

ACCESSION OF PRINCE LEOPOLD IN BELGIUM

(20 July 1831)

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It seems that, for the past year, God has taken delight in frustrating all the natural expectations of Europe concerning the events taking place in its midst. Starting with the seizing of Algiers, nothing happened as expected; by planting the French flag on the courageous land of the Moors, the very Christian king began a history that we could believe written by some Arabs who were awakened by the noise of our weapons under the sparkling ruins of their civilization, and sought to entertain the leisure of their tomb with revived fables from the Orient. They succeeded marvelously well. The French monarch who had disturbed their sleep inhabits an old castle in Scotland; he died one night with the speed of a dream, causing astonishment that glory had so little power. It was the glory of Saint Louis¹ leaving Africa once more carrying reliquaries of a royal race; but Saint Louis had not been victorious, and the remains of his family were taken to Saint Denis² under the banners of France by a son, heir to his throne and to his name. This time, the monarch was victor, a kingdom had just been terminated under his orders. And yet, he brought his grandson to a burial site other than that of his ancestors, with no one excited to see him passing, except for two kingdoms who cheered his demise as they fell with him. He, an old Christian king, was leaving for exile following a crusade, victim of the resentment against the Catholic faith which he had attempted to maintain, along with those other kings, companions in his misfortune, both expelled, one as a heretic, the other as a schismatic — all three for having hated freedom: a remarkable sight that time made even more marvelous!

One of the banished kings held two thrones: the one he had retained was awesome and, under the world's poles, caused shudders in Southern Europe. Twice it had destroyed Napoleon's streak of luck; it had just dictated laws in Constantinople and threatened to overtake jealous England, in the countries bathed by the great seas of Asia. The people who

had defied it by a revolt numbered only four million men bound together among three powers, enemies of its freedom. And for thirty years, its freedom, lost by the conquest, left it with none of the strength provided to an independent nation by a civil and military administration. In all of Europe, the prompt vengeance of the czar was foretold. Superb promulgations were addressed to the senate at Saint Petersburg; the Russian nobility fell at the knees of its master, holding in its hands the sword that had distinguished itself before the walls of Paris, of Yerevan³, and Andrinople.⁴ Great armies were assembled under the general who had won in the Balkans, and whose name resembled that of a victory; on the other side, scythes were the common weapon, traditional songs were sung, and since all the famous generals died for freedom, the Holy Virgin was entreated to help the arms of Poland; the name of God was placed on banners, lest the names of ancient battles show too much pride in a nation about to die. The soldiers, blessed by their priests, chanted and prayed, marched with a general who wore a scapular on his chest to face the enemy. This was eight months ago, and God had prepared a coffin: the victor of the Balkans sleeps next to the viceroy of Warsaw. Deep in his imperial palaces, in Saint Petersburg, assaulted by pestilence, the Czar, having seen one place between the two, sent to the Senate that received his magnificent decrees, a mysterious packet within which his death was mentioned.

And here is yet another spectacle.

The people who had expelled its heretical king today have a new king. They will receive him in the capital shortly, in a public square where thousands of men sacrificed their lives for national independence, for the freedom of their country and of their religion. Which prince will they crown, the ones and the others: those who died at the hands of those who survived, the ones with bloody crowns, the others by their cheers? Which one is he? He is a foreign prince and a heretic, the son of their choice, however; the son of a revolution that had as its primary cause the foreign name of Nassau with their religion hostile to the religion of their subjects. Wonderful events, like those I retold just a while ago, beginnings of an era where everything will be transformed, and that has already happened, prominent games, that, far from having emanated from the imagination of awakened Arabs under the glorious banner of the last king of France, actually come from wise advice that propels the world to the accomplishment of the eternal goals for which it was created.

Everything is serious here. The Frenchmen lodged at *La Cassauba* are the vanguard of Christianity toward the East. Already they are extending their hands to the Christian posts of Greece and of the Caucasus by calling the army which will rediscover, by the walls of Constantinople, a road known for its glory and its religion. The Catholic king, who in his old age, sent that vanguard to discover a future world and who now is dreaming, in the palace of Mary Stuart, about the causes of his stunning fall, is proof that something was missing for God during his reign: and what was that, if not freedom? The Czar, humiliated by war and by pestilence, conquered in his den of one thousand square leagues by a handful of Catholics, announced that the true faith is still invincible and that the schism will not be allowed to prevail against the Roman church. The heretical king thrown back into his marshes is a new sign of this; and that other heretical king who comes to occupy a place full of warnings of misfortune, foretells that the princes were not chosen to achieve the new destinies of nations. In the end, everything altogether, men and possessions, victors and vanquished, from the Atlas to the Neva, from Warsaw to Brussels, from throne to exile: everything attests that the world is suffering, that it has need to believe and to be free in order to restore its health, and that Providence has determined its recovery because It has made the nations of the earth capable of salvation. *Qui sanabiles fecit nationes terræ.*

