

Humanizing the Other**Mark Twain and the Struggle Against Imperialism Part 6****By Philip Chin**

Mark Twain's version of King Leopold highlighted many things that Samuel Clemens had hated or disliked his entire life: that Leopold was a believer in the divine right of kings; and that God raised kings above the judgement of any mortal. Samuel Clemens was a small-town Missouri democrat and republican (emphasis on small 'd' and 'r'). He believed in democracy and the ideals of the republican form of government in America. His writings reflected his belief that royalty were at best ridiculous relics of a long bygone age, as illustrated in his humorous but disrespectful writings about meeting the Russian czar, the German Kaiser, and other members of royalty. At worst, royalty like King Leopold were murderous parasites, persecuting and killing ordinary citizens on whim. Although Clemens didn't mention it specifically, Leopold was committing his crimes and mouthing his pious words as a publicly faithful Catholic. Just how much of the angry young man who'd joined the anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic Know-Nothing political party in the 1850s remained in Clemens is unknown. That history couldn't have helped him regard King Leopold in any better light than he already did.

This King Leopold rants that he hasn't been given enough credit for the things he has done and asserts his defense of divine right against any crimes he is charged with, "In these twenty years I have spent millions to keep the press of the two hemispheres quiet, and still these leaks keep on occurring. I have spent other millions on religion and art, and what do I get for it? Nothing. Not a compliment. These generosities are studiously ignored, in print. In print I get nothing but slanders -- and slanders again -- and still slanders, and slanders on top of slanders! Grant them true, what of it? They are slanders all the same when uttered against a king."

The king then exults in fooling the world as to his intentions at the Berlin Conference, especially making fun of the United States:

Miscreants -- they are telling everything! Oh, everything: how I went pilgriming among the Powers in tears, with my mouth full of Bible and my pelt oozing with piety at every pore, and implored them to place the vast and rich populous Congo Free state in trust in my hands as their agent, so that I might root out slavery and stop the slave raids, and lift up those twenty-five millions of gentle and harmless blacks out of darkness into light, the light of our blessed Redeemer, the light that streams from his holy Word, the light that makes glorious our noble civilization -- lift them up and dry their tears and fill their bruised hearts with joy and gratitude -- lift them up and make them comprehend that they were no longer outcasts and forsaken, but our very brothers in Christ; how America and thirteen great European states wept in sympathy with me, and were persuaded; how their representatives met in convention in Berlin and made me Head Foreman and Superintendent of the Congo State, and drafted out my powers and limitations, carefully guarding the persons and liberties and properties of the natives against hurt and harm; forbidding whisky traffic and gun traffic; providing courts of justice; making commerce free and fetterless to the merchants and traders of all nations, and welcoming and safe-guarding all missionaries of all creeds and denominations. They have told how I planned and prepared my establishment and selected my horde of officials -- "pals" and "pimps" of mine, "unspeakable Belgians" every one -- and hoisted my flag, and "took in" a President of the United States, and got him to be the first to recognize it and salute it. Oh, well, let them blackguard me if they like; it is a deep satisfaction to me to

remember that I was a shade too smart for that nation that thinks itself so smart. Yes, I certainly did bunco a Yankee -- as those people phrase it. Pirate flag? Let them call it so -- perhaps it is. All the same, *they were the first to salute it.*

The king then continues ranting about his critics, expanding on his belief in the divine right of kings:

They have told how for twenty years I have ruled the Congo State not as a trustee of the Powers, an agent, a subordinate, a foreman, but as a sovereign -- sovereign over a fruitful domain four times as large as the German Empire -- sovereign absolute, irresponsible, above all law; trampling the Berlin-made Congo charter under foot; barring out all foreign traders but myself; restricting commerce to myself, through concessionaires who are my creatures and confederates; seizing and holding the State as my personal property, the whole of its vast revenues as my private "swag" -- mine, solely mine -- claiming and holding its millions of people as my private property, my serfs, my slaves; their labor mine, with or without wage; the food they raise not their property but mine; the rubber, the ivory and all the other riches of the land mine -- mine solely -- and gathered for me by the men, the women and the little children under compulsion of lash and bullet, fire, starvation, mutilation and the halter.

