lightly watch the *diacre* in action and, as we shall see, to deal out pain and death in other ways as well? To begin with, of course, was race. To Europeans, Africans were inferior beings: lazy, uncivilized, little better than animals. In fact, the most common way they were put to work was, like animals, as beasts of burden. In any system of terror, the functionaries need few of all see the victims as less than human, and Victorian ideas about race provided such a foundation.

Then, of course, the terror in the Congo was sanctioned by the authorities. For a white man to rebel meant challenging the system that

going along with the system, you were paid, promised, awarded medals to men who would have been applied to the same system using a stick on the shores of Britain or Paris or Stockholm accepted the act, in this diffuse setting, as normal. We can hear the echo of this thinking, in another context, half a century later: "To tell the truth," said Franz Stangl of the mass killings that took place when he was commandant of the Nazi death camps of Sobibor and Treblinka, "one did however need to it."

In such a regime, one thing that often helps functionaries "become used to it" is a slight, symbolic distance — irrelevant to the victim — between an official in charge and the physical act of mass death. That symbolic distance was frequently cited in self-defense by Nazis put on trial after World War II. Dr. Johann Paul Koenen, for example, an SS physician who liked to do his pathology research on human tissue that was still fresh, explained:

The patient was put on the dissecting table while he was still alive. I then approached the table and put several questions to the man as to such details which pertained to my research. . . . When I had collected my information the orderly approached the patient and killed him with an injection in the vicinity of the heart. . . . I myself never made any lethal injections.

I myself never made any lethal injections. Although some whites in the Congo enjoyed wielding the whips, most put a visible symbolic distance between themselves and the dreaded instrument. "At first I . . . took upon myself the responsibility of making our punishment to those whose conduct during the previous day seemed to warrant such treatment," recalled Raoul de Prunow, who worked for a company operating in the Kasai River basin. "Soon . . . I found it desirable to assign the execution of sentences to others under my direction. The best plan seemed to be to have each capit [African functionary] administer the punishment for his own gang."

And so the bulk of whips blows were inflicted by Africans on the bodies of other Africans. This, for the colonizers, served a further purpose. It created a class of functionaries among the conquered, like the kapos in the Nazi concentration camps and the prefects, or trustees, in the

Soviet gulag. Just as terrorizing people is part of conquest, so is forcing someone else to administer the terror.*

Finally, what terror is the unquestioned order of the day, wielding it efficiently is regarded as a manly virtue, the way soldiers value cadence in battle. This is the attitude in "becoming used to it," there, for instance, a station chief named Georges Belcaux describes in his diary a hanging he endured in 1945 of a man who had stolen a rifle:

The gallows is set up. The rope is stretched, too high. They lift up the nigger and put the noose around him. The rope waits for a few moments, then snags, the man is swinging on the ground. A dot is the back of the neck and the gate is up. It didn't make the least impression on me this time! Had to think that the first time I saw the photo administered, I was pale with fright. Africa has some one after all. I could now walk into that as if it was nothing.

1911

The framework of control that Leopold extended across his overseas realm was military. After all, without armed force, you cannot make men bow their heads and families and carry sixty-five-pound loads for weeks or months. The king was particularly happy to run his own army in Africa, since as Belgian he was former at loggerheads with neighbors who did not share his passion for building great forts, spending more money on the army and industrializing the draft.

Leopold had made use of African mercenaries ever since sending Stanley to stake out his claim from 1879 to 1884. In 1888 he formally organized them into the Force Publique, an army for his new state. Over the next dozen years, it grew to more than nineteen thousand officers and men, the most powerful army in central Africa. By the late 1890s, it consisted more than half the state's budget. At once counterinsurgency troops, an army of occupation, and a corporate liberal police force, it was

* If the underlying objective is unchangeable, sometimes the conqueror tries persuasion. When eighteenth-century black soldiers were recruited in Sierra Leone, a photographer recalled the recruiter concluded that he had to make out a living equal of local black groups but just find a white line to cut the loyalty issue, the same white rule perception of Sierra Leone was in a long run at right angles to both groups, each was behavioral wilderness with a rifle at the ready.

divided mainly into small garrisons — typically, several dozen black soldiers under one or two white officers, on a riverbank. The initial handful of military posts quickly grew to 183 by 1905, and to 203 by 1908.

The Force Publique had its hands full. Many of the king's new subjects belonged to warlike peoples who fought back. More than a dozen different ethnic groups staged major rebellions against Leopold's rule. The Yaka people fought the whites for more than ten years before they were subdued, in 1906. The Chokwe fought for twenty years, inflicting heavy casualties on Leopold's soldiers. The Itza and the Balga mobilized more than five thousand men to fight a guerrilla war from deep within the rain forest. Just as Americans used the word *pejorative* in Vietnam seventy years later, so the Force Publique's military expeditions were officially called *missionnaires pejoratives*.

The history of central Africa before the European arrival was a filled with wars and conquests in Europe's own, and even during Leopold's rule not all the Congo's violence was between colonizer and colonized. Because so many Congo peoples had earlier fought among themselves, the Force Publique was often able to ally itself with one ethnic group to defeat another. But sooner or later the first group found itself subdued as well. With their forces stretched thin over a huge territory, Leopold's overlanders made clever use of the shifting pattern of alliances. In the end, though, their superior firepower guaranteed victory — and a history written by the victors.

Yet sometimes, even through these sieves, we can glimpse the demoralization of those who opposed the king. In Katanga in the far south, warriors from the Sanga people were led by a chief named Mahaze Niama. Though the state troops were armed with artillery, his forces put up a stiff fight, killing one officer and wounding three soldiers. They then took refuge in a large chink cave called Tiharsiele. The Force Publique commander ordered his men to light fires at the three entrances to the cave to smother the rebels out, and after a week he sent an emissary to negotiate Mahaze Niama's surrender. The chief and his men refused. Soldiers lit the fires again and blocked the cave for three months. When the troops finally entered it, they found 174 bodies. Fearful of leaving any sign of a warrior's grave, the Force Publique soldiers triggered landslides to obliterate all traces of the existence of the Tiharsiele cave and of the bodies of Mahaze Niama and his men.

Another rebellion took place along the caravan route around the lower Congo rapids. A war-torn state agent, a Belgian named Ilaghe

Roeland, took a station there to procure porters for the three-week trek from Matadi to Stanley Pool, a job for which the state needed fifty thousand men a year by the mid-1890s. Unlike the Protestant missionaries and some private traders, who hired the porters they used on this route and negotiated wages with them, the Congo state — at Leopold's specific order — used forced labor. Roeland named his station *Bata Bata*, which means "capture, capture."

