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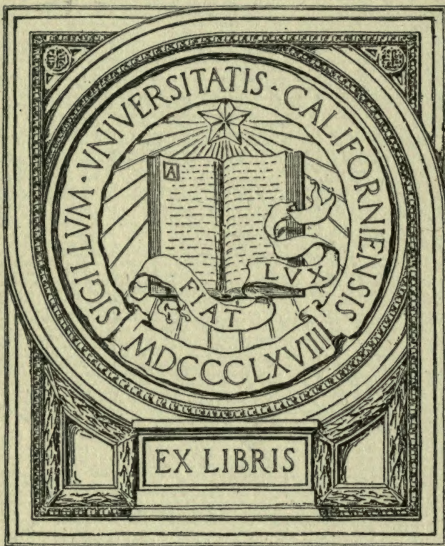
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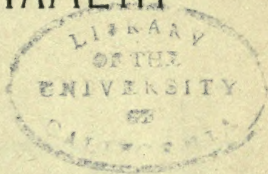
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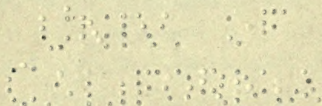
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AUGUST THE FOURTH, 1914  
IN THE  
BELGIAN PARLIAMENT



BY  
COUNT LOUIS DE LICHTERVELDE

*Translated from the French*

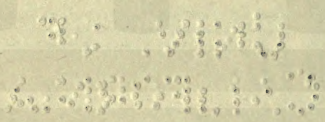


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## AUGUST THE FOURTH, 1914, IN THE BELGIAN PARLIAMENT

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### I.

SINCE those unforgettable manifestations of August 4th, 1914, at the Palais Bourbon, and at Westminster, which showed how whole-heartedly the representatives of the French people and the British nation rose with one accord against the common enemy, enthusiastic scenes in their respective Parliaments have borne witness to the steadfastness of the Allies in their struggle against Germany. Scenes of the same kind have taken place in the Parliaments of Rome and of Washington. The generous ardour of the first days still endures, in spite of the prolonged ordeal and the strenuous effort that have followed it. Such manifestations are repeated whenever responsible ministers affirm before their countrymen the immutable will to conquer which inspires our action in arms. The Belgian Parliament alone is silent. The Palais de la Nation at Brussels has become the seat of German administration, and the walls of the Senate House, where Jacques de Lalaing's panels evoke our age-long struggle for liberty, witnessed the procedure of that blood-stained tribunal which sent the architect Baucq

and Miss Cavell to their death. The voices of Belgian statesmen have been heard only in exile on rare occasions.

But the actions of the army and the heroic resistance of the populations which lie under the yoke of the enemy are more eloquent than the noblest speeches. They bear daily witness to the truth that there has been no change in the soul of Belgium, and that throughout her three years of suffering the hearts of her children have remained as lofty as they were on the first day of the war. The Belgian Parliament met on the morning of August 4th, 1914; it was sitting at the very hour when the German army crossed the frontier and began its savage onslaught upon Liège. The scenes then enacted in the Legislature were of such pathetic grandeur in their simplicity that their influence is still felt alike in the captive and in the exiled nation. The silence which has succeeded them has made their effect all the deeper and more durable, and we seem to hear some echo of them as we listen to the heart-beats of martyred but unconquerable Belgium. They may be likened to a hymn of triumph, the last chords of which will not die away.

■ We are, therefore, eager to fix those historic memories before their details have been blurred by the mists of years surcharged with events and emotions. On August 4th, 1914, the whole nation spoke by the mouth of its King, its Government, and its Representatives. It proclaimed its martial ardour, its will to live in freedom, its determination to sacrifice everything to duty. If we do well to forget all that might cause division among Belgians, to efface the memory of the political struggles which raged in the social

laboratory represented by the industrious little kingdom, we shall also do well to insist on the magnificent proofs of the spirit of concord and patriotism which governed its effort from the beginning of the war.

## II.

**W**HEN the mobilisation of the army took place on July 31st, 1914, the Government had resolved to convene Parliament in order to obtain the necessary votes of credit and to pass certain measures bearing on the situation. The opening of the session was fixed for August 6th by a royal order of August 1st. But when the German ultimatum was received, it was recognised that this date was too distant. During the deliberations of the Council of Ministers held in the royal Palace on the night of August 2nd-3rd, to draw up the reply to the Emperor's demand, the date of the meeting of Parliament was brought forward to August 4th. The King announced that he would go to the Palais de la Nation to make the Speech from the Throne.

On the morning of the 3rd, the deputies were summoned by telegram to meet the following day at 10 a.m. The interval was spent in feverish preparations. Invasion of Belgian territory was hourly expected; the King had made a supreme appeal for the diplomatic intervention of England. In the country, where mobilisation was in full swing, the news of the ultimatum spread from place to place, evoking indignant consternation on every hand. All con-

sciences were stirred by a blast of revolt. The Government accelerated measures of defence; it hurried forward the drafting of urgent bills designed to ensure public order, to avoid financial panic, and to facilitate the food supply of the country, which was at once beset with difficulties. Young men flocked to the colours. From hour to hour news from abroad showed ever more plainly that the die was cast.

There were, nevertheless, a few persons in diplomatic circles who continued to hope against hope that Germany would recoil before the consummation of the crime. The awakening of England and the firmness of the Belgian reply seemed to these optimists, unfamiliar with German mentality, factors which might bring about a change of front at Berlin. As the day wore on, they noted joyfully that no act of aggression had followed upon the receipt of the Belgian note. But the military element cherished no illusions. After consulting the Minister of War by telephone, General Lemane ordered the destruction of the railways and bridges, the use of which Germany had already demanded, and the demolition of numerous buildings in the neighbourhood of Liège which would have obstructed the fire from the forts. In the evening the deputies poured into Brussels from every corner of Belgium, bearing with them an echo of the unanimous determination of the country to defend itself to the end.

On Tuesday, August 4th, the approaches to the Palais de la Nation presented a scene of unwonted animation by nine o'clock in the morning. An immense crowd had gathered round the Park, the heart of governmental Brussels, and had overflowed into the Rue Royale, the



Rue de la Loi, and the Rue Ducale, the route to be followed by the royal procession in accordance with traditional custom. The deputies arrived in groups, discussing the news of the night. A crowd of eager spectators followed them in the hope of obtaining a card of admission. The door giving access to the public galleries had been besieged the evening before by citizens eager to behold the historic scene which was about to take place. The door-keeper, touched by their ardour, had agreed to bring them food in the course of the night.