These pests! -- it is as I say, they have kept back nothing! They have revealed these and yet other details which shame should have kept them silent about, since they were exposures of a king, a sacred personage and immune from reproach, by right of his selection and appointment to his great office by God himself; a king whose acts cannot be criticized without blasphemy, since God has observed them from the beginning and has manifested no dissatisfaction with them, nor shown disapproval of them, nor hampered nor interrupted them in any way. By this sign I recognize his approval of what I have done; his cordial and glad approval, I am sure I may say.

Blest, crowned, beatified with this great reward, this golden reward, this unspeakably precious reward, why should I care for men's cursings and revilings of me? [With a sudden outburst of feeling] May they roast a million aeons in -- [Catches his breath and effusively kisses the crucifix; sorrowfully murmurs, "I shall get myself damned yet, with these indiscretions of speech."]

Twain then lists more crimes that the king was charged with, putting the words into the mouth of the king. The king then continued to rant about how he wasn't being appreciated for the good things he'd done bringing the religion of love and mercy to the natives:

They tell how I levy incredibly burdensome taxes upon the natives -- taxes which are a pure theft; taxes which they must satisfy by gathering rubber under hard and constantly harder conditions, and by raising and furnishing food supplies gratis -- and it all comes out that, when they fall short of their tasks through hunger, sickness, despair, and ceaseless and exhausting labor without rest, and forsake their homes and flee to the woods to escape punishment, my black soldiers, drawn from unfriendly tribes, and instigated and directed by my Belgians, hunt them down and butcher them and burn their villages -- reserving some of the girls. They tell it all: how I am wiping a nation of friendless creatures out of existence by every form of murder, for my private pocket's sake. But they never say, although they know it, that I have labored in the cause of religion at the same time and all the time, and have sent missionaries there (of a "convenient stripe," as they phrase it), to teach them the error of their ways and bring them to Him who is all mercy and love, and who is the sleepless guardian and friend of all who suffer. They tell only what is against me, they will not tell what is in my favor.

The king then exults again over fooling the United States into recognizing the Congo, "Yes, I certainly was a shade too clever for the Yankees. It hurts; it gravels them. They can't get over it!

Puts a shame upon them in another way, too, and a graver way; for they never can rid their records of the reproachful fact that their vain Republic, self-appointed Champion and Promoter of the Liberties of the World, is the only democracy in history that has lent its power and influence to the establishing of an absolute monarchy!"

He then launches a bitter denunciation of the missionaries:

Blister the meddlesome missionaries! They write tons of these things. They seem to be always around, always spying, always eye-witnessing the happenings; and everything they see they commit to paper. They are always prowling from place to place; the natives consider them their only friends; they go to them with their sorrows; they show them their scars and their wounds, inflicted by my soldier police; they hold up the stumps of their arms and lament because their hands have been chopped off, as punishment for not bringing in enough rubber, and as proof to be laid before my officers that the required punishment was well and truly carried out. One of these missionaries saw eighty-one of these hands drying over a fire for transmission to my officials -- and of course he must go and set it down and print it. They travel and travel, they spy and spy! And nothing is too trivial for them to print.

The king then reads aloud a missionary's account of slave labor in the Congo and the precipitous reduction of the population. One prosperous village of 2,000 people that the missionary had previously visited just a few years previously had been reduced to just 200 people. The bones of most of the people were still scattered everywhere in the bush since the Belgians had killed so many for not fulfilling rubber quotas and other reasons that the survivors didn't have the strength or time to bury them all. This is information that the king condemns as too "trivial to print."

The king then condemns Roger Casement, accusing him of being "so lacking in delicacy and refinement" that he would print excerpts from the private diary of a Belgian officer. The officer wrote, "Each time the corporal goes out to get rubber, cartridges are given him. He must bring back all not used, and for every one used he must bring back a right hand. M. P. told me that sometimes they shot a cartridge at an animal in hunting; they then cut off a hand from a living man. As to the extent to which this is carried on, he informed me that in six months the State on the Mambogo River had used 6,000 cartridges, which means that 6,000 people are killed or mutilated. It means more than 6,000, for the people have told me repeatedly that the soldiers kill the children with the butt of their guns."