A local chief named Nzamu led an uprising, ambushing and killing Roeland on December 3, 1893, and burning his station to the ground. The rebels also burned and pillaged two other nearby state posts, where they killed two white officials and wounded several more. However, Nzamu spared Mokimanga, a Swedish mission on the caravan route. He even gave the missionaries some supplies he had found abandoned on the trail and returned some goods his men had taken from the mission station. One of the missionaries, Karl Thoder Anderson, wrote to his church members back in Sweden:

If our friends of the Mission at home are worried for our safety here as a result of letters and newspaper reports about the current in these parts, I wish to reassure them. . . . The leader of the rebels, Chief Nzamu of Kasi, has let us know that he does not wish harm to any one of us as we have always shown that we are friends of the black people. But to the men of the State he has sworn death. And anyone who knows of the conditions out here cannot feel surprised.

This rebellion particularly alarmed the state because it completely stopped traffic on the crucial caravan route to Stanley Pool. To crush the rebels, the authorities sent out a force of fifteen white officers and two hundred black soldiers. Another Swedish missionary, C. N. Bärnson, wrote home a few weeks later, "The rebels have not fled . . . but have assembled in the leader's village, which they are defending unto death although their other villages have been burned."

Horroon goes on to speak powerfully for the rebels whose own words we cannot hear:

A man uses whetstone rings. In making the state is the true source of these uprisings. It is strange that people who claim to be civilized think they can treat their fellow man — even though he is of a

different color — any which way . . . Without a doubt one of the most dispensable [of the officials] is the late Mr. Bremer. One should not speak ill of the dead but I must simply mention some smaller matters to prove that the street has been justified. . . . He imprisoned women when the people refused to transport [supplies] and to sell their goods below market prices. . . . He was not ashamed to come by our station and *disrupt our school girls . . . and treat them in deplorable ways.* One Sunday morning brother Anderson and I went to a neighboring village and helped release those poor women whom his soldiers had imprisoned because one of them had asked for the return of a stone jug which had been taken from her. . . .

But what happens to all of the women who are taken prisoner? Some are set free . . . when their husbands have done all they can to regain the one who is drawn to them. Others are forced to work in the fields and also to work as prostitutes. . . . Our most respected men here . . . have told us with tears in their eyes and much weeping in their hearts that they had recently seen a group of seven hundred women chained together and transported [to the coast on steamships]. "And," they said, "whether they cut off our heads or that of a chicken it is all the same to them. . . ."

So can anyone feel truly surprised that the discontent has finally come to the surface? Niassa, the leader of the uprising, and [Romanão] Anassa, only wanted to become the Engelbrecht of the Congo and the Gambia of his people. His followers as a loyal to him as Sweden were to their leaders in those times.

The missionary's comparison was to two Swedish partisans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, soldiers who led rebellions of Swedish peasants against harsh foreign kings. Was was successful and was himself elected King of Sweden. Niassa was less fortunate. He and his warriors fought an against Leopold's Force Publique for eight months, and, despite several scorched-earth expeditions sent against them, continued to fight sporadically for two more years. There seems to be no record of Niassa's fate.

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All the commissioned officers and some sergeants of the Force Publique were white, mostly Belgian, but some other countries as well. Their own armies were usually happy to give them leave to gain a few years' combat experience. All the ordinary soldiers were black, Mozambicans from Zanzibar and the British West African colonies in the army's first few years were even outnumbered by soldiers from the Congo itself, most of whom were conscripts. Even those who volunteered often did so because, as one soldier explained to a European visitor, he preferred "to be with the hunters rather than with the hunted." If paid, ill fed, and flogged with the *chicotte* for the slightest offense, many tried to desert, and in the early days officers had to spend much of their time capturing them. Then, to guard against desertions, the state began sending new conscripts far from their home districts. As a soldier finishing your seven-year term, you might then face a journey of several hundred to a thousand miles to get home. Sometimes even that you would not be allowed to go.

The soldiers' frustration frequently boiled over into mutinies, large and small. The first big one erupted at the railway base at Lubumbashi in the south-central uranium country in 1921. The base commander, Mahieu Pélissier, was a notorious bully who used his fist on those under him and routinely ordered soldiers given 124 lashes with the *chicotte*. When his African concubine slept with another man, he ordered her killed. At one point Pélissier ordered a soldier punished, but before the man wielding the *chicotte* could begin, a sergeant named Kankoko went up to him and snatched the whip out of his hands. When rebellion against Pélissier broke out shortly afterward, it was led by angry black noncommissioned officers with Kankoko at their head.

Soldiers attacked and wounded Pélissier, who fled into the bush and hid. But the rebels tracked him down and killed him. Under Kankoko, dressed in white and riding on a bull, they set off for other Force Publique posts, gathering supporters among the black soldiers and killing several European officers. For more than half a year, the rebels controlled most of the Kasai region. In the bush, they split into small groups, spending out over a broad area and successfully evading or fighting off a long series of heavily armed expeditions sent against them. A year later, worried Force Publique officers estimated that there were still four hundred to five hundred rebels at large, recruiting new members and allying themselves with local chiefs against the state. Altogether, suppressing the revolt cost the Force Publique the lives of several hundred black soldiers and porters

and fifteen white officers or NCOs. One was an American, Lieutenant Lindsay Burke, a twenty-six-year-old native of New Orleans, who had been in Africa less than a year. He marched into an ambush and died, along with twenty-seven of his men, in early 1899. The rebel leader Kumbolo was fatally wounded in battle, but two corporals who played a major role in the revolt, Yumbo-Yumbo and Kinsaki, fought on as guerrilla leaders; they were killed, still fighting, in 1908, thirteen years after the uprising began.

At the other end of the country, in the far northwest, a great military battle raged in 1897 among three thousand soldiers and an equal number of porters and auxiliaries. The men, who had been forced to march for months through forest and swamps in a renewed march by Leopold toward the headwaters of the Nile, finally had enough. The fighting went on for three years, in columns after columns of loyalist Force Publique troops fought the rebels over some six hundred miles of forest and savanna along the chain of lakes on the Congo's eastern border. Beneath their own red-and-white flag, which bore different ethnic groups fought together, maintained military discipline, and staged ambushes to replenish their supplies of weapons and ammunition. Sympathetic chiefs gave them support, including warnings by talking down of approaching troops. Even the Force Publique's official history acknowledges that its leaders "the rebels displayed a courage worthy of a better cause."

More than two years after the revolt began, the rebels were able to muster twenty-five hundred soldiers to attack a heavily fortified position. One contingent of loyalist Force Publique mercenaries was reduced from five hundred men to three during the campaign. The rebels were still fighting in 1908, when two thousand of them finally withdrew across the frontier into German territory today's Rwanda and Burundi, where they gave up their arms in return for the right to settle.