The floor of the house was very soon crowded. There had been no time to carry out the scheme of decoration customary on great occasions. The red velvet throne, which used to take the place of the presidential desk when the sovereign opened the session in person, had not been erected. It had only been possible to adorn the desk with a few trophies in which the Belgian and Congolese colours were grouped, and with a shield bearing the Royal arms. The gilded armchair of the throne, on the back of which the national device is embroidered, was substituted for the leather chair of the President of the Assembly on the platform. Above the desk rose the white statue of Leopold I., by Geefs, the date of the inauguration of the founder of the dynasty, July 21st, 1831, gleaming on the pedestal. Other inscriptions on the panels at the back of the Chamber record the most memorable debates of 1830. The eye dwelt instinctively on these memories of the first days of independence, and those present felt dimly that posterity would recognise August 4th, 1914, as yet another date to hold in remembrance.

The semicircle was soon filled with deputies and

senators ; the latter occupied the whole of the left side of the Assembly. In front of the benches a long table was reserved for the Bureau, presided over by the senior member of the two Chambers, M. Frédéric Delvaux, member for Antwerp, aged eighty. He was a genial old man with white hair, alert and vigorous. In the absence of M. Mullendorf, the Burgomaster of Verviers, who had been unable to leave his town owing to the gravity of the situation, the honour of presiding at the session was his by right. He was supported by the two youngest members of the Assembly, M. Pécher, his grandson, one of the members for Antwerp, and M. Devèze, member for Brussels. All three belonged to the Liberal Left. The Registrar of the Chamber and the Registrar of the Senate helped them to carry out the prescribed formalities.

The Chamber had been partially reconstituted during the month of May, and this was its first meeting since the elections. The country had been enjoying the happy calm which generally follows the feverish activity of the electoral campaign. The holidays had begun early, the political world was scattered, at the seaside and in the mountains. The predominant interests of the last few months had been remote indeed from the harsh realities which had brought about the special convocation of that day.

During the electoral campaign there had been a certain recrudescence of anti-militarism. In Limburg more especially the opposition had strenuously resisted the taxation designed to meet military expenses, and had won victories which caused great anxiety to the propagandists of the majority in this agricultural

district, whose inhabitants cared nothing for international politics. On the Right there were obvious signs of dissatisfaction with the Government. In 1913, M. de Broqueville had succeeded in carrying his programme of army re-organisation, to be completed in five years. But it was felt in political circles that he had put a very severe strain upon his friends. Certain deputies regretted having followed him, and cherished a hope of checking the costly intensity of our military effort by extending the proposed credits over a period of ten years. Committees were formed, pressure was brought to bear upon Ministers, attempts were made to influence the President of the Council.

The crime of Sarajevo had not checked these dangerous activities. The dismissal of the 1913 class, the only one entirely with the colours, was demanded. The Minister for War yielded partially to the demand on July 22nd. He had only made up his mind to this because a recent experiment had given him absolute confidence in the perfection of the mechanism which would enable him to call up the Reserve in twenty-four hours. Certain groups were counting upon forcing further concessions from him, notably in connection with the Artillery and the Cavalry, when pacifist illusions were suddenly shattered on July 24th by the news of the ultimatum addressed by Austria to Serbia.

On August 4th, this Parliament, elected in view of the contingencies we have indicated, had to face a situation of tragic intensity: the Franco-German War had broken out; Germany had demanded passage through Belgian territory; the Government had refused it. There was a rumour that a declaration of war had just arrived in

Brussels and that the enemy was already invading the Kingdom.

The deputies from the east brought no very precise news. The majority of them had arrived in the capital the evening before, and those who had just reached Brussels had heard only vague and contradictory reports. True, they had seen on every hand omens of approaching war. The demolitions ordered by the Governor of Liége had given them a pale forecast of the horrors that threatened the country, and the requisitions which had been carried on for several days had made them realise the rigour of military exigency. It now seemed a curious irony of fate that on August 2nd the Minister for War had been solicited to moderate the zeal with which General Leman was organising the defence of his fortress, and causing the cattle on the frontier to be driven in towards Liége !

An anxious murmur, made up of questions, answers, and confidences, filled the Chamber. The ministerial bench was empty. A Council had been convened at the Palace for nine o'clock, and the Members of the Government were not to arrive at the House till a short time before the entry of the royal party. Animated groups of senators, deputies and journalists were discussing the situation; news from London and Paris passed from mouth to mouth; Parliamentarians gave each other details of the mobilisation, the movements of the troops, the state of mind of the population. They bore witness to the unity and spontaneity of national sentiment on all points of the territory and to the harmony which reigned on the eve of debate among the members of the Assembly.

The feverish atmosphere of the capital affected even the calmest. Here and there a uniform caught the eye. Members pointed out the Duc d'Ursel among the senators, wearing the coarse tunic of a trooper in the Guides. He had enlisted the evening before in spite of his forty years. With his hair clipped close and his regulation riding breeches, there was nothing to distinguish the great patriotic noble from any modest recruit who had hastened to the colours within the last twenty-four hours. M. Hubin, the Socialist deputy of Huy, wore the uniform of a non-commissioned infantry officer who had been called up in the mobilisation. Other enlistments were announced.

At half-past nine the sound of a bell had interrupted the buzz of conversation for a moment. The President of the Assembly was about to initiate the choice by lot of the members, who, in accordance with the protocol, were to receive the King and Queen at the entrance of the Palais de la Nation. Four members went to meet the Queen : Messrs. Delbeke, Vergauwen, Behaghel and de Kerchove d'Exaerde, and twelve to meet the King : Messrs. Nobels, d'Hondt, Gillès de Pelichy, Van Cleemputte, de Wouters d'Oplinter, Boël, Féron, Borginon, Maenhaut, de Meester, Ortegat and Dejardin. The Ministers, then arrived, bearing on their faces visible signs of the anxious deliberations of the last few hours. Groups gathered round them immediately. Many of the deputies went into the Reading Room to see the arrival of the royal procession, which had just started from the Palace.

