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“ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN” by Rubens.
An example of Belgian Art.

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THE FUTURE OF BELGIUM.

BY GEORGE SARTON.

IN my childhood several masters spent long hours trying to teach me the history of nations, but I never understood much about it and gained little profit from their teaching. Was I a bad pupil or were they bad teachers? I think both these reasons must be taken into account, but the true explanation evidently is that most facts of political history are beyond childish comprehension. We were told, for example, of the migrations of peoples: some which invaded peaceful countries as conquerors, others which were forced into exile. But not one whit of it all stirred our feelings nor awakened our imaginations; it was all simply a string of words, and alas! of dates. Now I am beginning to understand history, and it may be that the young European children, and particularly the little Belgians, will also find it easier to discover the real and living meaning of historical facts.

Poor Belgians! There is said to be a million of them who have had to leave their native land and seek refuge in Holland, France or England. I believe this figure is exaggerated, but in any case it is certain that more than an eighth of the total population has had to go into exile. And what has become of those seven-eighths who have remained. How many have been able to stay in their own homes? Even the most fortunate of them have had to lodge and keep hostile soldiers and have undergone the direst privations. All this is so cruel that one cannot imagine it fully who has not lived through it. And note that I am not even thinking of the towns that have been burned, of the houses destroyed, or of the pillage and crimes of all sorts.

What then has happened? I will try to put it briefly and dispassionately. The neutrality of Belgium was guaranteed by the

Treaty of London, signed on April 17, 1839, on the one hand by King Leopold, and on the other by the Emperor of Austria, the King of France, the Queen of England, the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Russia. The seventh article of this treaty decrees that Belgium shall always remain a neutral and independent state, on condition that she should herself preserve her neutrality. This treaty obliged her then to defend her independence in the case of its being menaced. Let it be said in passing that the neutrality of the grand duchy of Luxemburg was guaranteed in the same way by the Convention of London in 1867. But Belgium's neutrality, solemnly guaranteed by Germany, was violated by her on August 4, 1914. Germany had already violated the neutrality of the Luxemburg duchy¹ two days before, on Sunday, August 2. I think that no one of good faith has any doubt that Germany has in truth broken her word, after France and England had confirmed their promise. Besides, the fact has been officially recognized in the speech made on August 4 in the Reichstag by the Imperial Chancellor: "We are in a state of legitimate defence and necessity knows no law. Our troops have occupied Luxemburg and perhaps have already entered Belgium. This is contrary to the dictates of international law. France has, it is true, declared at Brussels that she was prepared to respect the neutrality of Belgium so long as it was respected by her adversary. . . For the wrong which we are thus doing we will make reparation as soon as our military object is attained."² Now, what makes this crime especially abominable is that it has been perpetrated in the twentieth century, by one of the greatest nations of the world, by that very one which proclaims the superiority of its civilization with the most emphasis and pride!

At first the Germans did, then, confess to their crime, and thought to absolve themselves by promising reparation(?). But afterwards, feeling themselves condemned for their treachery by public opinion all the world over, they have tried other tactics. They try to make their friends believe that they have not really violated Belgian neutrality, because this had already been violated before them, either by the French or the Belgians themselves! Now it is absolutely without a doubt that the French did not penetrate into our country until quite a long time after the Germans,

¹ In what follows I shall speak of Belgium only, but it must be understood that little Luxemburg is also a victim of German treachery and that Germany has violated the neutrality of *both* nations.