The king condemns this because, "When the subtle consul thinks silence will be more effective than words, he employs it. Here he leaves it to be recognized that a thousand killings and mutilations a month is a large output for so small a region as the Mambogo River concession, silently indicating the dimensions of it by accompanying his report with a map of the prodigious Congo state, in which there is not room for so small an object as that river. That silence is intended to say, 'If it is a thousand a month in this little corner, imagine the output of the whole vast State!' A gentleman would not descend to these furtivenesses." The text is accompanied by a drawing made from a photograph of an African man sitting and contemplating a tiny severed hand and foot on the mat in front of him. The caption reads, "Imagine the output of the whole vast State!" The original photograph had explained that this was a Congolese father contemplating the severed hand and foot of his toddler daughter who'd been killed by the Belgians.

Twain then echoed the watermelon morality story he'd told throughout his career, "Now as to the mutilations. You can't head off a Congo critic and make him stay headed-off; he dodges, and

straightway comes back at you from another direction. They are full of slippery arts. When the mutilations (severing hands, unsexing men, etc.) began to stir Europe, we hit upon the idea of excusing them with a retort which we judged would knock them dizzy on that subject for good and all, and leave them nothing more to say; to wit, we boldly laid the custom on the natives, and said we did not invent it, but only followed it. Did it knock them dizzy? did it shut their mouths? Not for an hour. They dodged, and came straight back at us with the remark that 'if a Christian king can perceive a saving moral difference between inventing bloody barbarities, and imitating them from savages, for charity's sake let him get what comfort he can out of his confession!'"

The king reads several more quotes from the Casement Report complaining that his extraordinary generosity in paying the Congolese pennies for being worked to death collecting rubber isn't recognized when he could perfectly well pay them nothing at all. He then complains that most of the deaths couldn't be attributed to him or his soldiers. Fleeing Belgian oppression most of them had starved to death in the forests which wasn't his fault. King Leopold then ends this rant with the outrageous assertion that God sees and recognizes his good deeds.

Ordinary punishments are no good with ignorant savages; they make no impression. [Reads more sub-heads]

"Devastated region; population reduced from 40,000 to 8,000."

He does not take the trouble to say how it happened. He is fertile in concealments. He hopes his readers and his Congo reformers, of the Lord - Aberdeen - Norbury - John - Morely - Sir - Gilbert - Parker stripe, will think they were all killed. They were not. The great majority of them escaped. They fled to the bush with their families because of the rubber raids, and it was there they died of hunger. Could we help that?

One of my sorrowing critics observes: "Other Christian rulers tax their people, but furnish schools, courts of law, roads, light, water and protection to life and limb in return; King Leopold taxes his stolen nation, but provides nothing in return but hunger, terror, grief, shame, captivity, mutilation, and massacre." That is their style! I furnish "nothing"! I send the gospel to the survivors; these censure-mongers know it, but they would rather have their tongues cut out than mention it. I have several times required my raiders to give the dying an opportunity to kiss the sacred emblem; and if they obeyed me I have without doubt been the humble means of saving many souls. None of my traducers have had the fairness to mention this; but let it pass; there is One who has not overlooked it, and that is my solace, that is my consolation.

The king's next passage explains the first illustration in the manuscript showing King Leopold standing atop a pyramid of skulls at the start of *King Leopold's Soliloquy*. Clemens included a subtle dig at his friend and fellow Anti-Imperialist League member, the millionaire steel magnate, philanthropist, and to some critics, robber baron, Andrew Carnegie, who was busy giving away many millions away to charity by this stage of his life. This passage echoed Mark Twain's sarcastic suggestion about the Chinese Boxer Rebellion indemnity money being used to build a monument featuring representations of the heads of the Chinese killed in retaliation for the deaths of Christians. At the time, King Leopold was being directly blamed for 10 million deaths as well as 5 million people that would have existed if they'd been born if the population had followed a more normal course.

