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***My Brother's Keeper***

To me, the fact of greatest interest about the Congo is that it is owned, and the twenty millions of people who inhabit it are owned by one man. The land and its people are his private property. I am not trying to say that he governs the Congo. He does govern it, but that in itself would not be of interest. His claim is that he owns it. Though backed by all the mailed fists in the German Empire, and all the *Dreadnoughts* of the seas, no other modern monarch would make such a claim. It does not sound like anything we have heard since the days and the ways of Pharaoh. And the most remarkable feature of it is, that the man who makes this claim is the man who was placed over the Congo as a guardian, to keep it open to the trade of the world, to suppress slavery. That, in the Congo, he has killed trade and made the products of the land his own, that of the natives he did not kill he has made slaves, is what today gives the Congo its chief interest. It is well to emphasize how this one man stole a march on fourteen powers, including the United States, and stole also an empire of one million square miles.

Twenty-five years ago all of Africa was divided into many parts. The part which still remained to be distributed among the powers was that which was watered by the Congo River and its tributaries.

Along the north bank of the Congo River ran the French Congo; the Portuguese owned the lands to the south, and on the east it was shut in by protectorates and colonies of Germany and England. It was, and is, a territory as large, were Spain and Russia omitted, as Europe. Were a map of the Congo laid upon a map of Europe, with the mouth of the Congo River where France and Spain meet at Biarritz, the boundaries of the Congo would reach south to the heel of Italy, to Greece, to Smyrna; east to Constantinople and Odessa; northeast to St. Petersburg and Finland, and northwest to the extreme limits of Scotland. Distances in this country are so enormous, the means of progress so primitive, that many of the Belgian officers with whom I came south and who already had travelled nineteen days from Antwerp, had still, before they reached their posts, to steam, paddle, and walk for three months.

In 1844 to dispose amicably of this great territory, which was much desired by several of the Powers, a conference was held at Berlin. There it was decided to make of the Congo Basin an independent state, a "free-for-all" country, where every flag could trade with equal right, and with no special tariff or restriction.

The General Act of this conference agreed: "The trade of ALL nations shall enjoy complete freedom." "No Power which exercises or shall exercise Sovereign rights in the above-mentioned regions shall be allowed to *grant therein a monopoly or favor of any kind in matters of trade.*" "ALL the Powers exercising Sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of *the condition of their moral and material welfare, and to help in suppressing*

*slavery.*" The italics are mine. These quotations from the act are still binding upon the fourteen Powers, including the United States.

For several years previous to the Conference of Berlin, Leopold of Belgium, as a private individual, had shown much interest in the development of the Congo. The opening up of that territory was apparently his hobby. Out of his own pocket he paid for expeditions into the Congo Basin, employed German and English explorers, and protested against the then-existing iniquities of the Arabs, who for ivory and slaves raided the Upper Congo. Finally, assisted by many geographical societies, he founded the International Association, to promote "civilization and trade" in Central Africa; and enlisted Henry M. Stanley in this service.

That, in the early years, Leopold's interest in the Congo was unselfish may or may not be granted, but, knowing him, as we now know him, as one of the shrewdest and, of speculators, the most unscrupulous, at the time of the Berlin Conference, his self-seeking may safely be accepted. Quietly, unostentatiously, he presented himself to its individual members as a candidate for the post of administrator of this new territory.

On the face of it he seemed an admirable choice. He was a sovereign of a kingdom too unimportant to be feared; of the newly created state he undoubtedly possessed an intimate knowledge. He promised to give to the Dutch, English, and Portuguese traders, already for many years established on the Congo, his heartiest aid, and, for those traders still to come, to maintain the "open door." His professions of a desire to help the natives were profuse. He became the unanimous choice of the conference.

Later he announced to the Powers signing the act, that from Belgium he had received the right to assume the title of king of the Independent State of the Congo. The Powers recognized his new title.