A wave of sound was, in fact, coming from the town through the open windows and penetrating the Chamber

itself—a sound distant and confused at first, and then more precise. It rolled on slowly and swelled triumphantly. Listeners caught it rising around the great elms of the Park, in the brilliant sunshine of that tragic morning. It was the great voice of the people acclaiming the King, acclaiming the Queen and their children. The blare of brass, bugles, and trumpets shrilling the call to arms, and bands playing the National Anthem mingled with the formidable clamour which drew nearer to the Parliament House, and presently enveloped it as in an intoxicating cloud. Hearts beat faster. The procession had arrived at the Rue de la Loi, it was halting at the Place de la Nation. The roar swelled steadily. Passionate cries rang out from the street, from balconies, windows and roofs. The Civic Guards who were lining the route joined in the manifestation. The Queen stepped from her coach, drawn by six horses with postillions, and entered the Palace together with the Duke of Brabant, the Count of Flanders and the little Princess Marie José. The King followed on horseback, escorted by a cavalry squadron of the Civic Guard, and accompanied by the officers of his staff.

“Gentlemen, the Queen!” a voice announces. Everyone is standing in the semicircle, in the galleries. All eyes are turned towards the door on the left, which gives access to the gallery reserved for the Royal family. The delicate profile of Elisabeth, Duchess of Bavaria, third Queen of the Belgians, suddenly appears. She is dressed in a dark blue gown and wears a hat with white feathers; she looks as if she were in mourning, as, indeed, she will not cease to be throughout the sorrowful days that lie before her. She receives the greeting of

the Assembly with a shy grace. She is moved to the depths of her soul, as much by the popular ovation as by the cruel antithesis of which she is the living incarnation. The thunder of applause which greets her husband is heard without. . . . There are a few moments of silence, when everyone seems intent on fixing in his memory the image of that woman and her fair-haired children, and then a huge ovation bursts forth in the House itself. "Long live the Queen! Long live Belgium!" Ministers, senators, deputies, journalists and spectators unite to give, after the example of the people of Brussels, a thrilling testimony of loyalty and affection to the august and fragile creature so cruelly stricken by German perfidy.

While this touching scene was enacted Albert I. arrived in his turn at the peristyle of the Palais de la Nation and dismounted. The Parliamentary delegates, catching the popular enthusiasm, mingled their acclamations with those of the immense crowd; stretching out their arms, the deputies seemed to be inviting the chief for whom they had been waiting to take his place among them. General de Coune, the aged Commandant of the Civic Guard, rising in his stirrups, led the cheers with youthful enthusiasm. The King received the salutation of the delegates with a few words, and entered the Palace, while his escort took up its position in the square.

A crowd of spectators had made their way into the passages. Preceded by a procession of ushers, Albert I. mounted the grand staircase, on the steps of which guards presented arms. The acclamations broke out anew, and plumed hats were seen waving on the bayonets of the citizen-soldiers. Five years before, in December,

1909, the young King, amidst the cheers which greeted his "Joyous Entry" into Brussels, had come by this same route to take his constitutional oath in the Chambers. That day he solemnly swore "to maintain the national independence and the integrity of the territory." Now, before setting out at the head of his army to brave the first military power in the world, he had come again to affirm before those who had received his oath his steadfast determination to fulfil his arduous duty. Did the memory of that brilliant day rise before him as he advanced towards the Chamber? Had he some prescience of all that his people would have to suffer for listening to the voice of honour? Who shall say? But a spectator saw a tear gleam in his serious eyes, a tear which was furtively brushed away. He controlled his emotion, and passed on.

His approach had been heard within the Chamber. As soon as his tall figure appeared in the entrance the two thousand persons assembled in the vast hall greeted him with an enthusiastic ovation. He looked at the deputies, and then, solemnly, with complete mastery of his attitude and his gestures, and a majesty new to him, he walked to the Bureau, bowed, and received the homage of the Nation to its King. A new fire blazed in his usually timid eyes. A slight contraction of his features alone bore witness to the intensity of the feelings which were agitating his soul. In his sober field uniform of a Lieutenant-General, relieved by gold shoulder knots and the embroideries on the straight collar, the King, tall and fair, with curling hair, stood erect, a figure of proud and manly beauty, revealing himself as the chief who had come to seal the union of the country in the face of the



enemy. For several long minutes the triumphal ovation rolled from semicircle to galleries while the officers of the Staff, in field uniform like their sovereign, grouped themselves at the base of the platform.

In the general enthusiasm there were no shades indicating the former divisions of parties. The Socialist group, far from holding aloof, as on the occasion of the inauguration or the Speech from the Throne in 1910, joined heartily in the manifestation, a veritable outburst of the latent vitality of this divided country. Among the deputies who waved their handkerchiefs and mingled cries of "Long live the King" with cries of "Long live Belgium!"—the land of which this young soldier seemed the incarnation—many, especially among those whose rugged features proclaimed their plebeian origin, shed tears, yielding to an emotion they could no longer control.

### III.

**T**HEN the King spoke.

His speech had been prepared on the preceding evening, and had been submitted to the Council of Ministers that very morning. Reading it over to-day, we recognise that the text was no longer in complete accord with the actual situation, seeing that, some hours earlier, the German Minister had informed M. Davignon of the Empire's resolve to carry out, if necessary by force, what he dared to call "the measures considered indis-

pensable in view of the threat of a French advance." The Speech from the Throne still held out a faint hope of a peaceful solution. The ultra-prudence of Belgian diplomacy desired to delay the utterance of irrevocable words, fearing to let slip the slightest chance of preserving peace. But with regard to the firmness of Belgium's attitude, her determination to do her duty unflinchingly, and the real bearing of the question at issue, the King's speech was so precise, so categorical, so courageously clear-sighted, that this slight dissonance does not disturb the general harmony. On the contrary, it adds to the dramatic character of that memorable session.

Albert I. began in a low tone ; his slow delivery and clear articulation made him audible from end to end of the great assembly which was hanging on his words.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is the most momentous hour in the history of Belgium since 1830 : the integrity of our territory is threatened. The inherent strength of our right, the sympathy of other nations with Belgium, justly proud of her free institutions and her moral victories, the necessity of our autonomy as the guarantee of the equilibrium of Europe, still allow us to hope that the events we dread may not take place."

The King laid the question clearly before the country and the world. He stripped the German threat bare of the tortuous phraseology which obscured its meaning, and showed that it was the very existence of our country which was imperilled by Germany.