This prolonged military is the sole case in the history of Leopold's Congo where we have an eyewitness account of what it was like behind rebel lines. In April 1897, these insurgents captured a French priest, Father Auguste Achin, who unintentionally walked into their hands, assuming that the "immense camp" he had come upon must be that of a Force Publique expedition. Finding himself instead among some two thousand rebels, whose leaders were wearing captured gold-braided officers' uniforms and plumes, Achin was terrified, certain that he was going to die. Some of the men came did drag him up and tell him they had sworn to kill all white people. But the leaders of the group argued them down,

making a distinction between those whites who worked for the hated Congo man and those who did not. Malumbo, the chief of this group of rebels, reported Achin, told the priest that they were sparing his life because "I had no rifle, I sought God's word, I took care of sick natives, and (the decisive argument) I had never hit a black." The rebels had reached this conclusion after interrogating a dozen young Africans to whom the priest was giving religious instruction.

To Father Achin's surprise, the rebels eventually slaughtered a goat, fed him, brewed him a cup of coffee, and presented him with a gift of ivory to compensate for some of his goods they had confiscated, "so you won't write in Europe that we stole from you." After several days, he was released. The rebels told him they had killed their Belgian officers because the officers treated them like animals, they hadn't been paid for months, and soldiers and chiefs alike were flogged or hung for the slightest offense. They spoke of one white officer who shot sixty soldiers in a single day because they refused to work on a Sunday, and of another who "with his own hands poured salt and pepper on the bloody wounds made by the disease and ordered the sick from his post thrown alive into the Luaba River."

"For three years I built up a hatred against the Belgians in my heart, and choked it back," Malumbo said to Achin. "When I saw Otharis [Simon François Otharis, the Force Publique commander in the area] face to face with my rebelling countrymen, I trembled with happiness; it was the moment of deliverance and vengeance." Other rebels told Achin that they had chosen Malumbo as their king and two others as his deputies, and that they wanted to set up an independent state free of white rule. This uprising and the other Force Publique rebellions were more than moments of disgruntled soldiers; they were precursors of the anticolonial guerrilla wars that shook central and southern Africa starting in the 1950s.

THE

While Leopold gladly issued edicts banning the slave trade, virtually no western except George Washington Williams stated the obvious: not only the porters but even the soldiers of the Force Publique were, in effect, slaves. Moreover, under a system personally approved by the king, white men upon were paid a bonus according to the number of men they turned over to the Force Publique. Sometimes agents bought men from collaborating chiefs, who delivered their human goods in chains. In one

transaction, recorded in a district commissioner's notes, twenty-five francs per person was the price received for a half-tonne measure delivered by two chiefs from Itonga in 1892.) Congo state officials were paid an extra bonus for "refrains in recruiting expenses" — a thinly veiled invitation to use the state treasury by kidnapping these men directly instead of paying chiefs for them.

Always, however, the slave system was bedecked with euphemisms, used even by officials in the field. "Two boats . . . just arrived with Sergeant Lema and 25 volunteers from Ergwetta in chains; two men drowned trying to escape," wrote one official, Louis Rousseau, in his monthly report for October 1892. Indeed, some three quarters of such "volunteers" died before they could even be delivered to Forts Pablique posts, a worried senior official wrote the same year. Among the solutions to the problem of this "waste" he recommended were faster transport and lightweight steel chains instead of heavy iron ones. Despondent from this time repeatedly down Congo state officials ordering additional supplies of chains. One officer noted the problem of files of conscripts crossing narrow log bridges over jungle streams when "Moko [bleasted man] chained by the neck cross a bridge, if one falls off, he pulls the whole file off and it disappears."

White officers who bargained with village chiefs to acquire "volunteer" soldiers and porters were sometimes dealing with the same sources that had supplied the sea coast Afro-Arab slave-traders. The most powerful of these Zambezi-based slaves was the hardy, bearded, strongly built Hassid bin Muhammad of Masjidi, popularly known as Tippu Tip. His nickname was said to have come from the sound of the slave-trader's principal instrument, the *masala*.

Tippu Tip was a famous, successful man who made a fortune in ivory as well as slaves, business he was able to expand dramatically thanks to Stanley's discovery of the route of the upper Congo River.* Leopold knew that Tippu Tip's power and administrative status had made him

* Tippu Tip had supplied porters to Stanley, who had to cross enough men to ask the easy question about why they were recruited in chains: the loss of Stanley's expedition. Tippu Tip and his message came along for part of the way. One more: the explorer's British friend John Pakenham reported how such criticism in Europe was that at one point Stanley imperiously commissioned a voluntary recruit to accompany him down the Congo River. The night even of God saw their boat carry off part of an expedition that included Tippu Tip and his thirty-five wives and children.

direct the de facto ruler of the eastern Congo in 1883, the king asked him to serve as governor of the colony's eastern province, with its capital at Stanley Falls, and Tippu Tip accepted, several relations accepted posts under him. At this early stage, with Leopold's military forces spread thin, the king offered something to both men. (The king also contracted to buy the freedom of several thousand of Tippu Tip's slaves, but one condition of their freedom, those "bleasted" slaves and many others quickly discovered, was a seven-year enlistment term in the Force Publique.) Although Leopold managed for most of his life to be all things to all people, the spectacle of this wily ivory trader doing as much business with Africa's most powerful slave-dealer helped spur the first massing against the king in Europe.

Eventually the two men parted ways. Ambitious white state officials in the eastern Congo, without the approval of their superiors in Brussels, then fought annual victorious battles against some of the Afro-Arab warlords in the region, fighting that after the fact was covered over a noble campaign against the damnable "Arab" slave-dealer. Colonial-heroic literature elevated it to a central place in the period's official mythology, echoes of which can be heard in Belgian to this day. However, over the years Congo military forces spilled far more blood in fighting insupportable uprisings by Africans, including the rebels from their own ranks. Furthermore, as soon as the region campaign against the slaves was over, Leopold put many of them back in place as state officials.

END

What was it like to be captured and enslaved by the Congo's white conquerors? In one rare instance we can hear an African voice describe the experience. It was recorded by an American Swahili-speaking missionary, Edgar Carrión, who found himself unexpectedly moved by the story told to him by "a woman of great intelligence, named Banga." Later, when he met the officer and soldiers who had captured her, he concluded that she had indeed spoken the truth. The event she describes took place in the eastern part of the territory near Nyangwan, the town where Stanley had first seen the great river that turned out to be the Congo. Here, as recorded by Carrión, is Banga's story:

One village is called Wawimoko, also our chief Mawoko. . . . It is a large village near a small stream, and surrounded by large fields of milage (maize) and muboko (yams) and other foods, for we all

worked hard at our plantations, and always had plenty to eat. . . . We never had war in our country, and the men had not many arms except knives. . . .