The fact that Leopold, King of Belgium, was king also of the *État Indépendant du Congo* confused many into thinking that the Free State was a colony, or under the protection, of Belgium. As we have seen, it is not. A Belgian may serve in the army of the Free State, or in a civil capacity, as may a man of any nation, but, although with few exceptions only Belgians are employed in the Free State, and although to help the King in the Congo, the Belgian Government has loaned him great sums of money, politically and constitutionally the two governments are as independent of each other as France and Spain.

And so, in 1885, Leopold, by the grace of fourteen governments, was appointed their steward over a great estate in which each of the governments still holds an equal right; a trustee and keeper over twenty millions of "black brothers" whose "moral and material welfare" each government had promised to protect.

There is only one thing more remarkable than the fact that Leopold was able to turn this public market into a private park, and that is, that he has been permitted to do so. It is true he is a man of wonderful ability. For his own ends he is a magnificent organizer. But in the fourteen governments that created him there have been, and today there are, men, if less unscrupulous, of quite as great ability; statesmen, jealous and quick to guard the rights of the people they represent, people who since the twelfth century have been traders, who since 1808 have declared slavery abolished.

And yet, for twenty-five years these statesmen have watched Leopold disobey every provision in the act of the conference. Were they to visit the Congo, they could see for themselves the jungle creeping in and burying their trading posts, their great factories turned into barracks. They know that the blacks they mutually agreed to protect have been reduced to slavery worse than that they suffered from the Arabs, that hundreds of thousands of them have

fled from the Congo, and that those that remain have been mutilated, maimed, or, what was more merciful, murdered. And yet the fourteen governments, including the United States, have done nothing.

Some tell you they do not interfere because they are jealous one of the other; others say that it is because they believe the Congo will soon be taken over by Belgium, and with Belgium in control, they argue, they would be dealing with a responsible government, instead of with a pirate. But so long as Leopold is king of Belgium one doubts if Belgians in the Congo would rise above the level of their king. The English, when asked why they do not assert their rights, granted not only to them, but to thirteen other governments, reply that if they did they would be accused of "ulterior motives." What ulterior motives? If you pursue a pickpocket and recover your watch from him, are your motives in doing so open to suspicion?

Personally, although this is looking some way ahead, I would like to see the English take over and administrate the Congo. Wherever I visit a colony governed by Englishmen I find under their administration, in spite of opium in China and gin on the West Coast, that three people are benefited: the Englishman, the native, and the foreign trader from any other part of the world. Of the colonies of what other country can one say the same?

As a rule our present governments are not loath to protect their rights. But toward asserting them in the Congo they have been moved neither by the protests of traders, chambers of commerce, missionaries, the public press, nor by the cry of the black man to "let my people go." By only those in high places can it be explained. We will leave it as a curious fact, and return to the "Unjust Steward."

His first act was to wage wars upon the Arabs. From the Soudan and from the East Coast they were raiding the Congo for slaves and ivory, and he drove them from it. By these wars he accomplished two things. As the defender of the slave, he gained much public credit, and he kept the ivory. But war is expensive, and soon he pointed out to the Powers that to ask him out of his own pocket to maintain armies in the field and to administer a great estate was unfair. He humbly sought their permission to levy a few taxes. It seemed a reasonable request. To clear roads, to keep boats upon the great rivers, to mark it with buoys, to maintain wood stations for the steamers, to improve the "moral and material welfare of the natives," would cost money, and to allow Leopold to bring about these improvements, which would be for the good of all, he was permitted to levy the few taxes. That was twenty years ago; to-day I saw none of these improvements, and the taxes have increased.

From the first they were so heavy that the great trade houses, which for one hundred years in peace and mutual goodwill bartered with the natives, found themselves ruined. It was not alone the export taxes, lighterage dues, port dues, and personal taxes that drove them out of the Congo; it was the King appearing against them as a rival trader, the man appointed to maintain the "open door." And a trader with methods they could not or would not imitate. Leopold, or the "State," saw for the existence of the Congo only two reasons: Rubber and Ivory. And the collecting of this rubber and ivory was, as he saw it, the sole duty of the state and its officers. When he threw over the part of trustee and became the Arab raider he could not waste his time, which, he had good reason to fear, might be short, upon products that, if fostered, would be of value only in later years. Still less time had he to give to improvements that cost money and that would be of benefit to his successors. He wanted only rubber; he wanted it at once, and he cared not at all how he obtained it. So he spun, and still spins, the greatest of all "get-rich-quick" schemes; one of gigantic proportions, full of tragic, monstrous, nauseous details.