Another madman wants to construct a memorial for the perpetuation of my name, out of my 15,000,000 skulls and skeletons, and is full of vindictive enthusiasm over his strange project. He

has it all ciphered out and drawn to scale. Out of the skulls he will build a combined monument and mausoleum to me which shall exactly duplicate the Great Pyramid of Cheops, whose base covers thirteen acres, and whose apex is 451 feet above ground. He desires to stuff me and stand me up in the sky on that apex, robed and crowned, with my "pirate flag" in one hand and a butcher-knife and pendant handcuffs in the other. He will build the pyramid in the center of a depopulated tract, a brooding solitude covered with weeds and the mouldering ruins of burned villages, where the spirits of the starved and murdered dead will voice their laments forever in the whispers of the wandering winds. Radiating from the pyramid, like the spokes of a wheel, there are to be forty grand avenues of approach, each thirty-five miles long, and each fenced on both sides by skulless skeletons standing a yard and a half apart and festooned together in line by short chains stretching from wrist to wrist and attached to tried and true old handcuffs stamped with my private trade-mark, a crucifix and butcher-knife crossed, with motto, "By this sign we prosper"; each osseous fence to consist of 200,000 skeletons on a side, which is 400,000 to each avenue. It is remarked with satisfaction that it aggregates three or four thousand miles (single-ranked) of skeletons -- 15,000,000 all told -- and would stretch across America from New York to San Francisco. It is remarked further, in the hopeful tone of a railroad company forecasting showy extensions of its mileage, that my output is 500,000 corpses a year when my plant is running full time, and that therefore if I am spared ten years longer there will be fresh skulls enough to add 175 feet to the pyramid, making it by a long way the loftiest architectural construction on the earth, and fresh skeletons enough to continue the transcontinental file (on piles) a thousand miles into the Pacific. The cost of gathering the materials from my "widely scattered and innumerable private graveyards," and transporting them, and building the monument and the radiating grand avenues, is duly ciphered out, running into an aggregate of millions of guineas, and then -- why then, (---- ----!! ---- ----!!) this idiot asks me to furnish the money! [Sudden and effusive application of the crucifix] He reminds me that my yearly income from the Congo is millions of guineas, and that "only" 5,000,000 would be required for his enterprise. Every day wild attempts are made upon my purse; they do not affect me, they cost me not a thought. But this one -- this one troubles me, makes me nervous; for there is no telling what an unhinged creature like this may think of next.... If he should think of Carnegie -- but I must banish that thought out of my mind! it worries my days; it troubles my sleep. That way lies madness. [After a pause] There is no other way -- I have got to buy Carnegie.

Leopold then muses on single sentences of various atrocities committed in his name and rationalizes them away:

"Widow forced to sell her little girl."

[Irritated] Hang the monotonous grumbler, what would he have me do! Let a widow off merely because she is a widow? He knows quite well that there is nothing much left, now, but widows. I have nothing against widows, as a class, but business is business, and I've got to live, haven't I, even if it does cause inconvenience to somebody here and there? [Reads]

"Allowing women and children to die of starvation in prison."

[Musing] Death from hunger. A lingering, long misery that must be. Days and days, and still days and days, the forces of the body failing, dribbling away, little by little -- yes, it must be the hardest death of all. And to see food carried by, every day, and you can have none of it! Of course the little children cry for it, and that wrings the mother's heart.... [A sigh] Ah, well, it cannot be helped; circumstances makes this discipline necessary. [Reads]

"The crucifying of sixty women!"

How stupid, how tactless! Christendom's goose flesh will rise with horror at the news. "Profanation of the sacred emblem!" That is what Christendom will shout. Yes, Christendom will buzz. It can hear me charged with a half a million murders a year for twenty years and keep its composure, but

to profane the Symbol is quite another matter. It will regard this as serious. It will wake up and want to look into my record. Buzz? Indeed it will; I seem to hear the distant hum already.... It was wrong to crucify the women, clearly wrong, manifestly wrong, I can see it now myself, and am sorry it happened, sincerely sorry. I believe it would have answered just as well to skin them.... [With a sigh] But none of us thought of that; one cannot think of everything; and after all it is but human to err.

It will make a stir, it surely will, these crucifixions. Persons will begin to ask again, as now and then in times past, how I can hope to win and keep the respect of the human race if I continue to give up my life to murder and pillage. [Scornfully] When have they heard me say I wanted the respect of the human race? Do they confuse me with the common herd? Do they forget that I am a king? What king has valued the respect of the human race? I mean deep down in his private heart. If they would reflect, they would know that it is impossible that a king should value the respect of the human race. He stands upon an eminence and looks out over the world and sees multitudes of meek human things worshipping the persons, and submitting to the oppressions and exactions, of a dozen human things who are in no way better or finer than themselves -- made on just their own pattern, in fact, and out of the same quality of mud. When it talks, it is a race of whales; but a king knows it for a race of tadpoles. Its history gives it away. If men were really men, how could a Czar be possible? And how could I be possible? But we are possible; we are quite safe; and with God's help we shall continue the business at the old stand. It will be found that the race will put up with us, in its docile immemorial way. It may pull a wry face now and then, and make large talk, but it will stay on its knees all the same. Making large talk is one of its specialties. It works itself up, and froths at the mouth, and just when you think it is going to throw a brick -- it heaves a poem! Lord, what a race it is!