We were all busy in the fields tending our plantations, for it was the rainy season, and the work sprang quickly up, when a runner came to the village saying that a large band of men was coming, that they all wore red caps and blue cloths, and carried guns and long knives, and that many white men went with them; the chief of whom was Kibulaga [the African name for a French Pétlipe officer named Omer Michaux, who once received a Medal of Honor from Leopold's own hands]. Niasoko at once called all the chief men to his house, while the drums were beaten to summon the people to the village. A long consultation was held, and finally we were all told to go quietly to the fields and bring in ground-nuts, plantains, and cabbages for the warriors who were coming, and goats and fowls for the white men. The women all went with babies and filled them, and then put them in the mud. . . . Niasoko thought that, by giving persons of much food, he would induce the strangers to pass on without harming us. And so it proved. . . .

When the white men and their warriors had gone, we went again to our work, and were hoping that they would not return; but this they did in a very short time. As before, we brought in great heaps of food; but this time Kibulaga did not move any distance, but camped near our village, and his soldiers came and stole all our fowls and guns and went up our cabbages, but we did not mind that as long as they did not harm us. The next morning . . . soon after the sun rose over the hill, a large band of soldiers came into the village, and we all went into the houses and sat down. We were not long seated when the soldiers came rushing in shouting, and threatening Niasoko with their guns. They rushed into the houses and dragged the people out. Three or four came to our house and caught hold of me, also my husband Chika and my sister Katiga. We were dragged into the road, and were tied together with cords about our necks, so that we could not escape. We were all crying, for now we knew that we were to be taken away to be slaves. The soldiers beat us with the iron sticks from their guns, and compelled us to march to the camp of Kibulaga, who ordered the women to be tied up separately, we

to each cord, and the men in the same way. When we were all collected — and there were many from other villages whom we saw ere, and many from Wazirindi — the soldiers brought baskets of food for us to carry in stead of which was smoked human flesh. . . .

We then set off marching very quickly. My sister Katiga had her baby in her arms, and was not compelled to carry a burden; but my husband Chika was made to carry a goat. We marched until the afternoon, when we camped near a stream, where we were glad to drink, for we were much thirsty. We had nothing to eat, for the soldiers would give us nothing. . . . The next day we continued the march, and when we camped at noon were given some maize and plantains, which were gathered near a village from which the people had run away. So it continued each day until the 11th day, when the soldiers took my sister's baby and threw it in the grass, leaving it to die, and made her carry some cooking pots which they found in the deserted village. On the sixth day we became very weak from lack of food and from constant marching and sleeping in the damp grass, and my husband, who marched behind us with the goat, could not stand up longer, and so he sat down beside the path and refused to walk more. The soldiers beat him, but still he refused to move. Then one of them struck him on the head with the end of his gun, and he fell upon the ground. One of the soldiers caught the goat, while two or three others stuck the long knives they put on the ends of their guns into my husband. I saw the blood spurt out, and then saw him no more, for we passed over the back of a hill and he was out of sight. Many of the young men were killed the same way and many babies thrown into the grass to die. . . . After marching our days we came to the great water. . . . and were taken in chains across to the white man's town at Nyiraga.



Even children were not spared the rigors of Leopold's regime. "I believe we must set up three children's colonies," the king wrote on April 27, 1892. "One in the Upper Congo near the equator, specifically military with clergy for religious instruction and the vocational education. One at Leopoldville under clergy with a soldier for military training. One at

Boma like that at Léopold. . . . The sites of these colonies is shown all to furnish us with soldiers. We then have to build three big barracks at Boma, Léopold, and near the equator . . . each capable of housing 1,200 children and administrative personnel." Following up on Leopold's orders, the governor general six weeks later directed his district commissioners "first now on to gather the most male children possible" for the three state colonies.

As the years passed, many more children's colonies were established by Catholic missionaries. Unlike the Congo's Protestant missionaries, who were foreign and beyond Leopold's control, the Catholics were mostly Belgian and loyal supporters of the king and his empire. (One Belgian saint, the Schola Sisters, even started a mission station after a disaster of one of the big concession companies.) Leopold subsidized the Catholics lavishly and sometimes used this financial power to deploy priests, direct as if they were soldiers, to areas where he wanted to strengthen his influence.

The children taken in by these missionaries were, theoretically, "orphans," but in most intact, indigenous African societies, with their strong sense of extended family and clan ties, the concept of orphanhood in the European sense did not exist. To the extent that these children literally were orphans, it was frequently because their parents had been killed by the *Forces Publiques*. In the wake of their deadly raids throughout the territory soldiers often collected survivors, both adults and children, and brought them to the Catholic missionaries.

Monsieur Dewo furnished us with five prisoners, tied by the neck, to dig up clay for brick-making, as well as 25 laborers from Bamba for gathering wood [a Catholic priest reported to his superior in 1892]. . . . Since the last convey of children from Bama, 25 others have arrived. . . . From time to time we have baptized some of the latter ones, in case of danger of their dying. . . . On July 10 we celebrated the national day of the *État Indépendant du Congo*. At 8 o'clock, with all our children and a flag in front, we went at the banner of the *maréchal* carried out of the city to welcome *Commandant Dewo* and his soldiers. Returning to the mission, the children marched in front, the soldiers following. . . . During Mass . . . at the moment of the elevation of the host, "pious army" was sounded by bugles.

The children's colonies were usually ruled by the monks and the priests. There were many murders. If they survived their kidnapping, transport, and schooling, most of the male graduates of the state colonies became soldiers, just as Leopold had ordered. These state colonies were the only state-funded schools for Africans in Leopold's Congo.

Among the orphaned and malnourished children packed into both the state and Catholic colonies, disease was rife and the death rate high, often over 50 percent. Thousands more children perished during the long journeys to get them. Of one column of 100 boys on a forced march to the state colony at Boma in 1892-1893, only sixty-two made it to their destination; eight of them died within the following few weeks. The mother superior of one Catholic colony for girls wrote to a high Congo state official in 1895, "Several of the little girls were so sickly on their arrival that . . . our good nuns couldn't save them, but all had the happiness of receiving Holy Baptism; they are now little angels in Heaven who are praying for our great king!"

END

Despite such reports, back home the great king was having more domestic troubles. For one thing, his hopes of seeing his daughter Stephanie become Empress of Austria-Hungary ended in disaster. Her husband, Crown Prince Rudolph, turned out to be an alcoholic and a voracious killer. One day in 1889 he and his mistress were found dead in a hunting lodge, an apparent double suicide — although for years rumors swirled that he had been murdered by political enemies. In any event, Stephanie could never become empress. Leopold rushed to Vienna, where the Belgian Cabinet sent him in consolation. The king, then in the midst of his campaign to raise Congo development funds, replied: "We thank you for your kind expressions regarding the disaster which has befallen us. We know the feelings of the ministers, and count upon their sympathy in the terrible crisis which God has laid upon us. Do whatever you can to help *Monsieur Van Nieuw* [the Congo state administrator general for finance] to place some more shares on the market; this would be most agreeable to us. Once more, I thank you."