"But should our hopes be disappointed," he continued, slowly, "should we be forced to resist the invasion of our soil and to defend our threatened homes, our duty, hard though it be"—and here he

emphasised the deep meaning of the phrase by a sober gesture—" will find us armed and prepared to make the greatest sacrifices."

The Assembly greeted this first declaration with loud applause. Hearts beat faster. The King continued :

" Even now, in readiness for every eventuality, our valiant young men are coming forward, firmly resolved to defend their threatened Fatherland with all the traditional coolness and tenacity of the Belgians.

" I offer them fraternal greeting in the name of the Nation."

Then his voice rose in sterner and stronger tones :

" Everywhere, in Flanders and in Wallonia, in the towns and in the country, hearts are swelling with the same patriotic feeling. Every mind is fixed on a single vision, that of our imperilled independence. A single duty is laid upon our wills : stubborn resistance."

Those who heard the concluding words understood how a watchword should be given to a nation. Stubborn resistance ! The Assembly, completely carried away, seemed to drink in these manly words, which so perfectly expressed public sentiment. They flew from the House to the capital and throughout the kingdom, and have remained the governing formula in every action.

But the King went on :

" In these grave circumstances two virtues are indispensable : courage, calm but resolute, and the close union of all Belgians. Both have already manifested themselves brilliantly in the sight of an enthusiastic nation. The faultless mobilisation of our Army, the multiplicity of voluntary enlistments, the devotion of

the civil population, the self-sacrifice of families, have shown us in unquestionable fashion the sustaining valour which animates the entire Belgian people.

“ The moment for action has now come.

“ I have summoned you, gentlemen, to enable the Legislature to associate itself with the ardour of the people in a like spirit of self-sacrifice.

“ I rely upon you, gentlemen, to take at once such measures as the situation demands both for the prosecution of the war and the maintenance of public order.”

The atmosphere became more and more electrical; there was such perfect unanimity, such intimate agreement between the Government and the representatives of the country, the attitude of the chief was so dignified, so noble, in a word, so kingly, that the emotion of the great hours of history laid hold of all the spectators of this scene. The King then looked round the Chamber and seemed to be addressing each member present.

“ When I see this deeply stirred assembly, in which there is now but one party, that of the Fatherland ” (enthusiastic applause and cries of “ Long live Belgium ! ”) “ where all hearts beat in unison, my thoughts go back to the Congress of 1830, and I ask you, gentlemen ”—here his voice became yet graver; Albert I., standing beneath the statue of his grandfather, seemed to draw himself up to interrogate the Nation, emphasizing each word with a stern gesture—“ Are you unalterably determined to preserve intact the sacred patrimony of our ancestors ? ”

A storm of assent broke forth in reply to this question. The spectators in the galleries added their voices to those of the deputies to affirm that the resolution taken

should be kept unflinching, and that nothing should weaken the patriotism of the country.

The King seemed to collect himself, and to register this oath. He looked long at the agitated Assembly, where all faces were contracted by a common ardour of will. When the tumult had subsided he continued :

“ No one in this country will fail to do his duty.

“ The Army, strong and well disciplined, is equal to its task ; my Government and I have perfect confidence in its leaders and its soldiers.

“ The Government, closely attached to the people, and supported by them, is fully alive to its responsibilities, and will accept them to the end in the considered conviction that the efforts of all, uniting in the most fervent and generous patriotism, will safeguard the supreme good of the country.”

He added in conclusion :

“ If the foreigner, disregarding that neutrality the claims of which we have always scrupulously observed, should violate our territory, he will find all Belgians gathered round their sovereign, who will not fail ”—here the King emphasised his words in a manner unnoticed in the official report, stamping his foot and repeating : “ who will never fail to keep his constitutional oath, and round a Government invested with the absolute confidence of the entire Nation.”

The ovation became delirious.

“ I have faith in our destiny. A country which defends itself gains the respect of all ; that country will never die.

“ God will be with us in our just cause.

“ Long live independent Belgium ! ”

The majority of those present were in tears. In the diplomatists' gallery, where spectators noted the presence of M. Klobukowski, the French Minister; Sir Francis Villiers, the English Minister; and Prince Koudacheff, the Russian Minister, there was no less emotion than elsewhere, and more than one representative of our present allies could not control his feelings. In the hall and in the galleries hoarse cries broke out from contracted throats. The King, pale, but calm and resolute, contemplated this unprecedented manifestation for a moment, then folded the sheets of his speech hurriedly, slipped them into his tunic, descended the steps of the platform, and, followed by Count Jean de Mérode, Grand Marshal of the Court, and General Yungbluth, Adjutant-General, he left the House as if about to take his place in the field.

The ovation still continued in the Parliament when the applause outside announced his appearance in the Square. He mounted his horse. A band struck up *La Brabançonne*; I still hear the notes mingling with the clamour of the street whence rose the same roar which had greeted the King's arrival.

The historian most to be relied upon, most capable of describing the incidents and conveying the impressions of these unique moments, the grandeur of which surpasses anything in our annals, would be a painter or a poet, for they alone can soar to certain heights. "We saw a King," writes M. Dumont-Wilden, "in all the radiant splendour of those who hold high the sword, and his voice vibrated like a lyre quivering in the wind."

Yes, it is in words like these that such things should be recorded.

## IV.

CONTRARY to custom, the Chamber and the Senate did not at once part company. Baron de Broqueville, mounting the rostrum, asked leave to make a communication from the Government to the united Chambers. It was important to save time and simplify procedure as much as possible. After a few preliminary words, the Minister for War began to read aloud the ultimatum that had been received at 7 o'clock on Sunday evening. He was anxious to lay the situation, in all its gravity, before the Government: three documents of but a few lines each would serve his purpose. When these had been communicated to the representatives of the country they would have nothing further to learn, and would be able to pronounce upon the terrible dilemma submitted to their judgment with a clear knowledge of the issue.

The Assembly listened in impressive silence to the terms of the German ultimatum. The Minister emphasised the threatening words of the conclusion, more especially the sinister reference to "decision by force of arms," which summed up its philosophy. Then he added, in the simplest manner, as if dealing with the most natural thing possible:

"His Excellency the German Minister when he handed this note to us on Sunday evening at 7 o'clock demanded a reply within twelve hours. We at once invited all the Ministers of State, without any distinction on the score of political opinions, to associate themselves with the Government in order to deliberate in absolute

conformity of sentiment with the nation as a whole. I am in a position to declare that it was with the unanimous approval of all the members present at this meeting that common decisions were made in the common interest of the Fatherland."