The only possible way to obtain rubber is through the native; as yet, in teeming forests, the white man cannot work and live. Of even Chinese coolies imported here to build a railroad ninety percent died. So, with a stroke of the pen, Leopold declared all the rubber in the country the property of the "State," and then, to make sure that the natives would work it, ordered that taxes be paid in rubber. If, once a month (in order to keep the natives steadily at work the taxes were ordered to be paid each month instead of once a year), each village did not bring in so many baskets of rubber the King's cannibal soldiers raided it, carried off the women as hostages, and made prisoners of the men, or killed and ate them. For every kilo of rubber brought in in excess of the quota the King's agent, who received the collected rubber and forwarded it down the river, was paid a commission. Or was "paid by results." Another bonus was given him based on the price at which he obtained the rubber. If he paid the native only six cents for every two pounds, he received a bonus of three cents, the cost to the State being but nine cents per kilo. But if he paid the natives twelve cents for every two pounds, he received as a bonus less than one cent. In a word, the more rubber the agent collected the more he personally benefited, and if he obtained it "cheaply" or for nothing—that is, by taking hostages, making prisoners, by the whip of hippopotamus hide, by torture—so much greater his fortune, so much richer Leopold.

Few schemes devised have been more cynical, more devilish, more cunningly designed to incite a man to cruelty and abuse. To dishonesty it was an invitation and a reward. It was this system of "payment by results," evolved by Leopold sooner than allow his agents a fixed and sufficient wage, that led to the atrocities.

One result of this system was that in seven years the natives condemned to slavery in the rubber forests brought in rubber to the amount of fifty-five millions of dollars. But its chief results were the destruction of entire villages, the flight from their homes in the Congo of hundreds of thousands of natives, and for those that remained misery, death, the most brutal tortures and degradations, unprintable, unthinkable.

I am not going to enter into the question of the atrocities. In the Congo the tip has been given out from those higher up at Brussels to "close up" the atrocities; and for the present the evil places in the Tenderloin and along the Broadway of the Congo are tightly shut. But at those lonely posts, distant a month to three months' march from the capital, the cruelties still continue. I did not see them. Neither, last year, did a great many people in the United States see the massacre of blacks in Atlanta. But they have reason to believe it occurred. And after one has talked with the men and women who have seen the atrocities, has seen in the official reports that those accused of the atrocities do not deny having committed them, but point out that they were merely obeying orders, and after one has seen that even at the capital of Boma all the conditions of slavery exist, one is assured that in the jungle, away from the sight of men, all things are possible. Merchants, missionaries, and officials even in Leopold's service told me that if one could spare a year and a half, or a year, to the work in the hinterland he would be an eyewitness of as cruel treatment of the natives as any that has gone before, and if I can trust myself to weigh testimony and can believe my eyes and ears I have reason to know that what they say is true. I am convinced that today a man, who feels that a year and a half is little enough to give to the aid of twenty millions of human beings, can accomplish in the Congo as great and good work as that of the Abolitionists.

Three years ago atrocities here were open and above-board. For instance. In the opinion of the State the soldiers, in killing game for food, wasted the State cartridges, and in consequence the soldiers, to show their officers that they did not expend the cartridges extravagantly on antelope and wild boar, for each empty cartridge brought in a human hand, the hand of a man,

woman, or child. These hands, drying in the sun, could be seen at the posts along the river. They are no longer in evidence. Neither is the flower-bed of Lieutenant Dom, which was bordered with human skulls. A quaint conceit.