It is with these thoughts that we will see enter Brussels the king that Belgium has given itself through the choice of its national congress. At a moment so weighty, we who love Belgium as a sister, born of the same father and of the same mother, namely of Christ and of freedom, we have a genuine need to express again the love we have for her and how much we have at heart that her destiny be peaceful and prosperous. When she expelled the oppressors given to her by a foreigner and who had forgotten that they had to obtain pardon for their origins, hoped, beyond their race, to impose their tongue, their teaching, their debts, and their religion, we applauded her liberation. When, one month later, she fought in Brussels for her revolution, that Antwerp set afire on the banks of both countries brightened the glory of one and the shame of the other, we were pleased that the fortune of arms had been so satisfying, tears mingled with our joy in the fields of Berchem [suburb of Antwerp - Trans.], because there is always some pain at the root of human experience. When Belgium decreed her constitution, and we saw her very young freedom way ahead of that of France, we Catholics, we were proud to have been the first after having been the last. Soon, the rainbow which was rising for us in the storm raging in the heart of Belgium, after reaching its glorious curve at the walls of Praga, we could see that it would pass below the clouds, between two liberated altars, a great mercy from the Lord. Victorious and free

Belgium had need of a head. Formerly, ten knights would have come from the four corners of Europe, to offer their weapons and their strength to any country that lacked a royal name, without asking permission from a pack of jealous kings, and if, after the battle, they were asked where they were from, they would have answered like the last member of the Guise family in Naples: “*I was born in the faluca [Arabic: flat-bottom boat - Trans.] that brought me here.*” Things are not like that in our times. Belgium offered her crown to a young French prince; the offer was rejected, lest France be suspected of still loving glory. And so we complained about a nation misled by false negotiations covered with a veil of friendship; we hoped that it would not go from one court to another to seek on restful sofas some king kind enough to stand up before a crown. Moreover, since kings themselves degraded the scepter to the point of not wanting to take it in the form of a sword, proud Belgium left it in the chests of Holland and demanded from her ancient traditions a sign of authority at once more simple and more impressive. Such has been our language up to the last day. But Belgium has completed her choice, she found a king who really wanted her, provided she be smaller than what her revolution had expected almost a year ago. As she sits by the limits she had set for herself near a furrow filled with her blood and sweat, it is not for us to blame with grief the limits of her independence won with courage and a heroic patience against five kings united for peace — so they said — as they said on this day which will no longer be tomorrow and which has posterity behind it.

Although the king of Belgium is Protestant, after the lesson given to King William, it is probable that he will respect the Catholic religion, freedom of instruction and of association which are part of it and that he will vow to uphold them before the Belgians grant him the oath of fidelity. Blessed are the people who find on the paternal land the defender of their rights, a prince whose birth was the first promise to the nation! But there are no longer any shepherds of men. In this life that we live, without a common faith, lacking posterity, bloody remnants of a society devoid of life, uncertain ancestors of a society as yet unknown, it is better for us to give hospitality to kings than to receive hospitality from them. If Prince Leopold is an ingrate, Belgium will remember that he is a foreigner. We hope that it will never remember it, that she live in peace and in freedom, under the protection of God Whose cause she has honored by her weapons and deliberations, by her faith, by her love of order which was stronger than the intrigues of all the factions, finally by this mission that she received from Heaven: to raise up the first *labarum* [standard - Trans.]. This standard will lead better and farther than that of Constantine up to the centuries for which we are the adventurous scouts. We hope that

Belgium becomes a display that will encourage Catholics to win their deliverance, and that she be a reproach to all those oppressors who, in the presence of so many countries wherein liberty flourishes in the shadow of the faith, continue to slander the children of Christ. We hope that Belgium becomes happy, and if it was true that at the other end of Europe, a nation — whose glory alone has the right to say its name — was able to benefit from the peace being prepared in Brussels, we would believe our wishes fulfilled. The sacrifices of the Belgians, paid for by the protection given to Poland, would be suitable reparation for the living and for those who died for independence. If the crown of their country is less important than it ought to be in the West, the blood of the Poles would weigh less on the other side; the blood that has been spared will one day be found in the destinies of the world. Nothing is ever lost; the liberators of the human race have occasionally arisen from a single drop of blood, forgotten by inadvertence or by contempt. Belgium is worthy of redeeming Poland; if she saves only one of its sons, it will be Sobieski.⁵ Great men are born in the eternal treasures of the virtues long accumulated, until finally, God gives them a soul and sends them to nations as a representation of themselves. Let this be said of the brave, the patient, the loyal Belgium. As regards us, Catholics of France, let us follow the designs of God; let us not be astonished by anything, fear nothing, because nothing will happen the way we think it will. The dreams and reflections of man count for nothing in the centuries of wonders. This century is indeed a marvel after the consuls opened it in embroidered regalia on the remains of the republic, all the way to you who are reading me.

ENDNOTES [Trans.]

1. Saint Louis: Louis IX, King of France from 1214 to 1270. Participant in the 7th and 8th crusades.
2. Saint Denis: Basilica, north of Paris; site of royal burials.
3. Yerevan, capital of Armenia; famous battle in 1827.
4. Adrinople [Edirne, in Turkey]; locale of historical battle.
5. Sobieski: King John III of Poland (1629-1696); reigned from 1672 to 1696.

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