The widowed Stephanie later married a Hungarian count whose blood was not royal enough for Leopold; the king referred to his son-in-law as "the stepson." As with her sister Louise, Leopold refused to speak to Stephanie again.

Besides his disbelieving daughters to fire over, the king had his mad sister Carlota, confined to her château on the outskirts of Brussels, apparently believing she was still Empress of Mexico. Her bridal dress, faded flowers, and a feathered Mexican idol hung on her wall. She was supposed to spend her days talking to a life-size doll dressed in imperial robes. Rumors of her delusions provided endless means of copy to school children all over Europe. Once when her château caught fire, Carlota was said to have leaped over a parapet and shouted at the flames, "That is forbidden! That is forbidden!"

Fantasy problems could not, however, stop Leopold's musing in the night. It was as if he took for granted that this aspect of his life would be miserable, and he lived for other things, above all for his role as King-Sovereign of the Congo. And as he looked around himself in the 1890s, he could see previously unimagined Belgians beginning to share his dreams of conquest and glory. Swept in the social imagery of the time, these fantasies tickled over into action for schoolboys. One contained the glorification of a young Belgian lieutenant married for the imperial cause to a suppressing the 1897 meeting:

The situation was desperate. All seemed lost. But here De La Court sprang into the breach.

Together with other Belgian officers and the messengers of their platoon, he annihilated the black demons who had rushed into the pursuit of the colonel. . . . Smaller black bands seemed to swinge from every corner, grinding their white teeth. . . .

He fell. . . . He understood the supreme moment of death had come. . . . breathing, exhausted, sublime, thinking of his King, of his flag. . . . he looked for the last time upon the swarming bank of black demons. . . .

Thus Charles De La Court died in the fulness of youth in the face of the enemy.

There were your whies, to the distress of every young male European. Europe was at peace. For a young man looking for battle, especially battle against a poorly armed enemy, the Congo was the place to go. For a white man, the Congo was also a place to get rich and to wield power. As a district commissioner, you might be running a district as big as all of Holland or Belgium. As a station chief, you might be a hundred miles

away from the next white official; you could levy whatever taxes you chose in labor, ivory, or anything else, collect them however you wanted, and impose whatever punishments you liked. If you got carried away, the penalty if any was a day on the wrist. A station chief at Matanga, on the big river, who lost two of his personal servants to death in 1890 was only fined five hundred francs. What mattered was keeping the ivory flowing back to Belgium. The more you sent, the more you earned. "Five in Congo, then is nothing like it!" one young officer wrote to his family in 1894. "We have liberty, independence, and life with wide horizons. Here you are free and not a mere slave of society. . . . Here one is everything! Warlike, diplomatic, noble? Why not?" For such people, just as for the luxury-born Stanley, the Congo offered a chance for a great rise in status. Business found for a life as a small-town bank clerk or pharmacist in Europe could instead become a warlike, ivory merchant, big game hunter, and possessor of a harem.

Léon Roos, for example, was born in the provincial Belgian town of Molen. He studied in the army at the age of sixteen, but did not have enough education to become an officer. He then worked as a bookkeeper with a firm of customs brokers, but quickly tired of that. He came to the Congo in search of adventure in 1888, at the age of twenty-five. At a time when there was only a few hundred white men in the entire territory, his progress was rapid. Roos soon found himself district commissioner at Matohi, and in that capacity presided over the first civil marriage ceremony of a white couple in the Congo zone. His next career briefly as a judge. With so few whites running the vast colony, there was no clear line between civilian and military functions, and Roos was soon put to work training black troops for the Force Publique. The pay was good, too; once promoted to captain, he carried 50 percent more than a colored in the Belgian Army took home.

Acquiring various medals, Roos won some glory for an episode in a battle against the "Arabs" when he bravely entered an enemy fort as regimental quartermaster. According to one account: "Roos spontaneously volunteered. . . . He left unarmed, accompanied only by an interpreter and, from the spot assigned as a messenger, saw all the Arab troops crouched behind their ramparts, their rifles at the ready. An emissary, with the ruler's Koran in a silk-cloth, invited him to enter the fortress. In spite of the apprehensions of the interpreter, who snuffed a trap, Roos proceeded resolutely into the enemy camp. After two hours of negotiations, he left this bit, carrying an Arab flag as proof of surrender." Roos's

area description is even more disastrous: he prevails over the deadly Anka only because of his "intride double," while the terrified, trembling interpreter says, "Mama, they're going to kill you!" Whether accepting this narrative was anything but risky to begin with, we do not know. One of the benefits of service as a *Force Publique* officer was that the return journey was usually thousands of miles away, so you and a few friends could largely shape the record of your exploits.

Roux's upward mobility lay in more than just military rank; it also had intellectual trappings. Each time he returned to Europe he brought with him many heretofore specimens and in time was elected a member of the Entomological Society of Belgium. Honors like this, as well as his officer's sword and his cap with the Congo stars sewn on it, were a far cry from the life of a provincial bookkeeper.

Beyond the eagerly repeated stories of wealth and glory to be found by young white men in the Congo (usually by something else: the dy him that you could lose your boots and muddy back in Europe.) (As we shall see, this would be the case for Léon Rom.) For Europeans of the day, colonies all over the world offered a convenient escape. Kipling wrote:

Slip we somewhere out of here,
where the hot is like the west,
Where they are? on The Goodwin Sands,
as a man can rate a debt.

In the Congo the Ten Commandments was practiced even less than in most colonies. Belgium was small, the Congo was huge, and the white death rate in the African tropics was still atrociously high. (Authorities tried hard to keep such figures secret, but before 1903 fully a third of white Congo state agents died there; some of the others died of the effects of disease after returning to Europe.) And so in order to find enough men to staff his far-flung network of river posts in malaria-ridden territory, Leopold had to recruit not just Belgians like Léon Rom, but young white men from throughout Europe, offering them by such get-rich-quick incentives as the lucrative commission structure for acquiring ivory. Many who came out to work in the Congo were like the missionaries who joined the French Foreign Legion or the freelance hunters who flocked to the two great gold rushes of the day in South Africa and the Klondike. With its opportunities for both combat and riches, to

Europeans the Congo was a gold rush and the Foreign Legion combined.