The man to blame for the atrocities, for each separate atrocity, is Leopold. Had he shaken his head they would have ceased. When the hue and cry in Europe grew too hot for him and he held up his hand they did cease. At least along the main waterways. Years before he could have stopped them. But these were the seven fallow years, when millions of tons of red rubber were being dumped upon the wharf at Antwerp; little, roughly rolled red balls, like pellets of coagulated blood, which had cost their weight in blood, which would pay Leopold their weight in gold.

He cannot plead ignorance. Of all that goes on in his big plantation no man has a better knowledge. Without their personal honesty, he follows every detail of the business of his rubber farm with the same diligence that made rich men of George Boldt and Marshall Field. Leopold's knowledge is gained through many spies, by voluminous reports, by following up the expenditure of each centime, of each arm's-length of blue cloth. Of every Belgian employed on his farm, and ninety-five per cent are Belgians, he holds the *dossier*; he knows how many kilos a month the agent whips out of his villages, how many bottles of absinthe he smuggles from the French side, whether he lives with one black woman or five, why his white wife in Belgium left him, why he left Belgium, why he dare not return. The agent knows that Leopold, King of the Belgians, knows, and that he has shared that knowledge with the agent's employer, the man who by bribes of rich bonuses incites him to crime, the man who could throw him into a Belgian jail, Leopold, King of the Congo.

The agent decides for him it is best to please both Leopolds, and Leopold makes no secret of what best pleases him. For not only is he responsible for the atrocities, in that he does not try to suppress them, but he is doubly guilty in that he has encouraged them. This he has done with cynical, callous publicity, without effort at concealment, without shame. Men who, in obtaining rubber, committed unspeakable crimes, the memory of which makes other men uncomfortable in their presence, Leopold rewarded with rich bonuses, pensions, higher office, gilt badges of shame, and rapid advancement. To those whom even his own judges sentenced to many years' imprisonment he promptly granted the royal pardon, promoted, and sent back to work in the vineyard.

"That is the sort of man for *me*," his action seemed to say. "See how I value that good and faithful servant. That man collected much rubber. You observe I do not ask how he got it. I will not ask you. All you need do is to collect rubber. Use our improved methods. Gum copal rubbed in the kinky hair of the chief and then set on fire burns, so my agents tell me, like vitriol. For collecting rubber the chief is no longer valuable, but to his successor it is an object-lesson. Let me recommend also the *chicotte*, the torture tower, the hostage house, and the crucifix. Many other stimulants to labor will no doubt suggest themselves to you and to your cannibal sentries. Help to make me rich, and don't fear the 'State.' *'L'Etat, c'est moi!'* Go as far as you like!"

I said the degradations and tortures practiced by the men "working on commission" for Leopold are unprintable, but they have been printed, and those who wish to read a calmly compiled, careful, and correct record of their deeds will find it in the "Red Rubber" of Mr. E.R. Morel. An even better book by the same authority, on the whole history of the State, is his "King Leopold's Rule in the Congo." Mr. Morel has many enemies. So, early in the nineteenth century, had the English Abolitionists, Wilberforce and Granville Sharp. After they were dead they were buried in the Abbey, and their portraits were placed in the National Gallery. People who wish to

assist in freeing twenty millions of human beings should today support Mr. Morel. It will be of more service to the blacks than, after he is dead, burying him in Westminster Abbey.

Mr. Morel, the American and English missionaries, and the English Consul, Roger Casement, and other men, in Belgium, have made a magnificent fight against Leopold; but the Powers to whom they have appealed have been silent. Taking courage of this silence, Leopold has divided the Congo into several great territories in which the sole right to work rubber is conceded to certain persons. To those who protested that no one in the Congo "Free" State but the King could trade in rubber, Leopold, as an answer, pointed with pride at the preserves of these foreigners. And he may well point at them with pride, for in some of those companies he owns a third, and in most of them he holds a half, or a controlling interest. The directors of the foreign companies are his cronies, members of his royal household, his brokers, bankers. You have only to read the names published in the lists of the Brussels Stock Exchange to see that these "trading companies," under different aliases, are Leopold. Having, then, "conceded" the greater part of the Congo to himself, Leopold set aside the best part of it, so far as rubber is concerned, as a *Domaine Privé*. Officially the receipts of this pay for running the government, and for schools, roads and wharfs, for which taxes were levied, but for which, after twenty years, one looks in vain. Leopold claims that through the Congo he is out of pocket; that this carrying the banner of civilization in Africa does not pay. Through his press bureaus he tells that his sympathy for his black brother, his desire to see the commerce of the world busy along the Congo, alone prevents him giving up what is for him a losing business.

