

THE EARLIER RELATIONS OF ENGLAND AND BELGIUM¹

I do not know whether the speeches of Charles Sumner are still read in the United States with the admiration which they inspired fifty years ago. In fact I do not know whether they are read at all. But from early boyhood I have recalled, at intervals, the purple patch with which Sumner closes his oration on *The True Grandeur of Nations*:

It is a beautiful picture in Grecian story, that there was at least one spot, the small island of Delos, dedicated to the gods, and kept at all times sacred from War. No hostile foot ever pressed this kindly soil, and citizens met here in common worship, beneath the aegis of inviolable Peace. So let us dedicate our beloved country. . . . The Temple of Honor shall be enclosed by the Temple of Concord; that it may never more be entered through any portal of War; the horn of Abundance shall overflow at its gates; the angel of Religion shall be the guide over its steps of flashing adamant; while within . . . Justice, returned to the earth from long exile in the skies . . . shall rear her serene and majestic front.

It is now rather more than two generations since the great powers of Europe tried the experiment of converting the old Austrian Netherlands into a modern Delos. To transform this cockpit into the neutralized Belgium was an ambitious effort, involving the recognition of public law as a real force in modern life. Apparently mankind is less virtuous than it was assumed to be, or else new doctrines regarding the nature of the state have consigned to the scrap-heap ideas which were deemed fundamental in 1831. At any rate we have been witnesses of a grim fiasco. The Belgian Delos has been destroyed, and it follows that the Swiss Delos exists on sufferance. Henceforth the Happy Island of the Aegean must be classed with the Happy Valley of Abyssinia among the figments of the imagination. In fact Delos would be forgotten were it not for the American Historical Association. Here its memory, its ideal survives, and far be it from me to disturb this haven of peace by introducing matters of controversy. The present subject would not have occurred to me but for the fact that I was asked to treat of English history in recent times. Then came events which brought Belgium into the centre of the stage. Hence it seemed that a few remarks

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upon the past contact of England with Belgium might not be without interest.

Those who revel in origins and study the past *ab ovo* will doubtless remember that the Netherlands (or at least the northern part thereof) were rescued from paganism by the English—that is to say by Wilfrid and Willibrord of Northumbria; and by St. Boniface, the West Saxon, who also converted the Germans. Willibrord likewise had a double sphere of activity, inasmuch as he converted the heathen of Heligoland. But these events happened long ago, and have little more bearing upon Belgium than the Bull of Alexander VI. has on the Monroe Doctrine. The same may be said regarding the export of English wool to Bruges in the fourteenth century; Chaucer's statement that the Wife of Bath was more accomplished at the loom than the weavers of Ypres and Ghent; the marriage of Edward III. to Philippa of Hainault; the profanity of the troops in Flanders; and *Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre*.

We come, however, to something like modern relations between England and Belgium, in the period of the younger Pitt. This pacific son of a warlike sire was eventually dragged from his orbit by the strifes of the French Revolution, but his troubles had begun several years before the Jacobins decided to behead their king. With Oczakov, Nootka Sound, and the revolt of Belgium all going on at the same time, Pitt was fully occupied in 1789 and 1790.

Nootka Sound we may at once eliminate, but Oczakov and Belgium became very completely entangled with each other and with all the complications of European state-craft at this time. It was just as well that the British Foreign Office, under the Duke of Leeds, should have had something to stir it up. Sir Robert Keith, the ambassador at Vienna, stated that he had sent home fifty-two consecutive despatches without receiving a single reply, and that on the average he received one reply to forty despatches. But in the summer of 1789 Pitt evidently took over the writing of despatches himself, for their quality at once leaps to a high level and business receives attention.

Looking back at the tangled skein of European diplomacy as it was on the eve of the French Revolution, there are certain things which catch the eye instantly. The first of these is the league of England and Prussia—with whom, in the Triple Alliance of 1788, Holland also is grouped. England had issued from the War of the American Revolution without credit, cash, or friends. Her dream of imperialism seemed shattered, and for a time the task was that of picking up the pieces—a task in which much useful assistance was rendered by the Industrial Revolution. However, after the

lapse of a few years, the Continent began to realize that England had not disappeared from the map altogether. Indeed, this fact was grasped quite quickly by Prussia when, in 1787, Catherine II. and Joseph II. went off on their picturesque, though not romantic, excursion to the Crimea.