² Dispatch from Baron Beyens, Belgian minister at Berlin, to M. Davignon, Belgian minister of foreign affairs. Berlin, August 4, 1914. Official translation.

and many inexperienced Belgians have been only too tempted to deplore that the former were so long in coming to their rescue. Hardly had Germany declared war upon Belgium than three German army corps were at our gates! At that moment France was still struggling with the arrangements for her mobilization. It is from this point of view that it can be fairly said that Belgium saved France and so, Europe. The simple fact that the Germans were ready for the war *body and soul* for so many years has given them an immense, an incalculable, military advantage; but this very fact carries in itself their condemnation, for it proves conclusively on which side the aggressor is to be found.³

As to the Belgians, up to the very last hour, up to the very last minute, they did everything in the world to guard the strictest neutrality. Their efforts in this direction have been at least as great as those made by the Netherlands or by the United States. Concerning this, here are two significant facts: On August 1, at the moment when all minds were excited to the highest degree by the European crisis, the Belgian Home Secretary telegraphed the following circular to the governors of the nine provinces: "In the midst of the impending crisis Belgium has resolved to defend her neutrality. It must be respected, but it is the duty of the nation to take every measure required by the situation in order that it may be so respected. Therefore, the people must join with the government to secure the avoidance of all demonstrations which might cause friction with either the one or the other of our neighbors. With this object all burgomasters should at once publish notices forbidding the assembling of public meetings likely to manifest sympathy or antipathy toward either power. It is also proper that the corporations—burgomaster and sheriffs—should forbid the exhibition of any cinematograph pictures showing military scenes of a nature to stir up feeling or provoke popular emotions which might imperil public order. I must ask you therefore, M. le Gouverneur, to take measures to secure that these instructions are carried out without delay."⁴ Meanwhile, a Belgian paper, *Le Petit Bleu*, having disregarded the order, and having openly taken sides with France in its number of August 2, the minister of justice caused all copies to be seized. This took place only a few hours before the German ultimatum was delivered.

³ It is well to remember that this war is the fourth European war initiated by Germany in the course of half a century: 1864, Schleswig-Holstein; 1866, Austria; 1870, France; 1914, the Great War.

⁴ Translation published by the London *Times*, January 1, 1915, p. 6.

The German accusations make me think irresistibly of the fable of the wolf and the lamb. It was the lamb who began! The aggressor is not content with killing his victim, he insults it; after taking its life, he tries to stain its honor! This sort of argument appears to me even more odious than the crime itself.

I know the Germans claim that they found decisive proofs that Belgium had abandoned her neutrality into the Allies' hands many years ago. These proofs are contained in three documents which they found in the records of the Foreign Office in Brussels. I have the facsimile of these documents before my eyes;⁵ they date from 1906, 1911, 1912. They simply reproduce the confidential interviews between the Belgian General Staff and the British military attaché. These documents show us that England had been studying for several years the means of sending armies to succor Belgium, *in the eventuality of menace to that country's neutrality*. In the most important of these documents, that dated April 10, 1906, it is explicitly stated (in a note in the margin) that "*the entry of the English into Belgium would only take place after the violation of our neutrality by Germany.*" In what do these interviews and arguments violate Belgian neutrality? They were in truth simple precautions of which events have shown the utility. It was perfectly natural that England should ascertain what measures Belgium intended taking to defend her independence, so much the more that this little country, blinded by careless enjoyment of extraordinary prosperity, might have appeared unconcerned, and was so indeed. Moreover, Germany's criminal intentions were but too evident. I need only cite in proof the strategical railways and the military stations established close up to the Belgian frontier. These constructions so obviously implied the possibility of a violation of our territory, that Belgium would have had the right to protest to the German government (but what was the good? what could she obtain?). In any case, they amply justify the interviews about which Germany has bluffed so much, thus proving the weakness of her own cause. Far from considering these interviews as blameworthy, it appears to me on the contrary extremely to be regretted that they were not pursued more methodically and tenaciously, and that the Belgian government should not have taken more into account the

⁵ They have been published in a *Sonderbeilage der Norddeutschen Allgemeinen Zeitung*, No. 292, November 25, 1914. Very probably they have been reproduced also in the German-American papers. Since last October, I have had opportunity to read the German papers and to get information as to the state of mind in Germany; so I cannot be accused of having heard only one side.

dangers that her powerful and ambitious neighbor evidently exposed her to. I repeat that unheard-of prosperity had made the Belgian government and people extremely careless and selfish. The European crisis, more and more acute in later years, had not sufficed to lift our people out of their apathy nor to lead them to ask for, or even understand, the sacrifices that these growing menaces rendered more and more necessary. The last warning was given to King Albert by the Kaiser himself and by the chief of the German General Staff;⁶ but at that moment it was too late to regain the time lost. It is known that the reorganization of the Belgian army was hardly begun when the war broke out. I have even heard it stated by well-informed persons that this fact was taken into consideration when the German General Staff decided to precipitate events.