There are several answers to this. One is that in the Kasai Company alone Leopold owns 2,010 shares of stock. Worth originally \$50 a share, the value of each share rose to \$3,100, making at one time his total shares worth \$5,421,000. In the A.B.I.R. concession he owns 1,000 shares, originally worth \$100 each, later worth \$940. In the "vintage year" of 1900 each of these shares was worth \$5,050, and the 1,000 shares thus rose to the value of \$5,050,000.

These are only two companies. In most of the others half the shares are owned by the King.

As published in the State Bulletin, the money received in eight years for rubber and ivory gathered in the *Domaine Privé* differs from the amount given for it in the market at Antwerp. The official estimates show a loss to the government. The actual sales show that the government, over and above its own estimate of its expenses, instead of losing, made from the *Domaine Privé* alone \$10,000,000. We are left wondering to whom went that unaccounted-for \$10,000,000. Certainly the King would not take it, for, to reimburse himself for his efforts, he early in the game reserved for himself another tract of territory known as the *Domaine de la Couronne*. For years he denied that this existed. He knew nothing of Crown Lands. But, at last, in the Belgian Chamber, it was publicly charged that for years from this private source, which he had said did not exist, Leopold had been drawing an income of \$15,000,000. Since then the truth of this statement has been denied, but at the time in the Chamber it was not contradicted.

Today, grown insolent by the apathy of the Powers, Leopold finds disguising himself as a company, as a laborer worthy of his hire, irksome. He now decrees that as "Sovereign" over the Congo all of the Congo belongs to him. It is as much his property as is a pheasant drive, as is a staked-out mining claim, as your hat is your property. And the twenty millions of people who inhabit it are there only on his sufferance. They are his "tenants." He permits each the hut in which he lives, and the garden adjoining that hut, but his work must be for Leopold, and everything else, animal, mineral, or vegetable, belongs to Leopold. The natives not only may not sell ivory or rubber to independent traders, but if it is found in their possession it is seized; and if

you and I bought a tusk of ivory here it would be taken from us and we could be prosecuted. This is the law.

Other men rule over territories more vast even than the Congo. The King of England rules an empire upon which the sun never sets. But he makes no claim to own it. Against the wishes of even the humblest crofter, the King would not, because he knows he could not, enter his cottage. Nor can we imagine even Kaiser William going into the palm-leaf hut of a charcoal-burner in German East Africa and saying: "This is my palm-leaf hut. This is my charcoal. You must not sell it to the English, or the French, or the American. If they buy from you they are 'receivers of stolen goods.' To feed my soldiers you must drag my river for my fish. For me, in my swamp and in my jungle, you must toil twenty-four days of each month to gather my rubber. You must not hunt the elephants, for they are my elephants. Those tusks that fifty years ago your grandfather, with his naked spear, cut from an elephant, and which you have tried to hide from me under the floor of this hut, are my ivory. Because that elephant, running wild through the jungle fifty years ago, belonged to me. And you yourself are mine, your time is mine, your labor is mine, your wife, your children, all are mine. They belong to me."

This, then, is the "open door" as I find it to-day in the Congo. It is an incredible state of affairs, so insolent, so magnificent in its impertinence, that it would be humorous, were it not for its background of misery and suffering, for its hostage houses, its chain gangs, its *chicottes*, its nameless crimes against the human body, its baskets of dried hands held up in tribute to the Belgian blackguard.