The Belgian uprising of 1789-1790 occurred in the midst of the war which Catherine and Joseph were conducting against the Porte—with more advantage to Russia than to Austria. It may be worthy of mention that the immediate trouble between the Belgians and their Austrian rulers was caused by disputes regarding the University of Louvain—which would appear to be a storm centre. What at first was a zephyr, soon became a hurricane. Before the close of 1789 the rule of the Hapsburgs at Brussels seemed to be overthrown. Early in January, 1790, a federal republic was declared—the United States of Belgium. Then Joseph died, Leopold came in, and Belgian freedom was put down by Austria after an existence of rather less than twelve months. But the incident lasted long enough to leave a striking record in the archives of the British Foreign Office. Above all, English despatches to Berlin show how seriously the issue was considered by Pitt, and how large an element Belgium grew to be in the relations of England and Prussia.

The desire of Frederick William II. to injure Austria by encouraging revolt in Belgium was closely bound up with his desire to enlarge his own kingdom in another quarter. Prussia still lacked Thorn and Danzig. If through the help of Frederick William, Poland could regain Galicia, she might be willing to let Prussia have Thorn and Danzig. With this enterprise the Belgian question became involved, since the success of the Polish project depended largely on the degree of England's friendship, which, in turn, was conditioned appreciably by the unfolding of the situation in Belgium.

As the face of the world was so soon afterwards transformed by the French Revolution, we need not pause to conjecture how Belgian affairs would have developed but for the collapse of the Old Régime. It is enough to note that on the very eve of the deluge Belgium was a danger spot which gave England grave concern, helping her to crystallize very definite views regarding the future of this region to which fate has denied the boon of natural frontiers. Charles Emmanuel of Savoy said that he was prevented by geography from being an honest man, but to no state has geography been so cruel as to Belgium. Pitt recognized with perfect clearness all the physiological elements in the case, as affecting England, and acted accordingly. When the United States of Belgium cut loose from Austria they had no trouble in getting countenance from Prussia.

England and Holland, however, were by no means ready to recognize and support the Belgian republic. On the one hand, Pitt wished to keep friends with Prussia; on the other, he strongly objected to the creation of a Belgium so weak as to invite inroads which might embarrass and endanger England. While he and the Prussian Foreign Office exchanged despatches, the Austrians settled the matter by upsetting the new Belgian commonwealth.

Thus a Belgian crisis arose at the moment when the National Assembly of France was beginning to shape its famous constitution. The outstanding features of the incident are these. England and Prussia as allies face Austria and Russia in a balance-of-power rivalry which discovers clashing interests from the Black Sea to Ostend. Pitt wants Belgium to be in safe hands—that is, in the hands of those who will not use their sea-coast as a menace to England. His whole action shows that he is much more interested in compassing this end than in helping Prussia to gain Thorn and Danzig. Finally, the Belgium of 1790 was mixed up with Oczakov, as the Belgium of July, 1914, was mixed up with the ultimatum to Serbia. Lowell said that the devil always has his finger in the Irish pie. The Eastern Question, with a more complete ubiquity, seems subject to the same malevolence.

But, after all, Pitt's connection with Belgium is a matter of academic interest when measured by the part which Palmerston took in the Belgian Revolution of 1830. To give its due perspective to this phase of England's relations with Belgium would be to trace the rise and persistence of the Canning tradition in Downing Street. Omitting the perspective, let us come to that very pretty interplay of English Whigs with July Monarchists, of the downright Palmerston with the astute, experienced Talleyrand. Even after the Belgians had driven out the Dutch, Belgium lay at the mercy of the Five Powers. As Nothomb, the Belgian patriot, himself said: "We are only four millions. We cannot expect to give the law to the rest of Europe." In these circumstances the problems of Belgian independence and neutrality were solved by the powers, notably by France and England.