The conclusion that we are forced to come to is that Germany—in spite of all the odious calumnies with the help of which she tries to show herself innocent—really and deliberately violated the neutrality of Belgium and the Luxemburg duchy in the month of August, 1914. And when one sums up for one instant all the destruction, all the misery, all the horrors this violation implies, when one tries to measure the immensity of the crime so committed, one's imagination recoils. There are things one must have lived through to be able to understand or realize.

Before using force towards Belgium, we know that the Germans had vainly proposed to this poor little country that she should allow them free passage⁷ and thus dishonor herself. We also know what reply Belgium gave twice over to this infamous proposal, and how by so doing she has won for herself imperishable glory. This proposal was particularly infamous because it dissembled fresh treachery, for Germany promised Belgium to restore her territory and to make good the harm caused, knowing perfectly well that such a promise was impossible to carry out. Once Belgium became the basis of military operations it is clear that her exhaustion and

⁶Letter from M. Jules Cambon, ambassador of the French Republic at Berlin, to M. Stephen Pichon, minister of foreign affairs. Berlin, November 22, 1913:

"...The German Emperor is no longer in his [King Albert's] eyes the champion of peace against the warlike tendencies of certain parties in Germany. William II has come to think that war with France is inevitable, and that it must come sooner or later...General von Moltke spoke exactly in the same strain as his sovereign. He, too, declared war to be necessary and inevitable, but he showed himself still more assured of success; 'for,' he said to the King, 'this time the matter must be settled, and your Majesty can have no conception of the irresistible enthusiasm with which the whole German people will be carried away when that day comes.'"

⁷Ultimatum of August 2, 1914. Proposition of August 10, 1914.

her partial or total destruction were practically inevitable. Can one indemnify a people for such devastation? Is there a price for a medieval town? Can one rebuild historical buildings and churches each of whose stones has been consecrated by centuries of time? Is it not simply barbarous to have such ideas? From the moment that the Germans crossed her frontiers did not Belgium once more run the risk of becoming Europe's battlefield and so undergo the desolation of desolations? *All of which the Kaiser knew.*

The violation of the neutrality of a state is not only the breaking of a promise—that is to say, a moral crime which all mankind is saddened by—it is a material disaster for that country as well. This violation, when one fully grasps its whole significance, is in itself so terrible and so odious that there is scant need to render it more odious still by the recital of atrocities which the Belgian and French official reports and the pastoral letter of Cardinal Mercier have brought to light and rendered incontestable. Let us pass over this.⁸

* * *

I will not stop to examine the causes of the war nor weigh the responsibilities; it would carry me too far from my subject. For

⁸ I only know the Belgian official reports by the account of them published in the papers. An English translation of the French report has been published by *The Daily Chronicle*, London, 1915. The official translation of the pastoral letter has been published by Burns and Oates, London, 1915.

I do not wish to talk of the German atrocities, but it is necessary to unveil certain calumnies with which the Germans have once again tried to justify themselves. When they entered Belgium, in every town or village notices had been posted up advising the inhabitants to remain calm and begging them to bring their arms and ammunition to the Town Hall. I myself saw these notices in many places, and in my village (Wondelgem, near Ghent) a large quantity of arms were in this way gathered together. Each gun etc. bore naturally the name and address of its owner on a ticket, to facilitate its return after the war: the Germans have concocted out of this, that there were stores of arms ready to be distributed to the inhabitants!