This declaration, the only official account of what took place at the nocturnal Council held at the Palace on August 2nd, was greeted with expressions of assent and approval.

Baron de Broqueville then passed on to the second document, the Belgian reply to the ultimatum. In accordance with diplomatic usage, it begins with a careful *résumé* of the document to which it replied. The attention of the Assembly was marked by a concentrated intensity. The Chamber applauded the passage which stated that Belgium would have defended her neutrality against France if that Power had given effect to the intentions attributed to her by Germany; it expressed lively approval of the scathing sentence which referred to the fact that the independence and neutrality of Belgium "had been guaranteed by the Powers, and in particular by the Government of H.M. the King of Prussia." This proud and measured language was in perfect harmony with the national temperament. A long ovation greeted the final sentence which contained the definitive answer, couched in the most impeccable diplomatic terms: "The Belgian Government is determined to resist any attack upon its rights by every means at its disposal." Rising to their feet, the members acclaimed the head of the Government with a sense of pride and confidence.

Baron de Broqueville paused for a moment, and



then read the third and last document. This was the letter containing the declaration of war, handed to M. Davignon at 6 o'clock that morning by Herr von Below-Saleske. The Imperial Government, said the German Minister, "would, to its extreme regret, be obliged to carry out, if necessary by force of arms, the measures considered indispensable in view of the threat of a French advance."

Falsehood continued to mingle with brutality! In that Chamber where the most puerile assertions of pacifism and the absurd arguments of a narrow-minded anti-militarism had so often been heard, what echoes must have been awakened by this short letter of the heirs of Bismarck! What a refutation it offered to those who had allowed themselves to be ensnared by the barren conflicts of party! It meant war then, war that very day!

Baron de Broqueville continued, his voice vibrating with suppressed indignation:—

"Gentlemen, this answer needs no commentary, for any commentary would but weaken what has happened to-day. The moment has come when arms must speak, but by means of arms we will do our duty frankly and vigorously."

A murmur of anger, the anger of honest men, rose from the Assembly. Cries of "Long live Belgium!" broke out again. The Minister himself was carried away by them.

"As His Majesty has just declared," he said, "a people which is true to itself may be conquered, but it cannot be subdued."

Baron de Broqueville went on to draw a necessary picture of sinister possibilities ; his words were distasteful to some enthusiasts, but history must not fail to attest that the Belgian answer to the German ultimatum was not the outcome of brains bemused by a facile optimism.

“ And I,” he added in a superb passage of reasoned eloquence, the only sentence of the kind in his speech, “ I declare in the name of the whole Nation, a nation of one heart and one soul, that this people, even if it be conquered, will never be subdued.”

A violent blow on the rostrum emphasised this peroration, which events were unhappily to justify all too soon. The Assembly greeted it with prolonged acclamations.

M. Carton de Wiart, rising from the Ministerial bench, exclaimed : “ Union is strength.” The words seemed to explain in a moment the underlying reasons of sacred unity.

The aged “ Father of the House ” then rose :— “ Gentlemen,” he said, “ in the name of the national representatives, it is our duty to register the solemn declarations His Excellency has just made in the name of the Government. Our only reply is that our hearts are with him and that we rest all our hopes on him. We say to him :—‘ Long live Belgium ! ’ We know that the energy of the Belgians will never suffer her to perish.”

The Liberal Member for Antwerp truly expressed the confidence of the whole country in this touching apostrophe to the Catholic Minister who had foreseen the danger, and whose misfortune had been that he

had come too late. The Senators retired to their own Chamber in the midst of the general enthusiasm. The session of the united Assemblies had lasted barely half an hour.

## V.

THE Chamber hereupon opened its regular session. Time pressed. On the motion of the senior deputy, whose duty it was to preside until the constitution of the new Bureau, it decided to confirm the powers of the newly elected members collectively, and to re-elect the former Bureau of the Assembly by acclamation. M. Schollaert accordingly took the chair again, and gave the accolade to the venerable M. Delvaux. Both are dead ; the first died in exile, the second under the enemy occupation, relinquishing the hope of witnessing the solemn return of Parliament to their liberated country. It would have been such joy to see the same faces presiding over the meeting of the past and that of the future. But the ordeal was too long for those hoary heads.

M. Schollaert thanked his colleagues in the firm voice and the tone of conviction which gave true eloquence—an eloquence made up of sincerity and emotion—to his speeches. He saluted the Army and the Nation :—“ Ah ! the gallant people ! ” he exclaimed. “ How proud one feels to be a Belgian ! ” He recalled the memorable Sunday night when he had been summoned to the Palace. “ In the evening the threat was hurled at us. In the night, under the

guidance of our King, virile resolutions were passed to ensure respect for our international obligations. At break of day our valiant troops hastened to the defence of our frontiers, and ever since our young men have been flocking in thousands to swell our battalions."

But it was now time to despatch legislative work. The Chamber voted a war-credit of 200,000,000 francs without debate. But bad news was circulating. Deputies coming in late confirmed the rumours that had been heard since the morning. Suddenly Baron de Broqueville, to whom a paper had just been handed, rose to speak, and, with an emotion he could scarcely control, announced:—"Gentlemen, it is my painful duty to inform the Chamber that our territory has been violated." *Prolonged sensation*, says the stenographer's report. There was indeed a moment of indescribable anguish in the Assembly. The physical image of the invader entering the country by the sunlit roads of the beautiful Liégeois district was impressed on all imaginations.

The news was not unexpected by the Government. At 4.45 a.m., two German officers, one of whom was carrying a white flag, had appeared at the frontier post of Moresnet and had asked to be put into telephonic communication with the military Governor of Liège.

"I am Major de Mélotte, the military attaché at Berlin," said one of them, as soon as an officer of General Leman's Staff had come to the instrument. "I am to proceed to the Belgian General Headquarters. Where am I to go?" But the Belgian officer knew Major de Mélotte's voice, and was too quick-witted to fall into this clumsy snare. He answered:—"Major de Mélotte

knows where the Belgian Headquarters are. You are not Major de Mélotte." "No, but he is with us." "Put me through to him, please." Another voice was heard speaking with a strong German accent.