Raymond Guyot has written an excellent account of Talleyrand's part in the negotiations which led up to the creation of Belgium as a separate kingdom. Approaching the same subject from the English side, special attention must be called to Palmerston's despatches and private correspondence. His letters to Lord Granville, then British ambassador at Paris, are particularly graphic—though Palmerston never excelled his great exemplar, Canning, in mere raciness.

The Belgian Question which confronted Talleyrand and Pal-

merston might just as well, in degree of complexity, have been the Macedonian Question. The Congress of Vienna gave Belgium to Holland, not because it loved the Dutch or the House of Orange, but because the Allies of Chaumont were resolved that the cockpit should not belong to France. On this point no one at Vienna had been more convinced than Castlereagh. After Castlereagh's death, Canning developed sympathy for oppressed nationalities, and in 1830 the Belgians seemed to come under this rule. Moreover if oppressed nationalities had appealed to a Tory like Canning, *a fortiori* they deserved to appeal to a Whig administration like that of Lord Grey.

Thus England in shaping her Belgian policy at the moment when Wellington gave place to Grey, was compelled, first of all, to clarify her own thought on the subject. Self-protection had led her at Vienna to see that Antwerp, Zeebrugge, and Ostend should not be used against herself. In 1830 there was a distinct risk that if Belgium cut loose from Holland she would not be strong enough to resist powerful neighbors who coveted her soil and her ports. On the other hand, Belgium's plea for independence appeared reasonable, and was manifestly supported by the desire of four million people. Lord Grey himself would have been glad to settle the matter on the basis of Belgian autonomy, with a cadet of the House of Orange for sovereign. And in the first stage of the Revolution the Belgians might have listened to a compromise of this sort. But the affair advanced rapidly and King William of Holland was so unpopular at Brussels that the whole House of Orange soon fell under condemnation. The first problem for England was whether to join Russia and Austria in enforcing the arrangements made at Vienna, or frankly to acknowledge Belgian independence.

Presented as a sharp choice of alternatives there was but one course for the Whigs to take. They were the party of freedom, whose recent advent to power after immemorial years in opposition placed them under the necessity of supporting their principles. Their own Reform Bill, then being drafted, was a measure of emancipation. They approved of the July Revolution in Paris and had been helped by it. France and England had never been so close in sympathy, and through their co-operation Belgium was established as a sovereign, neutral state.

But even with the help of a good understanding between the July Monarchists and the Whigs, the path was thorny. It would have been thornier still but for the revolution in Poland, which kept Nicholas occupied at home during the critical months of the Belgian crisis, and for the risings in Italy which made the winter of 1831 a

busy time for Metternich. Thus favored by fortune Talleyrand and Palmerston managed to work Belgium out of her worst troubles before the close of 1831. Their difficulties were caused less by interference from the three autocrats than by the restlessness of the war party at Paris.

Talleyrand, the most sagacious adviser of Louis Philippe, desired above all things that the Citizen King should keep the peace, and this was also the wish of Louis Philippe himself. But Laffitte and General Sebastiani had also to be reckoned with, and Palmerston was deeply concerned lest they should do things which he not only could not support but must openly oppose. The fact, of course, was that at home the July Monarchy rested on a very insecure foundation and the chauvinist faction among its supporters was anxious that foreign affairs should yield a little *réclame* which could be used in the elections. Charles X., during the last days of the Bourbon monarchy, had worked out a promising foreign policy in alliance with Russia. But the July Revolution turned Nicholas from a friend into an enemy. Laffitte and his supporters were hungry for a little glory—if not real glory, at least electoral glory—and it was hoped by them that Palmerston would be good-natured enough to assist their little game with the French voters. They did not ask for the dismemberment of Belgium. A slight rectification of the southern frontier would answer quite well.