I am absolutely certain that not one single act of violence against the German soldiers can have been concerted. It is obvious, on the other hand, that *individual* crimes may have been committed by Belgians, but these acts could not in any way justify the terrible German reprisals. Of course it was impossible to *oblige* the inhabitants to give up their arms, and certain people preferred to keep them. I myself kept my revolver at home. I had German soldiers and officers quartered upon me (one night we had to put up 26) and my revolver might have been necessary if acts of brutality had been committed upon the persons of my wife, little girl or the servants. It would have been my duty to use it. Yet had I found myself under this terrible necessity, it is probable that my whole village would have been wiped out! Who would then have been the criminals?

I could not do better than recommend to all those wishing to enlighten their minds upon these matters, to read *The German War Book*, issued by the General Staff of the German army (London, John Murray, 1915). All the methods now being practised by the German forces, however wrong, are there foreseen and an attempt made to justify them.

it is evident that beneath the more apparent causes—the examination of which is fairly easy (most of the diplomatic documents having been published by the different countries concerned⁹—there are others deeper and graver the study of which is on the contrary extremely difficult and complicated. There are economical as well as psychological causes which are so obscure—so intimately bound up with the aspirations of groups and of individuals—that it is hard to define them. And besides such an inextricable medley could not be analyzed: longings for glory and hegemony; scientific, industrial and commercial jealousies; race antipathies; conflicts between diverse ideologies and between different systems of education; and at the root of all these the clashing of irreducible sensibilities, also basing themselves upon the whole and taking advantage of all these differences, embittering all: despicable financial and political calculations—briefly a whole world of realities, arguments, sentiments, above all of instincts, where the worst is mingled with the best; a great deal of unconscious ignorance and of kindness worked upon by a few selfish and criminal intellects; rare ideals and a mass of human mire. I cannot stop to examine all this here. Each one must do so to satisfy his own conscience. Nor will I prophesy as to what will be the result of the great war. Such prophecies coming from me would simply be worthless and quite unnecessary for the subject before us. *I have indeed the deepest conviction that the future of Belgium is in great part independent of the issue of the war.*

Whoever be the victors or the vanquished, it is obvious that Belgium will draw from this great war lessons never to be forgotten and everlasting glory. It is not less certain that Germany, despite the marvelous efficiency of her armies, despite the heroism and spirit of sacrifice of which she has given proof (in a measure unequalled I believe by any other of the belligerent countries), will come out of it dishonored by her fundamental treachery.

I think that this treachery has already been expiated partly by events themselves. If Germany had not violated Belgian neutrality, she would not have been obliged to defend a front of such great length in the west and could have turned the great majority of her forces against Russia; her chances of victory would thus have been much greater. If Germany is vanquished she will owe

⁹ To tell the truth the collection at our disposal is not yet complete for we have not seen the correspondence between Germany, Austria and Italy, but the fact that this correspondence has not been published is in itself very significant.

it then in great part to the fact that she violated Belgian neutrality. It would be a just chastisement.

A large number of Belgian people have had to abandon their country, their belongings, their homes and take refuge abroad. The greatest number have gone into Holland; many have gone into France and lastly a certain number have crossed the sea and asked England's hospitality. I have no exact information as to the state of the Belgian refugees in France and in Holland. I only know that in the latter country—less thickly populated than Belgium—the number of refugees received is far too great, so that most of them are living under miserable conditions. It has gone so far that now a new emigration movement has set in from Holland to England; about 5000 refugees are brought over each week. As to the state of the refugees in England I am much better informed not only by personal experience and by various information gathered from different sources, but above all by the official report published recently.¹⁰ In December there were 110,000 Belgian refugees in England. A small number only have been able to be employed so far. A rule was made not to give employment to any young unmarried Belgians between the ages of 18 and 30 who were fit for military service, for it was considered the duty of these young men to join their army and to help regain their native land. There are estimated to be about 5000 that come under this head. I hasten to add that this decision was taken upon the special request of the Belgian government, for it is clear that the British could not oblige their guests to fight as long as the same obligation did not rest upon themselves. One must render homage to the intelligent generosity which the English people have shown toward the Belgian emigrants. Numbers of organizations sprang up everywhere to help the poor refugees in the most efficient and discreet ways. But such a situation being without precedent in our time, the different schemes have not all been successful and mistakes have sometimes been made. It would, however, be most unfair to judge English hospitality by these.