As the ruse was unsuccessful, the German continued: "We are envoys, and it is absolutely essential that we should have an interview with General Leman." The Belgian officer replied that all the roads were obstructed, and that it would be necessary to make a *detour* of 200 kilometres to get to Liége. They persisted. It was decided that they should be allowed to pass near Gouvy, and that they should be escorted by the police. The conversation ended with this sentence pronounced by the German officer:—"Lost hours can never be recovered." He repeated it several times, little thinking, said one who was present at the scene, how true it would prove, not for the Belgians, but for the German army.

These envoys, after crossing the frontier at Gouvy, abandoned an enterprise they no doubt considered too perilous.

As early as six o'clock that morning semi-official communications had notified hostile raids at various points on the frontier. About eight o'clock the German army committed its crime more or less officially at Gemmenich, in Limburg, and distributed the proclamation of General von Emmich, the Commander of the Army of the Meuse in Belgian territory

The first of the invading troops were the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions. The Germans entered Belgium successively by the roads from Aix-la-Chapelle to Visé, from Aix to Liége via Herve, from Eupen to Dolhain, from Aix to Verviers, from the camp of Elsenborn

to the hutments of Michel, from Malmédy to Hockay, and from Malmédy to Franchorchamps. At eleven o'clock they were at Warsage, by noon at Battice, by one o'clock at Verviers. At one o'clock, moreover, the first fighting took place on the Meuse, at Visé, for this important strategic line is only a few paces from the German frontier. About five o'clock Fort Fléron came into action. In the evening the greater part of Von Emmich's army established itself on the line Bombaye-Herve-Remouchamps. Incendiary fires and fusillades at Soiron, at Fourn-le-Comte, at Berneau, at Moulant, at Warsage and at Battice immediately bore witness to the ferocious character of the invasion.

M. de Broqueville would not let pass this painful moment, when the need to co-ordinate all efforts for the salvation of the country was so obvious, without the performance of a political action of lofty and far-reaching significance. On the 2nd of August M. Paul Hymans and Count Goblet d'Alviella, leaders of the Liberal Party in the Chamber and the Senate respectively, were appointed Ministers of State by Royal decree. This honorary title places those who bear it among the advisers of the Crown without investing them with ministerial responsibility.

As Parliament had manifested unanimous confidence in the Government, the President of the Council considered that the hour had come when the same distinction should be conferred on the leader of the Socialist party, M. Emile Vandervelde. The King was very anxious to rally round him the responsible representatives of the various political groups. Baron de Broqueville sounded the deputy during the session,

and secured his patriotic collaboration. Without further delay he read the decree which made the votary of Republicanism one of King Albert's councillors. This manifestation of the policy of union which characterised the Cabinet was unanimously approved, and a crowd of members came to congratulate the new Minister of State and the Minister for War on their wise and clear-sighted action. In the course of the session M. Vandervelde further gave the Government, in the name of his group, a hearty promise of unconditional support. The irresistible exigencies of the common safety swept away the reservations which a tradition bearing the stamp of obsolete verbalism had too long maintained in the declarations of the Extreme Left with regard to national defence.

All the deputies were drawn together by a common sentiment of fraternity. If there was a certain coolness on the part of M. Hendericks, member for Antwerp, it is only just to record that when the votes were taken he associated himself with the ardour of his colleagues. In the case of certain aged deputies, grief got the better of enthusiasm, and one who had helped to obstruct the introduction of military reforms was heard to murmur sadly: "*Finis Patriæ!*" M. Woeste's face was full of anguish; he applauded the speeches of the King and M. de Broqueville vigorously, but those near him saw the tears of distress constantly flowing from his eyes.

The Chamber then voted without debate an increase in the contingents of 1914, a law concerning the allowances to be made to the families of mobilised troops, and

a law as to devolutions, in the event of the invasion of the country.

While these deliberations were in progress the town was filled with echoes of what had just taken place in Parliament. The crowd which had gathered along the route of the Royal procession dispersed slowly. Brussels presented that extraordinary appearance of a city in gala array which it was to retain until the sudden arrival of the German army. Flags were flying from all the windows ; animated groups were gathered in the streets ; strangers approached each other to exchange news and collect the most fantastic rumours. Soon patriotic songs were heard. A procession was spontaneously formed to go to the War Office, give an ovation to the Army, and call for M. de Broqueville.

In a few minutes an enormous crowd had gathered at the angle of the Avenue des Arts and the Rue de la Loi, and thousands of enthusiastic voices were inviting the Minister to come out on the balcony. Colonel Wielemans, the future Chief of Staff during the retreat from Antwerp and the battle of the Yser, was at work on the ground floor of the house with the officers of the Military Cabinet. He opened the window and informed the demonstrators that the head of the Government was still at the Chamber of Deputies. " Long live the Army ! " they cried at the sight of his green uniform. " Long live Belgium ! " replied the Colonel, and the cry was taken up in the street, now black with people. Hands were held out to the officer. He closed the window again, and the procession, at the head of which walked a man carrying on his shoulders a



child who was waving the national flag, set out, singing, for the Palais de la Nation.

The square was soon invaded. The Commandant of the Palace, always prudent, had already doubled the guard on duty at the entrance, when an usher, who had gone out to parley with the first arrivals, came to announce to the Assembly that the crowd was calling for the Prime Minister. Some deputies and M. Berryer, the Minister of the Interior (Home Secretary), urged Baron de Broqueville to show himself for a minute. At last he appeared, and was greeted with a prolonged ovation. He spoke a few words to the crowd in a strong voice which rang through the Square. We give them as reported by the correspondent of the *Métropole* of Antwerp:—

“ My friends, let me say two words to you which come from the depths of my heart. An attack has just been made which is, perhaps, without a parallel in history: Belgian soil has been violated by German troops in spite of promises, in spite of our guaranteed neutrality. From the bottom of my Belgian heart I cry to you that this is an abominable outrage, which must not be perpetrated with impunity. The army has at its head a leader of great parts, on whom the nation relies at this supreme hour. King Albert will be able to safeguard the integrity of the kingdom, with the help of the army. There is one thing to which we will never submit, and that is foreign domination.

“ Long live the King !