To blandishments of this kind Palmerston turned a deaf ear. Not an inch of Belgian soil should be taken by anyone, on any pretext, except over England's dead body. Once suffer the wedge to enter, even by a razor's breadth, and then all the neighbors, including Prussia, would clamor for their share. This issue, once raised, meant a general war, for Louis Philippe had said to Pozzo di Borgo that under no circumstances must Prussia enter Belgium, "for we will not permit it".

The Conference of London was the agency employed to settle Belgian affairs without war. It had been proposed by Wellington that the powers should exchange views on Belgium as well as on Greece; but in November, 1830, the Tories were driven from office, and it became Palmerston's task to carry on the pacification which the duke had begun. Towards both Holland and Belgium the Conference of London was very firm. Its first act was to declare that there must be an armistice between these belligerents while the powers were settling their affairs for them: and an armistice was accordingly declared.

Little trouble arose over Belgian autonomy. Even Russia was willing to concede this, if a federal connection with Holland were

maintained and a Prince of Orange made king over Belgium and Luxembourg. But the Belgians would listen to no proposals which made them ancillary to the Dutch, and on November 24 their first legislature excluded the House of Orange from the throne. Under ordinary circumstances Nicholas might not have taken this quietly. The Polish revolution tied his hands. Talleyrand then hurried business on so fast that by December 18 the Conference of London decided Belgium should be a separate kingdom, after which it only remained to select the king and agree on the frontiers. Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg was Palmerston's choice for king,² and to this Talleyrand agreed; though Sebastiani, then French minister of foreign affairs, was carrying on an intrigue behind Talleyrand's back in favor of the Duc de Nemours.

The selection of a sovereign and the apportionment of the debt were both important, but the territorial aspects to the case constituted the greatest menace to a peaceful solution. It was in January, 1831, that Talleyrand began vigorously to advocate the principle of neutralization. No one knew better than he that France would be unable to secure any part of Belgium for herself, and

² It is not necessary to recite the intricate story of the negotiations which preceded the nomination of Belgium's first king. Wellington, Aberdeen, and Grey would all have preferred to see a prince of the House of Orange on the Belgian throne, and Leopold was only taken as a result of elimination. Against him were his rather equivocal record with regard to the candidature for the Greek throne, and, in certain quarters, his English affiliations. When, during the spring of 1831, it became a question between Leopold and the Duc de Nemours, Palmerston took the ground that the Duc de Nemours was not to be thought of, whereas Leopold would prove a loyal king of the Belgians, not subservient to England or any other power. The most striking passage which bears on this subject will be found in a letter of Palmerston to Granville, dated April 1, 1831.

"Talleyrand read me two days ago a despatch from Sebastiani, saying that France would support Leopold; and that he had no doubt that England, for the sake of an arrangement so advantageous to her, would agree to all the French wishes about Bouillon and Luxembourg and Maestricht, etc. Talleyrand, before I could say anything, said that the answer he meant to give was, that the election of Leopold was an object of comparative indifference to us, and that we were not disposed to make any sacrifices to obtain it.

"I said he was quite right, and begged him also to say that, even if we looked upon Leopold's election as a matter of English interest, still we were bound by engagements to other Powers, and that we should preserve our good faith in preference to consulting our selfish interests; that consequently the election of Leopold would make no change whatever in our opinions and determinations, and that we should not be a whit more inclined to support the unreasonable pretensions of the Belgians with Leopold than without him. But I said the reason we wished for Leopold, next after a member of the family of Orange, was that we think he would become a good *Belgian king*; that he would be no more English than French, but would look to his own interests, and to those of the State which he governed." Bulwer, *Life of Palmerston*, II, 61-62.

neutralization would at least prevent an enemy from getting too close to Lille and Maubeuge. Here again Talleyrand was opposed to Sebastiani, but he had his way and the protocol of January 28, 1831, accepts the principle of Belgian neutrality, coupling therewith a noble statement as to the complete and perpetual disinterestedness of the powers.