Leopold reflects on the changes in the world that have taken place that have made sure that his crimes were exposed to the world despite the best efforts of his propaganda to convince the world that the tales of atrocities were lies. In words that still echo in the exposure of police brutality cases of today through ubiquitous cellphone camera footage, he blames the "kodak" for his troubles. This would have been the Kodak Brownie series of cameras first sold in 1900. Cheaply made and sold, it was the first mass-produced camera that ordinary people could afford. Its use quickly spread everywhere around the world causing an untold number of cultural changes.

The kodak has been a sore calamity to us. The most powerful enemy that has confronted us, indeed. In the early years we had no trouble in getting the press to "expose" the tales of the mutilations as slanders, lies, inventions of busy-body American missionaries and exasperated foreigners who found the "open door" of the Berlin-Congo charter closed against them when they innocently went out there to trade; and by the press's help we got the Christian nations everywhere to turn an irritated and unbelieving ear to those tales and say hard things about the tellers of them. Yes, all things went harmoniously and pleasantly in those good days, and I was looked up to as the benefactor of a down-trodden and friendless people. Then all of a sudden came the crash! That is to say, the incorruptible kodak -- and all the harmony went to hell! The only witness I have encountered in my long experience that I couldn't bribe. Every Yankee missionary and every interrupted trader sent home and got one; and now -- oh, well, the pictures get sneaked around everywhere, in spite of all we can do to ferret them out and suppress them. Ten thousand pulpits and ten thousand presses are saying the good word for me all the time and placidly and convincingly denying the mutilations. Then that trivial little kodak, that a child can carry in its pocket, gets up, uttering never a word, and knocks them dumb!

This passage is followed by a picture showing mutilated children holding up an arm and displaying where their missing hand should be to the camera. It is captioned, "The pictures get sneaked around everywhere."

The king continues to read another news article. In a prescient suggestion of what was to come in the 20th Century when genocide on an industrial scale would become increasingly prevalent, he reflects that his crimes are so horrendous that they will act as his protection. The world will be so horrified that they will not want to face the fact that any leader could order such crimes against humanity:

"But enough of trying to tally off his crimes! His list is interminable, we should never get to the end of it. His awful shadow lies across his Congo Free State, and under it an unoffending nation of 15,000,000 is withering away and swiftly succumbing of their miseries. It is a land of graves; it is *The Land of Graves*; it is the Congo Free Graveyard. It is a majestic thought: that is, this ghastliest episode in all human history is the work of *one man alone*; one solitary man; just a single individual -- Leopold, King of the Belgians. He is personally and solely responsible for all the myriad crimes that have blackened the history of the Congo State. He is *sole* master there; he is absolute. He could have prevented the crimes by his mere command; he could stop them today with a word. He withholds the word. For his pocket's sake.

It seems strange to see a king destroying a nation and laying waste a country for mere sordid money's sake, and solely and only for that. Lust of conquest is royal; kings have always exercised that stately vice; we are used to it, by old habit we condone it, perceiving a certain dignity in it; but *lust of money -- lust of shillings -- lust of nickels -- lust of dirty coin*, not for the nation's enrichment but for *the king's alone* -- this is new. It distinctly revolts us, we cannot seem to reconcile ourselves to it, we resent it, we despise it, we say it is shabby, unkingly, out of character. Being democrats we ought to jeer and jest, we ought to rejoice to see the purple dragged in the dirt, but -- well, account for it as we may, we don't. We see this awful king, this pitiless and blood-drenched king, this money-crazy king towering toward the sky in a world-solitude of sordid crime, unfellowed and apart from the human race, sole butcher for personal gain findable in all his caste, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, proper and legitimate target for the scorn of the lowest and the highest, and the execrations of all who hold in cold esteem the oppressor and the coward; and -- well, it is a mystery, but *we do not wish to look*; for he is a king, and it hurts us, it troubles us, by ancient and inherited instinct it shames us to see a king degraded to this aspect, and we shrink from hearing the particulars of how it happened. *We shudder and turn away* when we come upon them in print."