“ Long live Belgium ! ”

These thrilling words revived the recent excitement. Men and women acclaimed the speaker. Mothers held

their children up to look at him. "To arms!" cried the crowd. "Give us rifles." Young men drew up in line to go to the recruiting office. The Minister returned to the Chamber as if irradiated in his turn by the confidence of the people.

The Assembly then proceeded to vote, without debate, on the Bill increasing contingents, the Bill dealing with allowances to the families of mobilised men, and the Bill to place large powers in the hands of local authorities in the event of invasion. It abrogated the existing incompatibility of parliamentary functions and military service in order to allow several of its members to join the colours.

Then M. Vandervelde, leader of the Socialist Left, asked leave to speak that he might make a statement on behalf of his party before the final vote. "I wish," he said, "to record our affirmative vote in the name of the Socialist party. To do this with the brevity proper to the occasion, I need only recall our earlier declarations.

"On December 1st, 1911, for instance, speaking with the full concurrence of my friends, I said :

" ' We are an international party opposed to war in Germany, in England, in France, and in our own country. We demand the abolition of standing armies and the substitution of the nation in arms, and we are inflexibly opposed to any increase in military expenditure. But I hasten to add, if Belgium should ever be attacked we will defend her.' "

"Gentlemen, the day has come when we must make good our words. Since yesterday, we have been living under the threat of invasion. The Belgian army will be called upon to defend our frontier. It will do so, and

our party will do so, with all the more ardour because it knows that in defending its fatherland it will also be defending the cause of democracy and political freedom in Europe. But to ensure our defence, we must have funds. The Government asks for these. We shall vote them unanimously."

Applause from all the benches greeted this new manifestation of national union.

Meanwhile ill news had been travelling apace. Certain deputies had just received precise details as to the enemy's advance. M. Journez, member for Liège, rose:—

"Gentlemen," he said, "we have just heard that the German armies are now at Dolhain and in the neighbourhood of Verviers. Under the circumstances we deputies of Liège think it our duty, the House being in full assembly, to return at once to our constituencies."

Thus at the very beginning, at the moment when such action was most perilous, a large number of deputies voluntarily chose the hard mission of going to the help of their invaded compatriots, and remaining among them to share their sufferings.

The Chamber then proceeded to give collective assent to the six measures submitted to it. A hundred and sixty-four members were present, and the names of the Liégeois deputies were called first. They voted affirmatively, and retired amidst the sympathetic emotion of their colleagues.\*

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\* The names of those who voted are as follows:—Messrs. Anseele, Augusteyns, Bastien, Begerem, Behaghel, Berloz, Bertrand, Boël, Bologne, Borboux, Borginon, Bôval, Branquart,

The Chamber then passed the Bill dealing with crimes and offences against the external safety of the State, which at last provided Belgium with a measure, inadequate indeed, for protection against espionage; the Bill prohibiting legal actions against citizens serving in the army, and finally, the bill empowering the courts to grant stay of execution. These Bills, of a more specifically legal order, had been laid on the table of the Senate by the Government, and were first submitted to the vote of the High Assembly.

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Braun, Brenez, Briart, Brifaut, Brunel, Bruyninx, Buisset, Buyl, Buysse, Caeluwaert, Carton de Wiart, Cavrot, Cocq, Colaert, Colfs, Crick, Daens, Dallemagne, Davignon, de Béthune, de Broqueville, de Bue, Debunne, de Coster, Dejardin, de Jonghe d'Ardoye, de Kerchove d'Exaerde, de Lalieux, Delbeke, Delporte, Delvaux, Demblon, de Meester, de Ponthière, de Schutter, Destrée, Deveze, de Wouters d'Oplinter, d'Hauwer, d'Hondt, d'Huart, Dony, Donnay, Drion, du Bus de Warnaffe, Duquesne, Duysters, Elbers, Feron, Fonteyne, Franck, Galopin, Gendebien, Gielen, Gillès de Pélichy, Goblet, Goethals (Emile), Goethals (François), Golenvaux, Hamman, Hanssens, Harmignie, Helleputte, Henderickx, Heynen, Honincks, Horlait, Hoyois, Hubin, Huyshauer, Huysmans (Camille), Huysmans (Louis), Hymans, Imperiali, Janson, Jouret (Henri), Jourez (Léon), Journez, Lambillotte, Lamborelle, Lampens, Lefebvre, Lemonnier, Léonard, Le Paige, Levie, Leyniers, Liebaert, Lorand, Mabille, Maenhaut, Maes, Mahieu, Mansart, Maroille, Masson, Mechelynck, Melot, Meysmans, Moyersoen, Nerinx, Neujean, Neven, Nobels, Nolf, Ooms, Ortegat, Ozeray, Pecher, Peel, Pepin, Persoons, Peten, Pil, Pirmez, Polet, Poncelet, Poulet, Raemdonck, Ramaekers, Renkin, Rens, Reynaert, Rosseeuw, Royer (Emile), Schaetzen, Schollaert, Segers, Serruys, Servais, Sevrin, Siffer, Standaert, Terwagne, Théodor, Thienpont, Tibbaut, T'Kint, Triau, Troclet, Van Brussel, Van Cauwelaert, Van Cauwenbergh, Van Cleemputte, Van Damme, Vandepierre, Vandervelde, Van de Vyvere, Vandewalle, Van Hoegaerden, Van Merris, Van Reeth, Verachttert, Vergauwen, Verhaegen, Vermeersch, Versteyleylen, Warocqué, Wauters, Wauwermans, Woeste.

Absent: Messrs. Dauvister, du Bus de Warnaffe, Mullendorf, Pirard, Royers and Schinler, who were held up by suspensions in the train service; Messrs. Claes and Pastur, who were with the colours; and M. Franck, who was abroad.

At 11.50 a.m. all was over, and M. Schollaert closed the session to repeated cries of : " Long live Belgium ! "

The venerable president had performed the last act of his long parliamentary career. The Belgian Chamber, scattered by the tempest, was never to meet again under his guidance.