One of the most important results of this great war is the extraordinary internixing which it has brought about among European peoples. Invading soldiers, prisoners sent from one part of Europe to another, emigration of all sorts, cause an incredible *mêlée* of which no one can foresee all the consequences. I sometimes feel as if Europe were like a gigantic caldron where the

¹⁰ Government Belgian Refugees Committee, 1914. *First Report*... presented to parliament by command of His Majesty, London, 1914.

peoples are being whirled around and are mixed up together in every sort of way, stirred by prodigious and invisible forces. For example it is particularly difficult to say how all these good folks of Belgium will adapt themselves after being received with open arms into an environment so different from their own, and what their remembrances of it all will be like. As always, the results will largely depend upon the individuals concerned, but I think as a whole they will be considerable.

Meanwhile it is certain that English hospitality has unfortunately been the occasion in one way and another for a good deal of friction on both sides. No one likes to speak of it, but I think that is a mistake, for all these things are just misunderstandings which silence will only deepen.

That there should be misunderstandings between Belgians and English is almost inevitable. The former—easy-going, familiar, *sans-gêne*, at one and the same time mystical and sensual, boastful, fond of a joke, and undisciplined; the latter—stiff, methodical, traditionalists, phlegmatic, much less sentimental, too conscious of their superiority (as real in some domains as it is debatable in others). With such wide differences, is it to be wondered at that mutual shocks and friction should take place? Above all, the sensibilities of the two peoples differ too widely for them to agree well.

Need one be surprised then that English generosity, often magnificent but too methodical, untinted by sentimentality, discreet but distant, has been sometimes misjudged? And on the other hand have not the English sometimes taken for ingratitude what was simply awkwardness? One must not forget that most of the Belgian refugees in England are people of very little education, still dazed by their terrific misfortunes and by the unheard-of circumstances in which they find themselves suddenly placed; also that their exile in a country of which the language and customs are so different from their own makes them feel utterly bewildered. Probably some of them, absorbed in the sufferings and irreparable losses they have undergone for the salvation of Europe and democracy, allow themselves to be led away by this idea and to measure everything by it, and so to consider the kindness shown them as ever inadequate. One need hardly say that such an attitude is absolutely wrong, but what helps to excuse it is that this frame of mind is due in great part to German insinuations. It is a fact that as soon as they arrived in Belgium the Germans set themselves to show the Belgians that the latter had been deceived by their allies—chiefly by England—and sacrificed to their selfishness. They did this with

that common accord and that methodical discipline, which characterize them, partly in order to justify their own cause and partly to make themselves agreeable to the inhabitants at England's expense.

Now I fear they may have succeeded in persuading many Belgians, for the latter are very credulous. Did they not say: "The allies could have come much more quickly to your help if they had wanted to. . . . they could have saved Antwerp. . . . and see what they have done"? Why indeed did not the allies come sooner? The good folks of Belgium did not think of the very simple explanation that the Germans were ready and the allies were not, nor that this is also the best proof of the righteousness of their own cause. I am speaking from personal experience, for I had occasion to discuss these questions at great length with German officers, and men of my village gathered the same impression from conversations with the soldiers. One can conceive that having been duped in this way many simple-minded Belgians may have had exaggerated ideas of what was due to them. But if the English have numberless duties toward their poor Belgian brothers it is clear that the latter have no positive rights.