Why, certainly -- THAT IS MY PROTECTION.. And you will continue to do it. I know the human race.

The original piece ends with another passage provocatively rendered in the form of a cross:

AN ORIGINAL MISTAKE

"This work of 'civilization' is an enormous and continual butchery." "All the facts we brought forward in this chamber were denied at first most energetically; but later, little by little, they were proved by documents and by official texts." "The practice of cutting off hands is said to be contrary to instructions; but you are content to say that indulgence must be shown and that this bad habit must be corrected 'little by little' and you plead, moreover, that only the hands of fallen enemies are cut off, and that if the hands are cut off 'enemies' not quite dead, and who, after recovery, have had the bad taste to come to the missionaries and show them their stumps, it was due to an original mistake in thinking that they were dead." From Debate in Belgian Parliament, July, 1903.

In the second edition printed in 1906, Mark Twain reported on what subsequently happened. King Leopold II was forced to appoint a government commission with international representation to investigate the claims about what was happening in the Congo Free State, in

spite of his continued denials that any atrocities were happening. Not much was expected from any commission appointed by Leopold, despite the presence of Swiss and British representatives. The British representative was informed of his appointment so late, probably deliberately, that he missed most of the testimony taken in the Congo as he had to take a ship from England. It took everyone by surprise when the commission came back verifying all the claims. The commission was visibly shaken and appalled by the catalog of atrocities and the physical evidence of whippings, amputations, mutilation, and murder. One of the commissioners was so moved that he included this passage in the report, "I was so moved, your Excellency, at these people's story that I took the liberty of promising them, in the name of the Congo Free State, that you will only kill them in future for crimes."

Naturally, Leopold refused to allow the report to be published. Keeping a lid on a politically explosive report that could be used to stab rival members of government in the back though naturally insured the contents of the report were quickly leaked to the world. Leopold then released a sanitized version of the original report that eliminated all the horrifying testimony and contents, only leaving the dry conclusions of the commission. While never directly condemning King Leopold, who'd commissioned the report in the first place, one of the passages could have directly applied to him, "Numbers of agents only thought of one thing: to obtain as much as possible in the shortest possible time, and their demands were often excessive. This is not at all astonishing, at any rate as regards the gathering of the produce of the Domaine.... For the agents themselves who regulated the tax and saw to its collection, had a direct interest in increasing its amount, since they received proportional bonuses on the produce thus collected."

King Leopold appointed a new commission to recommend reforms to be undertaken. He ensured though that all but three members of the fourteen member commission had all been previously outspoken supporters of his rule in the Congo or directly involved in the businesses and atrocities committed there.

Included in the second edition of Mark Twain's booklet was an interview with Reverend John H. Harris printed in the English Review of Reviews in September 1905 entitled, "Ought King Leopold To Be Hanged?" Harris was an English missionary who'd lived for seven years in the Congo Free State. The article said, "Mr. Harris is a young man in a dangerous state of volcanic fury, and no wonder. After living for seven years face to face with the devastations of the vampire State, it is impossible to deny that he does well to be angry. When he began, as is the wont of those who have emerged from the depths, to detail horrifying stories of murder, the outrage and torture of women, the mutilation of children, and the whole infernal category of horrors, served up with the background of cannibalism, sometimes voluntary and sometimes, incredible though it seems, enforced by the orders of the officers..." The writer was so overwhelmed by the tidal wave of angry stories about atrocities that Harris was telling that he interrupted him saying that questions that atrocities had occurred was no longer in doubt by anyone.

"I want to know," I said, "whether you consider the time is ripe for summoning King Leopold before the bar of an international tribunal to answer for the crimes perpetrated under his orders and in his interest in the Congo State."

Mr. Harris paused for a moment, and then said:-- "That depends upon the action which the king takes upon the report of the Commission, which is now in his hands."