The first wave of Leopold's agents included many hard-litten men facing marital troubles, bankruptcy or alcoholism. A popular song soon sprang up the coast of the river. One official description in his memoirs from shortly arrived in the Congo, he was kept awake all night by drunken agents singing it wildly in the bar of his wretched suspect hotel. The first verse runs:

Y en a qui font la maison d'ile
A leur parents;
Qui font les dettes, qui font les hites,
Ivres/morts;
Qui, en leur vie, de leur malheur
Ont pleuré à des
Et fait le camp, pleuré de tristesse
Sur le Congo . . .

(There're those who blow up at their families,
Who run up debts, who play the fool in vain,
Who one fine evening are fed up with their grief,
They are all full of sorrow for the Congo . . .)

African in the Congo, meanwhile, were singing very different songs. A missionary transcribed this one:

O mother how we'll weep for our son . . .
But the sun will kill the white man,
But the moon will kill the white man,
But the arrow will kill the white man,
But the tiger will kill the white man,
But the crocodile will kill the white man,
But the elephant will kill the white man,
But the river will kill the white man.

1840; on a later visit, he gave Theodore Roosevelt a pipe and a palm-leaf coverlet. On these trips home, Sheppard delivered innumerable speeches, at colleges, universities, and churches throughout the country and his fervent preaching about Africa recruited more black missionaries for the Presbyterian. One of them, Lucy Gantt, a teacher and talented singer whom he had known while still a theology student, he married. To help out what eventually became several mission stations, more white Presbyterians came to Africa as well, and a white man was always in charge. On the official rolls of the Southern Presbyterian mission society (published in the United States, Sheppard and his crew recast songs had "yeh-oh-oh" or "i-ee" after their names. But in Africa itself he did not feel relegated to second-class citizenship: he called one of his children Mawankaga, after a son of the Kaba king.

Not surprisingly the Kaba were happy with their coming way of life, and, despite their fierceness toward Sheppard, showed little interest in Christianity. The mission station Sheppard ran among them made few converts. But Sheppard had become so well known back home for his discovery that the Presbyterians were afraid of an adverse public reaction if they closed his mission to the Kaba and stationed him elsewhere.

The entire Kasai region, like the rest of the Congo, in time succumbed to the tightening grip of the Congo state. Some eight years after Sheppard's Jesuaria visit, Leopold's forces finally reached and looted the Kaba capital.

The rail on the capital, like many other events in the Congo, was triggered by a discovery far away. One day a few years before William Sheppard first embarked for Africa, a veterinary surgeon with a majestic white beard was tinkering with his son's tricycle at his home in Belfast, Ireland. John Dunlop was trying to solve a problem that had bedeviled bicyclists for many years: how do you get a gentle ride without spiking? Dunlop finally devised a practical way of making a long-sought solution, an inflatable rubber tire. In 1840 the Dunlop Company began making tires — setting off a bicycle craze and starting a new industry just in time, it turned out, for the coming of the automobile.

Europeans had known about rubber ever since Christopher Columbus noticed it in the West Indies. In the late 1700s, a British scientist gave the substance its English name when he noticed it could rub out pencil marks. The Scot Charles Macintosh contributed his name to the language

in 1823 when he figured out a mass-production method for doing something long practiced by the Indians of the Americas: applying rubber to cloth to make it waterproof. Seven years later, the American inventor Charles Goodyear accidentally spilled sulfur into some hot rubber on his stove. He discovered that the resulting mixture did not turn stiff when cold or sticky and gooey when hot — major problems for those trying to make rubber boots or raincoat bellows then. But it was not until the early 1850s, half a decade after Dunlop fixed the pneumatic tire onto his son's tricycle wheel, that the worldwide rubber boom began. The industrial world rapidly developed an appetite not just for rubber tires, but for boots, tubing, gutters, and the like, and for rubber insulation for the telegraph, telephone, and electrical wiring now rapidly encompassing the globe. Suddenly however could not get enough of the magical commodity and its price rose throughout the 1850s. Nowhere did the boom have a more drastic impact on people's lives than in the equatorial rain forest, where wild rubber vines soaked high into the trees, that covered nearly half of King Leopold's Congo.

For Leopold, the rubber boom was a godsend. He had gone dangerously into debt with his Congo adventures, but he now saw that the return would be more lucrative than he had ever imagined. The world did not lose its desire for ivory, but by the late 1850s wild rubber had far surpassed it as the main source of revenue from the Congo. His furnace cooled, the king eagerly grilled functionaries returning from the Congo about rubber harvests, he demanded a constant stream of telegrams and reports from the territory, making them up in the margins and posting them on to allow for action. His letters from this period are filled with verbatim commodity prices from world markets, interest rates on loans, quantities of rubber to be shipped to the Congo, tons of rubber to be shipped to Europe, and the exact dimensions of the triangular well in transit he was planning to build with his newfound profits. Reading the king's correspondence is like reading the letters of the CEO of a company who has just developed a profitable new product and is trying to take advantage of it before competitors can get their assembly lines going.

The competition Leopold worried about was from cultivated rubber, which comes not from a vine but a tree. Rubber trees, however, require much care and some years before they grow large enough to be tapped. The king voraciously demanded ever greater quantities of wild rubber from the Congo, because he knew that the price would drop once plantations of rubber trees in Latin America and Asia reached maturity.

This did indeed happen, but by then the Congo had had a wild-rubber boom nearly two decades long. During that time the search knew no bounds.

As with the area bringing in ivory those supplying rubber to the Congo state and private companies were rewarded according to the amount they turned in. In 1897, one particularly "productive" agent received a concession eight times his usual salary. But the big money flowed directly back to Antwerp and Brussels, in the capital ready to either side of the rue Belvédère, the small street that separated the back of the Royal Palace from several buildings holding offices of the Congo state and Congo business operators.

Even though Leopold's privately controlled state got half of concession-company profits, the king made steady more money from the land the state exploited directly. But because the concession companies were not managed so securely, we have better statistics from them. In 1897, for example, one of the companies, the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber and Exploration Company or A.B.I.R., spent 1.15 francs per kilo to harvest rubber in the Congo and ship it to the company's headquarters at Antwerp — where it was sold for prices that sometimes reached 10 francs per kilo, a profit of more than 700 percent. By 1898, the price of A.B.I.R.'s stock was nearly thirty times what it had been six years earlier. Between 1890 and 1904, total Congo rubber earnings increased ninety-six times over. By the turn of the century, the État Indépendant du Congo had become, for all its size, the most profitable colony in Africa. The profits came easily because, transportation costs aside, harvesting wild rubber required no cultivation, no fertilizers, no capital investment in expensive equipment. It required only labor.

How was this labor to be found? For the Congo's rulers, this posed a problem. They could not simply round up men, chain them together, and put them to work under the eye of an overseer with a whip, as they did with porters. To gather wild rubber, people must disperse widely through the rain forest and other clab trees.