Another frequent cause of misunderstanding is that many English people are too easily convinced that their particular methods of living are infinitely superior to the continental ones (it is often true but not always—and above all not *necessarily* true), and the least intelligent and the least kind among them are thus ready to spoil their generosity by ill-concealed condescension. We all know that there are no more irritating misunderstandings than those of this sort. What is perfectly true is that the standard of life is much higher in England than in the corresponding social classes living in Belgium, but that is only a relative and questionable superiority. I must repeat that at bottom the essential cause of misunderstanding must be looked for in the different sensibilities: the English mind is more empirical, more cautious, more inclined to politics, more keen as to social and religious *rites*; the Belgian is more of an artist, and in spite of a certain unruliness and many sins against "respectability" he is at heart more religious. Of course I know quite well that definitions so brief are necessarily incomplete.

I have thought it useful to make known these differences and misunderstandings for the reason that they are interesting in themselves and because it is only possible to attenuate them after admitting their existence. Moreover, painful as this friction may be,

it will in the end be a source of progress. At least, the intelligent people of both nations will gather from it all sorts of lessons and will come through these vexations more experienced, broader minded and better armed for life's struggle. The friction will be quickly forgotten—at least we shall only remember the comic side of it—and later there will remain to us the remembrance of English generosity and of the thousand and one things we learned in our exile.

* * *

Whether they be in Holland, in France or in England, I think that most of the exiled Belgians are always dreaming of the time when they will be able to go back to their own dear land and take up their daily work in security once more. What deep emotion will be in each man's heart when he sees his village from afar—or the ruins of his village—his home, his workshop; when the scientist shall cross once more after so long a time the threshold of his laboratory or his library! What a mad longing to work will take hold of all those whom the war has not exhausted! Belgium will be one great cemetery piled up with ruins and blood-stained remains; what sums of energy will there not be needed to rebuild the towns, to establish new homes, to restore and renew public and private life everywhere!

To imagine this to oneself even in a measure one must first of all remember what Belgium was before this disaster. Briefly: it was the most thickly populated country in the world, the country possessing proportionately the greatest length of railways, and where the average business transacted by each inhabitant attained the highest figure.¹¹ It is hardly necessary to add that Belgium was not only distinguished above all nations by qualities of a material sort (as significant as these are) but that she was also a center of civilization of corresponding value. Without recalling the past it is enough to quote a few of the glorious names of our own time: Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Constantin Meunier. Now if I venture, though a Belgian, to praise my country so warmly it is because I

¹¹ Here are a few figures which will give a more accurate idea. There were in Belgium 652 inhabitants per square mile. In the continental United States there are only 31. The two states the most densely populated, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, have respectively 508 and 419 inhabitants per square mile. In Belgium there is .47 of a mile of railway per square mile; in the United Kingdom there is only .19 and in the United States less than .09. The "general trade" done by each inhabitant in the United States, the United Kingdom and Belgium amounts respectively to £8, £27 and £67. These last figures are only approximate and refer to 1911. I think that the figures relating to the Netherlands would be still greater than the Belgian, but I was not able to find out.

am distinctly conscious that this activity, marvelous for its quantity and quality, is not only due to the exceptional racial characteristics of its people, but also to its privileged situation in rich land, well watered, in the center of Europe at one of the principal crossways of the civilized world. It is particularly tragic at the first glance that peoples should fight in this, the most thickly populated region of the world; that is to say, on the spot where a war must obviously cause the greatest number of victims and the greatest amount of damage, but one soon sees that it is perfectly natural that it should be so. For the same causes which have brought about the creation and accumulation in this place of so much wealth, must also periodically bring to it all the horrors of war. Belgium has often been called the battlefield of Europe. So long as Europe remains what she is, Belgium will be an incomparable center of exchange and of civilization, but alas! she will continue to run the same risks. We had rather forgotten it, yet the experience of to-day is not the first we have been through.