Reverend Harris praised the work of the commission of inquiry, although doubting the results of that inquiry would ever be published, "The Commission impressed us all in the Congo very favorably. Some of its members seemed to us admirable specimens of public-spirited, independent statesmen. They realized that they were acting in a judicial capacity; they knew that the eyes of Europe were upon them, and, instead of making their inquiry a farce, they made it a reality, and their conclusions must be, I feel sure, so damning to the State, that if King Leopold were to take no action but to allow the whole infernal business to proceed unchecked, any international tribunal which had powers of a criminal court, would upon the evidence of the Commission alone, send those responsible to the gallows."

Harris then remarked that the contents of the commission report had been shown to the senior official of the Congo Free State, Governor General Costermans, just before the commissioners left to report their findings in Belgium. The reporter then asked what result this had.

"In the case of the highest official in the Congo, the man who corresponds in Africa to Lord Curzon in India, no sooner was he placed in possession of the conclusions of the Commission than the appalling significance of their indictment convinced him that the game was up, and he went into his room and cut his throat. I was amazed on returning to Europe to find how little the significance of this suicide was appreciated. A paragraph in the newspaper announced the suicide of a Congo official. None of those who read that paragraph could realize the fact that that suicide had the same significance to the Congo that the suicide, let us say, of Lord Milner would have had if it had taken place immediately on receiving the conclusions of a Royal Commission sent out to report upon his administration in South Africa."

The writer then remarked that he hoped that if the report's contents were so appalling that they would cause the senior government official in the Congo Free State to commit suicide that, "I am almost beginning to hope that we may see King Leopold in the dock at the Hague, after all."

"I will comment upon that," Mr. Harris said, "by quoting you Mrs. Sheldon's remark made before myself and my colleagues, Messrs. Bond, Ellery, Ruskin, Walbaum and Whiteside, on May 19th last year, when, in answer to our question, 'Why should King Leopold be afraid of submitting his case to the Hague tribunal?' Mrs. Sheldon answered, 'Men do not go to the gallows and put their heads in a noose if they can avoid it.'"

In the end, King Leopold II was never tried for his crimes. The Belgian Government, sick of the international condemnation and bad publicity, decided to force the king to hand over control of the Congo Free State to them in 1908. The country was renamed as the Belgian Congo in the process. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his 1909 book, *The Crime of the Congo*, exposed the fact that abuses and slavery continued even under direct Belgian government control. The new Governor General Wahis, sent out to replace Governor General Costermans, the one that had committed suicide after hearing the result of the commission investigation, had previously held the position when documented atrocities were recorded. A 1901 telegram translated in the Casement Report had Wahis complaining about the quality of the rubber being produced and urging his agents to "make unceasing efforts to increase production." Based upon reports from missionaries and diplomats that Doyle quoted, the collection of rubber continued uninhibited by considerations of human rights even without King Leopold in charge.

King Leopold II died in 1909 and was remembered in Belgium as the "Builder King" for the lavish public buildings and works he'd built during his reign. The crimes in Congo by which he'd financed those works were quietly swept into the historical dustbin of memory and is only now

gaining some recognition in Belgium. His more lasting legacy was found in the Congo, which bloodily gained independence in 1960 and today exists as the tortured and unstable Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the BBC described in a 2004 story, King Leopold's legacy continued to have a horrifying impact:

"Legalized robbery enforced by violence", as Leopold's reign was described at the time, has remained, more or less, the template by which Congo's rulers have governed ever since.

Meanwhile Congo's soldiers have never moved away from the role allocated to them by Leopold - as a force to coerce, torment and rape an unarmed civilian population.

The effort to remove King Leopold from ruling over the Congo Free State led to the first mass international human rights movement, a part in which Samuel Clemens held a major role. "Meddlesome" people like Roger Casement and missionaries that Twain's version of King Leopold ranted about for investigating and exposing his crimes, the BBC said, had their modern successors in such organizations as "Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Kinshasa-based Voix des Sans Voix and Journaliste En Danger." These organizations and others were then and now documenting and publicizing the abuses and atrocities being committed in the modern Democratic Republic of the Congo and around the world. Organizations such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) also indirectly owe their existence to King Leopold II. Ironically, both organizations, dedicated to the protection of human rights against the power of states and individuals acting under state authority, are located in The Hague in Belgium. Samuel Clemens would have probably been amused by that.

<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furg/i21/cls.html>

http://www.kongo-kinshasa.de/dokumente/lekture/crime_of_congo.pdf

<https://ia801006.us.archive.org/14/items/CasementReport/CasementReportSmall.pdf>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3516965.stm>