So far Palmerston and Talleyrand worked harmoniously, and, indeed, throughout the transaction, Palmerston's chief anxieties were caused by Sebastiani rather than by Talleyrand. In August, 1831, a French army, invited by King Leopold, crossed the frontier and gave aid to the Belgians in resisting an invasion by the Dutch. Ample assurance had been given by Talleyrand that the French troops would withdraw on the completion of their task. None the less, Palmerston was clearly nervous, and on August 11 he wrote Granville a very strong letter to describe the excitement of Parliament on hearing the news of this expedition. The closing words ran as follows:

The French Government are perpetually telling us that certain things must, or must not, be done, in order to satisfy public opinion in France; but they must remember that there is a public feeling in England as well as in France; and that although that feeling is not as excitable upon small matters as the public mind in France, yet there are points (and Belgium is one) upon which it is keenly sensitive, and upon which, if once aroused, it would not easily be appeased.³

As the French withdrew in due course, nothing happened; but the incident is eloquent. Palmerston's despatch shows that however friendly the Whigs were with the Orleanists, they were not disposed to leave Belgian affairs at loose ends. Talleyrand, at Sebastiani's instance, wheedled skillfully for Philippeville and Marienbourg, but he did not get them.

Palmerston said that Belgium was one of the points upon which English public opinion was keenly sensitive, and upon which, if once aroused, it would not easily be appeased. This is a statement which requires some comment, both in the light of conditions which existed in 1831, and in the light of those which have come to exist since then. It obviously is impossible to cite the evidence here, but my own opinion is that England was more sensitive about Belgium in 1870 than in 1831, and that the same feeling has gathered strength ever since 1870.

At the outset England was drawn towards the Netherlands by considerations which affected her own safety. This is clear from the policy which Pitt pursued in 1790. To justify his solicitude,

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

France soon seized Belgium and conquered Holland, with the result that for twenty years English statesmen did not enjoy their normal amount of sleep. With this recent experience it is not strange that in 1814 the instinct of self-protection should have determined the attitude of England towards Belgium. The same attitude of mind existed in 1831, and it is to this that Palmerston alludes in the words which have been quoted.

But when the new Kingdom of Belgium began its career under Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, the feeling of England towards her small neighbor across the Channel ceased to be determined by self-interest alone. For one thing, she felt that the existence of Belgium was largely due to her. Though all the Five Powers joined in the final guaranty of neutrality, the actual work of construction had been done by France and England. As between these two states England had prevailed when Sebastiani insisted that France should at least receive some portion of Belgian soil. Thus England had favored Belgian independence and Belgian neutrality, had supported Leopold against the Duc de Nemours, had prevented France from snapping up any of the border fortresses. England, in short, was ready from the outset to feel a maternal interest in the fortunes of that Belgium with the creation of which she had been so intimately connected.

This sentiment was strengthened by the excellent account which the Belgians gave of themselves. Their independence had been conceded under the condition of perpetual neutrality. Not only did they fulfill their part of the bargain by abstaining from plots of ambition, they held up to Europe an example of the quiet, industrious community which seeks nothing better than to do its work in peace. Naturally England watched this unfolding of events with great satisfaction. Thirty-two years after the Belgian Revolution the *Quarterly Review* is finding that the people of the two countries are linked by an identity of taste and temper. "An ardent love of liberty", it says, "a taste for natural scenery, an enthusiastic attachment to agriculture, an appreciation of domestic comfort and love of country life characterize alike the people of Belgium and England."

It is true that for some years the English did not like the Belgian tariff, which discriminated against them to the advantage of the French, but presently this grievance disappeared. When England went in for free trade the imports from Belgium increased enormously. In 1846 they were 9,000,000 francs; in 1862 they had reached 100,000,000. More important, though, than the commercial tie was the feeling that the Belgian experiment had proved a

success. In 1830 Belgian aspirations were a nuisance because they disturbed the settled order and introduced dangerous complications. Forty years later Belgium had so far justified her existence that to most Englishmen the conquest of her territory by foreign force would have seemed a worse crime than the partition of Poland—worse because Belgium was much more orderly and well behaved than Poland had ever been.