Just as Belgium was rent and tortured by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, so the same sequence of historical events predestined her no doubt to be the victim of German atrocities in the twentieth. Yet we can only accept the fact of this destiny with infinite sadness, for it seemed to be too late for such events to repeat themselves, and no one would have dared dream that the sons of Goethe, of Beethoven and of Kant would have been in these circumstances the pitiless instruments of fate. I cannot adequately express my sorrow that Germany—the Germany that I admired and loved and cannot help still liking—should thus have belittled herself.

* * *

In speaking of the resurrection of Belgium, I have constantly inferred that she would retain her independence. And indeed not only do I hope so, but I am convinced that Belgium will be whole and independent after the war as before it. When the time comes to settle accounts the neutral powers, and principally the United States, will not allow this independence to be questioned. As a matter of fact, to permit Belgium to be wholly or partially annexed by Germany would be to participate in the iniquity and to ratify the crime. Moreover, from that moment the very existence of all other small countries would be threatened. Now it must not be forgotten that small countries are the best trustees of the world's peace. It is never the small countries that tend to upset the equi-

librium of nations, but the big ones. Small countries, well fortified and well armed, interposed between bigger ones—*états tampons* as they have been called—appear to me the surest factors in the European equilibrium. They alone may arm themselves without awakening suspicions or susceptibilities.¹² It is quite likely that one of the results of this great war will be to increase the number of the small European nations, and in any case these will be of ever-growing importance in the future. They will become in a way the police of Europe. The more the great nations disarm, the more the little nations placed between them, at the principal European cross-roads—Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, the Scandinavian and Balkan States and perhaps Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, Albania, a Jewish Palestine and others still—will be obliged to arm themselves better. They will receive grants, of course, for this purpose from the great powers, on a scale to be equitably determined by an international court.

When all the great nations of the world assemble to fix the conditions of peace, it is then almost certain that whatever be the fate of arms they will restore to the heroic Belgian people the entire proprietorship of their territory. Perhaps the treaty of 1839 will be replaced by another having the same purpose but providing that all the treaty powers shall guarantee her neutrality to Belgium for ever and aye, while obliging her to make better preparations for her own defense. But that will not be sufficient. It seems to me that the violation of the old treaty should be punished in some way, if only to render the new one more binding. For justice to be done it is really necessary that Germany—even if not actually vanquished—should be obliged to pay a considerable indemnity to Belgium. I would further suggest that she be condemned to pay a very heavy fine to some international foundation. This fine ought to be so heavy that it would force the great powers to reflect before they would violate the neutrality of a small state. And if I propose that this fine should be paid not to Belgium herself but to an international fund, it is in order to evidence the disinterestedness and judicial character it ought to possess.

This fund could be employed for all sorts of international aims and could serve notably to pay the cost of organizing greater intercourse between the nations and subsidize the great works of human

¹² Doubtless the large countries may also surround themselves with fortresses without their neighbors reasonably taking offense, for it is evident that fortresses can never serve for offensive purposes, and I believe personally that for long centuries to come it will be the peoples' duty to protect themselves by this means as it is the duty of individuals to put locks on their doors.

progress and solidarity. The realization of this idea would be, I think, the first great sanction of international law. After the payment of this fine no one will again have the right to say that international law is essentially frail because—at least in important cases—it is impossible to get it sanctioned. In very truth the realization of this idea would mark the beginning of a new era in the relations between different peoples.

On the other hand, the nations will have a thousand opportunities of showing their gratitude to Belgium for her heroic stand for the right—the most splendid example of collective heroism that has been given to the world since the days of antiquity. When the poor Belgians shall once more enter their native land to find it empty, devastated and blood-stained, they will *then* above all need help from all sides. The task before them will be immense, yet not beyond their strength. When to their own passionate devotion and united strength, shall be added, I am sure, offers of work and collaboration from every corner of the world, when all the nations shall give credit cheerfully to this people which has shown such energy and resource in the past—then there will arise a new Belgium revived and made greater by her fiery ordeal.