Rubber is coagulated sap; the French word for it, caoutchouc, comes from a South American Indian word meaning "the wood that weeps." The wood that weeps in the Congo was a long spongy vine of the *Landolphia* genus. Up to a foot thick at the base, a vine would twist upward around a tree to a hundred feet or more off the ground, where it could reach sunlight. Then, branching, it might wind its way hundreds of feet through the upper limbs of another half-dozen trees. To gather the

rubber, you had to slash the vine with a knife and hang a basket or earthenware pot to collect the slow drip of thick, milky sap. You could make a small incision to tap the vine, or — officially forbidden but widely practiced — cut through it entirely, which produced more rubber but killed the vine. Once the vines near a village were drained dry, workers had to go ever deeper into the forest west, before long, most harvesters were working at least one or two days to find fresh vines. As the lengths of vine within reach of the ground were tapped dry, workers climbed high into the trees to reach up. "We . . . gained a man on the road who had broken his back by falling from a tree while . . . tapping some vines," wrote our missionary Purchanman, heavy tropical down-pour during much of the year turned large areas of the rain forest, where the rubber vines grew, into swamps.

No payments or tributes or taxes were enough to make people stay in the flooded forest for days at a time to do work that was so arduous — and physically painful. A gatherer had to dry the syrup-like rubber so that it would coagulate, and often the only way to do so was to spread the substance on his arms, thighs, and chest. "The first few times it is not without pain that the man pulls it off the hairy parts of his body," Louis Chabot, a French *Publicque* officer, confided to his journal in 1892. "The native doesn't like making rubber. He must be compelled to do it."

How was he to be compelled? A trickle of news and rumor gradually made its way to Europe. "An example of what is done was told me by the Ubangi [River]," the British vice consul reported in 1892. "This office [sic] . . . reached . . . was so active in concert at a village, the inhabitants of which inevitably rebelled on their arrival; the soldiers were then loaded, and commenced looting, taking all the chickens, goats, etc., out of the houses; after this they attacked the natives until able to seize their women; these women were kept as hostages until the Chief of the district brought in the required number of kilograms of rubber. The rubber having been brought, the women were sold back to their owners for a couple of grams apiece, and so he continued from village to village until the requisite amount of rubber had been collected."

Sometimes the hostages were women, sometimes children, sometimes slaves or chiefs. Every state or company post in the rubber zone had a blockade for hostages. If you were a male villager, missing the order to gather rubber could mean death for your wife, the night de anyway, the wife includes food you scarce and conditions were harsh. "The women were during the last night at Esperanza are causing me no end of trouble,"

wrote Force Publique officer Georges Brizua in his diary on November 22, 1895: "All the soldiers wear caps. The natives who are supposed to watch them unchain the prettiest ones and rape them."

Loquard, of course, never proclaimed hostage-taking as official policy, if anyone made such charges, authorities in Brussels indignantly denied them. But out in the field, far from prying eyes, the promises were dropped. Instructions on taking hostages were even given in the semi-official instruction book, the revealing *Manuel de Hygiène et de Sécurité au Congo*, a copy of which the administration gave to each agent and each state post. The manual's five volumes cover everything from keeping servants obedient to the proper firing of artillery salutes. Taking hostages was one more routine piece of work:

In Africa taking prisoners is . . . an easy thing to do, for if the natives hide, they will not go far from their village and men come to look for food in the gardens which surround it. In watching these carefully, you will be certain of capturing people after a brief delay. . . . When you feel you have enough captives, you should choose among them as old persons, particularly as old women. Make her a present and send her to her chief to begin negotiations. The chief, wanting to see his people at free, will usually decide to send representatives.

Soldiers' done history offers us a chance to see such detailed instructions for those carrying out a regime of terror. The tips on hostage-taking are in the volume of the manual called *Practical Questions*, which was compiled by an editorial committee of about thirty people. One member — he worked on the book during a two-year period following his stint as the head-collecting station chief at Stanley Falls — was Léon Rom.



Hostage-taking set the Congo apart from most other forced-labor regions. But in other ways it resembled them. As would be true decades later of the Soviet gulag, another slave labor system for harvesting raw materials, the Congo operated by quotas. In Siberia the quotas concerned cubic meters of timber cut or tons of gold ore mined by prisoners each day; in the Congo the quota was for kilos of rubber. In the A.B.I.R. concession company's rich territory just below the Congo River's great

half-mile bend, for example, the annual quota assigned to each village was three to five kilos of dried rubber per adult male per fortnight — which essentially meant full-time labor for those men. Elsewhere, quotas were higher and might be raised as time went on. An official in the Moapila River basin in the far north, controlled by another concession company, the Société Anversoise de Commerce au Congo, estimated that to fill their quotas, rubber gatherers had to spend twenty-four days a month in the forest, where they built crude huts to sleep in for protection — not always successful — against leopards.

To get a part of the vice high off the ground, men hauled to get every possible drop of rubber would sometimes use down the whole vine, slice it into sections, and squeeze the rubber out. Although the Congo state would warn agents against killing the vines this way, it also applied the threat to men who didn't bring in enough rubber. The threat prevailed. One witness saw Africans who had to dig up roots in order to find enough rubber to meet their quotas.

The estate system was militarized. Force Publique garrisons were scattered everywhere, often supplying their firepower to the concession holder concerned. In addition, each company had its own militia force, euphemistically called "auxiliaries." In military matters as in almost everything else, the companies operated as an extension of the Congo state, and when hostages had to be taken or a rebellious village subdued, company auxiliaries and Force Publique soldiers often took to the field together.

Wherever rubber vines grew, the population was tightly controlled. Usually you had to get a permit from the state or company agent in order to visit a friend or relative in another village. In some areas, you were required to wear a numbered metal disk, attached to a cord around your neck, so that company agents could keep track of whether you had met your quota. Huge numbers of Africans were conscripted into the labor army: in 1906, the books of A.B.I.R. alone, responsible for only a small fraction of the Congo state's rubber production, listed sixty-seven thousand rubber gatherers.

All along the river, columns of exhausted men, carrying baskets of heavy grey rubber on their heads, sometimes walked twenty miles or more to assemble near the houses of European agents, who sat on their porches and weighed the loads of rubber. At one collection point, a missionary counted four hundred men with baskets. After the tap was

maned as it was turned into rough slabs, each the size of a small suitcase, and left to dry in the sun. Then it was shipped downstream, on a barge or scow covered by a matboat, the first stage of the long journey to Europe.