Burke was unwilling to indict a whole people, and it is equally illegitimate to ascribe to a whole people the nobler ideals which are as a lamp to the elect. With this express limitation it may be said that English sentiment regarding Belgian neutrality has become less selfish with the growth of the conviction that great powers should recognize those express covenants which guarantee the existence of small, unambitious states. The corollary of this conviction is the belief that a breach of public law may become a *casus belli*. Cobden believed so completely in moral force that he advised the Belgians to do away with their army altogether. During the crisis of the Franco-Prussian War, Parliament was deeply stirred by the publication of the arrangement discussed by Bismarck and Benedetti under which France was to take Belgium with the connivance of Prussia. Gladstone thought it would be quixotic for England to oppose France and Germany if they united to dismember Belgium, but, lover of peace though he was, decided that England should join with either to prevent the other from breaking its covenant. His special treaty of 1870 was designed to enforce in a specific instance the principles of the 1831 protocol, as finally embodied in the treaty of 1839. Gladstone, Disraeli, and the *Times* were at one in recognizing that while England had every reason for standing outside the war if Belgium were unmolested, she must use every effort to secure the validity of the mutual guaranty.

Here the two most significant utterances are those of Gladstone in his correspondence with Bright. On August 1, 1870, he writes: "We do not think it would be right, even if it were safe, to announce that we would in any case stand by with folded arms, and see actions done which would amount to a total extinction of public right in Europe." On August 4, after stating the view of the Cabinet, he continues:

I add for myself this confession of faith. If the Belgian people desire, on their own account, to join France or any other country, I for one will be no party to taking up arms to prevent it. But that the Belgians, whether they would or not, should go "plump" down the maw of another country to satisfy dynastic greed, is another matter. The accomplishment of such a crime as this implies, would come near to an extinction

of public right in Europe, and I do not think we could look on while the sacrifice of freedom and independence was in course of consummation.⁴

There are moralists who seem to maintain that where one's interest is served by the discharge of one's duty, it is discreditable—and, indeed, hypocritical—to discharge the duty. Not being an expert in ethics I am unable to say. But I do believe that on the fourth day of August last many people in England considered the Belgian question first from the standpoint of duty, and were willing that their country should discharge important obligations because it was the *right* thing to do.

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⁴ Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, II. 342.

A THEORY OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

IN biography the scientific element, the colorless objectivity of pure investigation, is not the most potent. Personality is too elusive to arise from the dead through a mere array of facts. Let us be frank with ourselves and admit that as biographers we are always theorists, always working out of the facts we have observed some containing theory that shall cause them to cohere, to accept an inner illumination from a central source, to strike our sensibilities, to evoke a person. All attempts at biography, however modest, are attempts at art. They can never fully escape impressionism. The present brief study is no more than an impression of what it is that appears to one observer to be shining through from the back of the facts of Davis's life and revealing their unity.

The basis of this impression is his youth and in that youth the central fact is this: he was a boy without a country. Consider the calendar of his wanderings: born in Kentucky, 1808; taken to Mississippi while a little child; sent back to Kentucky at the age of seven; back to Mississippi at nine; to Kentucky again, to enter Transylvania University, when he was but fourteen; removed from Transylvania direct to West Point; thence after a short visit to Mississippi removed to the far Northwest, where he saw nine years of military service among the Indians.¹ From fourteen to twenty-seven his associations were all outside the state in which his family was settled. Nor did he have an opportunity to acquire the sense that he *belonged* in any of the communities where temporarily he resided. He was a bird of passage. In reflecting upon the basis of his nature, the part that was laid before maturity, we should always remember that it was not the product of a single soil. His was a migratory growth, frequently transplanted.

Furthermore, there was not in the history of his family that traditional attachment to some abandoned locality, or that memory of a lost social status, either of which has at times, in the imagination of a youth of genius, proved the ruling power. The same roving note which was the tonic of his own early life had long been the tonic of his family history. His grandfather, Evan Davis, a

¹ *Jefferson Davis: a Memoir*, by his wife, I. 1-160, contains the classic story of his youth. Professor Dodd's recent biography is, of course, the standard modern work.