I have still another idea. A Roman citizen, Henrick Christian Anderson,¹³ has dreamed the splendid dream of building a world's city, where would be harmoniously grouped all the central offices of international endeavors. But where to build this city? The nations would dispute as to the honor of possessing it, and, whatever the choice, much jealousy would be aroused. Now it seems to me that this choice has become a very simple matter. The world's city should be erected in Belgium, in the country sanctified by glorious wounds, and I believe that none of the other nations would protest. This choice, moreover, would be all the more legitimate since even before the war Belgium was the one among all the countries in which the greatest number of international associations had fixed their headquarters.¹⁴ The fact that the Palace of Peace is at the Hague and that the peace conferences meet in that town need be no real obstacle to this scheme. It seems to me on the contrary desirable that there should not be excessive centralization. Then, too, the Hague is not very far from Brussels.

If this city were erected in Belgium such a manifestation of the world's homage would be really the most beautiful and noble

¹³ I have spoken of him before in *Isis*, Vol. I, pp. 488-489.

¹⁴ In 1913, of 169 international associations having fixed headquarters, 45 were to be found in Belgium (*La vie internationale*, Vol. IV, pp. 59-60, Brussels, 1913).

recompense and consolation for the Belgian people, not to mention the benefit which humanity as a whole would receive.

In any case, whatever aid the other nations may bring her at this critical period of her existence, there will emerge out of this war—whatever its issue—a Belgium purified and enobled by suffering. Too great prosperity too easily attained had to a certain extent corrupted Belgium's soul. Commercialism had gradually invaded this little country which Karl Marx rather aptly called "the capitalists' paradise." The standard of life of its working people was scandalously low and much misery existed side by side with great riches. A growing thirst for pleasure and enjoyments filled men's souls. The Belgian mind was becoming mediocre. It became truer and truer that the Belgian was too easily satisfied and contented himself with approximate results. Political aims became year by year lower and meaner. A humdrum, lukewarm self-satisfaction steeped the moral atmosphere.

We shall rebuild, I hope, a better Belgium—healthier and inspired with higher ideals. But alas! there are things we can neither rebuild nor create anew. Nothing can replace for us those marvelous edifices which had come down through the centuries, which even the Spaniards had refrained from spoiling, and all those admirable little medieval towns: Malines, Louvain, Ypres, Furnes, Dixmude—each a jewel in the glorious crown of souvenirs bequeathed to us by our ancestors. Their presence was a continual inspiration and a living influence upon all our people.

These are indeed infinite and irreparable losses. I cannot think of them without my heart bleeding, without a feeling of mutilation—alas! alas! But after allowing for that which is irreparable, bravely facing our destiny, I am certain that our new Belgium will come forth more strenuous, more productive than ever. Our energies will never flag till we realize that she is fairer than that which has been destroyed. We shall be at one and the same time humbler and stronger. Little Belgium will soon become once more the busy, swarming bee-hive that strangers looked upon with admiration, and will also become a factor of progress and peace in the civilized world.

Belgium may slumber, but die—never! She has never ceased to exist. In spite of our losses and sufferings we are all ready and eager completely to restore and reestablish our motherland, and because of that we look with confidence and joy to the future.

* * *

In conclusion I wish to add a suggestion. It is extremely

desirable and urgent that the neutral countries should appoint an official commission to investigate into the transgressions of the laws of nations committed by the belligerent peoples. Similar commissions offering serious guarantees have been already instituted by Belgium and by France, and trustworthy reports of their proceedings have been published. However, it is obvious that they cannot have the same weight as if they had been made by neutral and disinterested personalities. This commission should also undertake to visit the different prisoners' camps; naturally the same persons should visit all, in order that a fair comparison might be arrived at. America could not, under present circumstances, initiate a nobler or more useful work than this. (The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace organized such a committee during the war in the Balkans.) The work accomplished by this commission would be most precious to the future historian after the great war, and would of course be invaluable when the settlement of accounts takes place.