The state and the companies generally paid villagers for their rubber with a piece of cloth, beads, a few spears of iron, or a knife. These cost next to nothing, and the knives were essential tools for gathering more rubber. On at least one occasion, a chief who forced his people to gather rubber was paid in human beings. A legal dispute between two white officials near Stanley Falls got the following exchange on record in 1911. The witness being questioned was *Isidore*, chief of a village named *Makala*.

Question: Did M. Hottiaux [a company official] ever give you living women or children?

Answer: No, he gave me six women and two men.

Question: What for?

Answer: In payment for rubber which I brought into the station, telling me I could not do so, so kill them, or use them as slaves — as I liked.

The main forest bordering the Kasai River was rich in rubber, and William Sheppard and the other American Protestants there found themselves in the midst of a cauchyon. The Kasai was also the scene of some of the strongest resistance to Leopold's rule. Armed men of a chief allied with the regime campaigned through the region where Sheppard worked, plundering and burning more than a dozen villages. Flocks of desperate refugees sought help at Sheppard's mission station.

In 1910 the reluctant Sheppard was ordered by his superiors to march into the bush, at some risk to himself, to investigate the source of the fighting. There he found bloodstained ground, destroyed villages, and many bodies; the air was thick with the stench of rotting flesh. On the day he reached the murderer's camp, his eye was caught by a large number of objects being smoked. The chief "conducted us to a framework of sticks, under which was burning a slow fire, and there they were, the night hands, I counted them, 81 in all." The chief told Sheppard, "See! Here is our evidence. I always have to cut off the right hand of those we kill in order to show the State how many we have killed." He proudly showed

Sheppard some of the bodies the hands had come from. The smoking preserved the hands in the hot, moist climate, for it might be days or weeks before the chief could display them to the proper official and receive credit for his tolls.

Sheppard had stumbled on one of the most grisly aspects of Leopold's rubber system. Like the hostage-taking, the smothering of hands was deliberate policy, as even high officials would later admit. "During my time in the Congo I was the first commissioner of the Equateur district," recalled Charles Lorrain after his retirement. "As soon as it was a question of rubber, I wrote to the government, 'To gather rubber in the district . . . one must cut off hands, noses and ears.'"

If a village refused to submit to the rubber regime, state or company troops or their allies sometimes shot everyone in sight, so that nearby villages would get the message. But on such occasions some European officials were interested. For each cartridge issued to their soldiers they demanded proof that the bullet had been used to kill someone, not "wasted" in hunting or, worse yet, saved for possible use in a meeting. The standard proof was the right hand from a corpse. Or occasionally one from a corpse. "Sometimes," said one officer to a missionary soldier "shot a cartridge at an animal in hunting; they then cut off a hand from a living man." In some military units there was even a "keeper of the hands"; his job was the smoking.

Sheppard was not the first foreign witness to see severed hands in the Congo, nor would he be the last. But the articles he wrote for missionary magazines about his grisly find were reprinted and quoted widely both in Europe and the United States, and it is partly due to him that people everywhere began to associate the Congo with severed hands. A half-dozen years after Sheppard's sick discovery, while smothering the explosive public works Leopold was building with his Congo profits, the socialist leader Louis Vandervelde would speak in the Belgian Parliament of "monstrous crimes which one will someday call the *Archer of the Severed Hand*." William Sheppard's maplessness would eventually bring down the wrath of the authorities and one day Vandervelde, an attorney, would find himself debating Sheppard in a Congo courtroom. But that is getting ahead of our story.

As the rubber crime spread throughout the rain forest, it branded people with memories that remained raw for the rest of their lives. A Catholic priest who succeeded oral historians half a century later quotes a man, *Tweembe*, speaking of a particularly hated state official named *Léon*.

Fiver, who terrorized a district along the river three hundred miles south of Stanley Pool.

All the blacks see this man as the Devil of the Equator . . . From all the bodies killed in the field, you had to cut off the hands. He wanted to see the number of hands cut off by each soldier, who had to bring them in baskets. . . . A village which refused to provide rubber would be completely swept down. At a young man, I saw (Fiver's) soldier Moli, free guarding the village of Buyika, take a big net, put ten arrested natives in it, stretch big stones to the net, and make it handle into the river. . . . Rubber caused these tortures; that's why we no longer want to hear its name spoken. Soldiers made young men kill or rape their own mothers and sisters.

A Forté Pôlibôpe officer who passed through Fiver's post in 1914 quotes Fiver himself describing what he did when the surrounding villages failed to supply his troops with the fish and manioc he had demanded: "I made war against them. One example was enough: a hundred hands cut off, and there have been plenty of supplies at the station ever since. My goal is ultimately humanitarian. I killed a hundred people . . . but that allowed for hundred others to live."

With "humanitarian" ground rules that included cutting off hands and heads, soldiers like Fiver had a field day. The station chief at M'Bira used his revolver to shoot holes in Africans' ear lobes. Raoul de Fremont, an agent working along the Kasai River, enjoyed giving large doses of cancer oil to people he considered malingerers. When villagers, in a desperate attempt to meet the weight quota, resorted to rubber mixed with dirt or pebbles to the agent Alexis Dridge, he made them eat it. When two porters failed to use a designated latrine, a district commissioner, Jean Verhulst, ordered them paraded in front of troops, their faces rubbed with excrement.

As news of the white man's soldiers and their baskets of severed hands spread through the Congo, a myth gained credence with Africans that was a curious reversal of the white obsession with black cannibalism. The cans of corned beef seen in white men's houses, it was said, did not contain meat from the animals shown on the label, they contained chopped-up hands.

II CHAPTER

A SECRET SOCIETY OF MURDERERS

ONE WAY Leopold and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany were weaving a paradise in Africa, Leopold, gazing longly about the cross-roads of royal authority, remarked to the Kaiser, "There is really nothing left for us kings except manna!" Rubber would soon bring Leopold money beyond imagining, but the Congo alone was never enough to satisfy him. Paralyzing an empire that would encompass the two legendary rivers of Africa, the Congo and the Nile, he imagined linking the river by a great railway, and in the early 1890s dispatched expeditions westward from the Congo toward the Nile valley. One of these claimed the ancient copper mines of Buha-el-Ghazal, taking care to claim the mines for Leopold personally while convincing the Congo state to provide military protection.

The French finally blocked the king from farther moves toward the Nile, but he was already dreaming of new colonies elsewhere. "I would like to make out of our little Belgium, with its six million people, the capital of an immense empire," he said. "The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, are in a state of decadence and their colonies will one day or another come on to the market." He asked Prime Minister William Gladstone of England about the possibility of leasing Uganda.

Leopold was quick to establish his imperial schemes with any humanitarian sentiment in the air. In 1895, he proposed to another European prime minister, Lord Salisbury, that a Belgian army under Congo state officers be used "for the purpose of invading and occupying