## VI.

THE attitude of the Belgian Parliament on August 4th, 1914, will always be cited as one of the noblest examples ever given by a representative Chamber. No cloud obscured the splendour of the spectacle—patriotism, concord, sobriety of language, rapidity and vigour of decision—in short, all the highest and rarest of civic virtues shone forth that day in matchless radiance. What manner of men were those who made up this assembly of Romans ? History will ask. They were Belgians neither better nor worse than their fellow-countrymen. Side by side with a few individuals of commanding talents, there were lawyers, doctors, nobles, workmen, small tradesmen, fully representative of the various social strata in a complex modern democracy. One characteristic was common to them all—sterling honesty. Belgian public life, in spite of the inevitable blemishes of the electoral system, has been singularly free from venality, and worthless persons have always been rapidly eliminated by their own party.

The German proposal roused indignation by its cynicism, its treachery, and its falsehood. This explains how this Parliament, in which there was so little knowledge of international politics, where so many influential anti-militarists, but newly converted and ready enough to retract, played a prominent part, where so many worthy persons had accepted the ingenuous articles of faith of the International Society, suddenly gave proof of the most steadfast clarity of outlook, and the most virile energy. A firm Government, which had had the wisdom to foresee and the courage to speak, had marked out the way. The Chambers followed it unflinchingly, with such unanimity and ardour that there must have been something more than the promptings of political reason underlying their action. M. Henry Carton de Wiart accounts for it very acutely in one of the speeches he has made in exile:—"The age-long effort of our ancestors against foreign oppression was suddenly revived in the enthusiasm of a patriotism the fervour of which was hardly suspected by the nation itself."

This Chamber, which had been incapable of voting the Budget at the proper time, which had prolonged the most futile discussions interminably, which had harassed exasperated Ministers with questions and interpellations, accepted the challenge of the German Empire without discussion. Must we not see in this session, the stirring incidents of which we have tried to record, a confirmation of the theory of psychologists who have studied the individual and the crowd: that we are governed by forces the strength of which we do not perceive in ordinary times? A great writer has condemned the modern régime by showing in those orators

who exacerbate party conflicts by fomenting hatred *the dead speaking* more loudly than the living. But this formula is capable of a more consoling interpretation, and does not triumph only for evil.

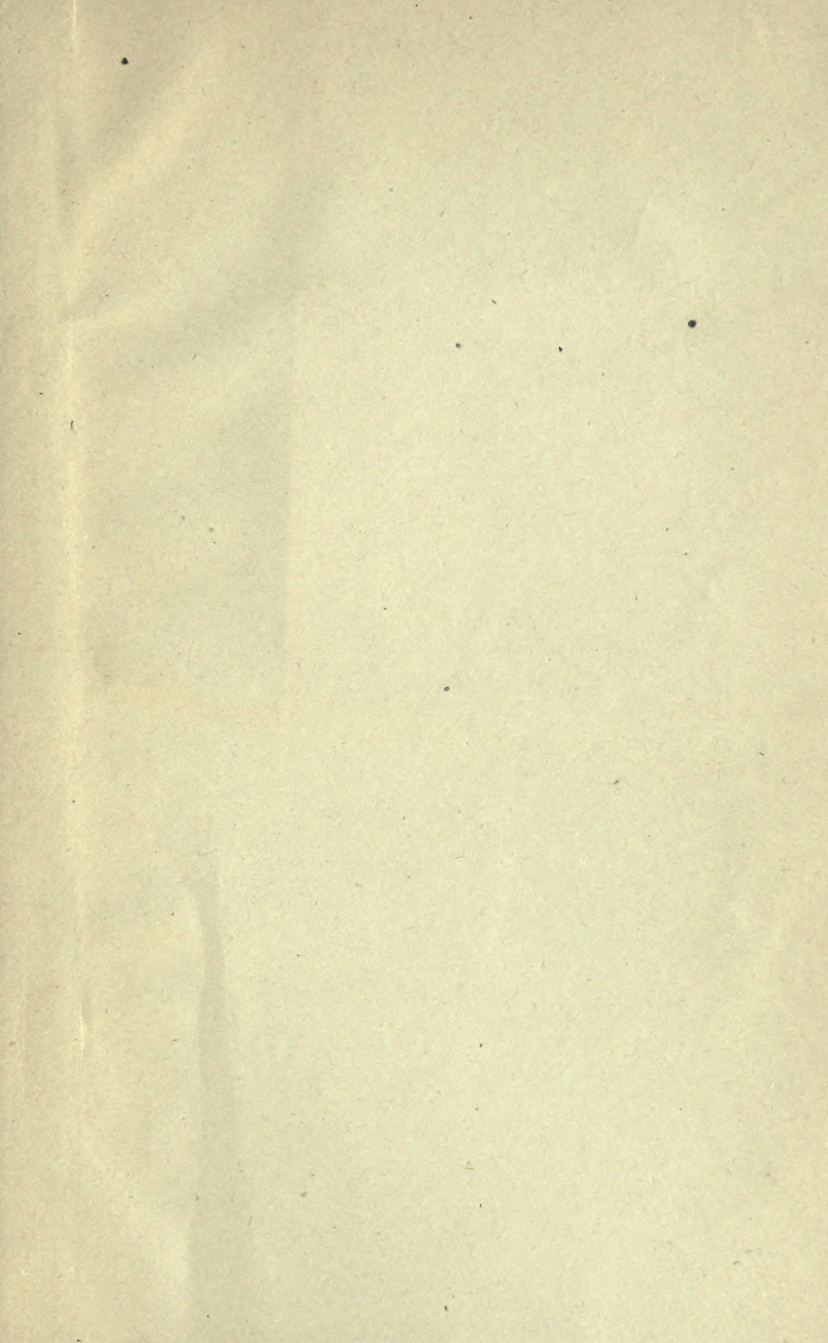
In the spectacle of a Parliament which suddenly gives the magnificent example given by the Belgian Parliament on the day when the country was invaded, we may see a proof that the divisions which seemed most profound, the errors which seemed most inveterate, die down and disappear as soon as a catastrophe promotes reaction, and gives us over to those occult powers which centuries of struggle have mysteriously instilled into the heredity of a race. I am far from admitting the facile theory of historic fatalism, which is perpetually contradicted by the lives of great men whose genius has conquered circumstance in the interests of their country or of their ambitions. But I think it is very difficult to know the soul of a people, and to give a rational explanation of the convulsions which agitate it. There are times—and herein lies the refutation of the pessimist—when a supernatural afflatus seems to transfigure the humblest actors on the world's stage, and when the man appears as the son of his fathers, and the sum of his race, marked by the divine impress which ennobles the clay from which he is moulded.

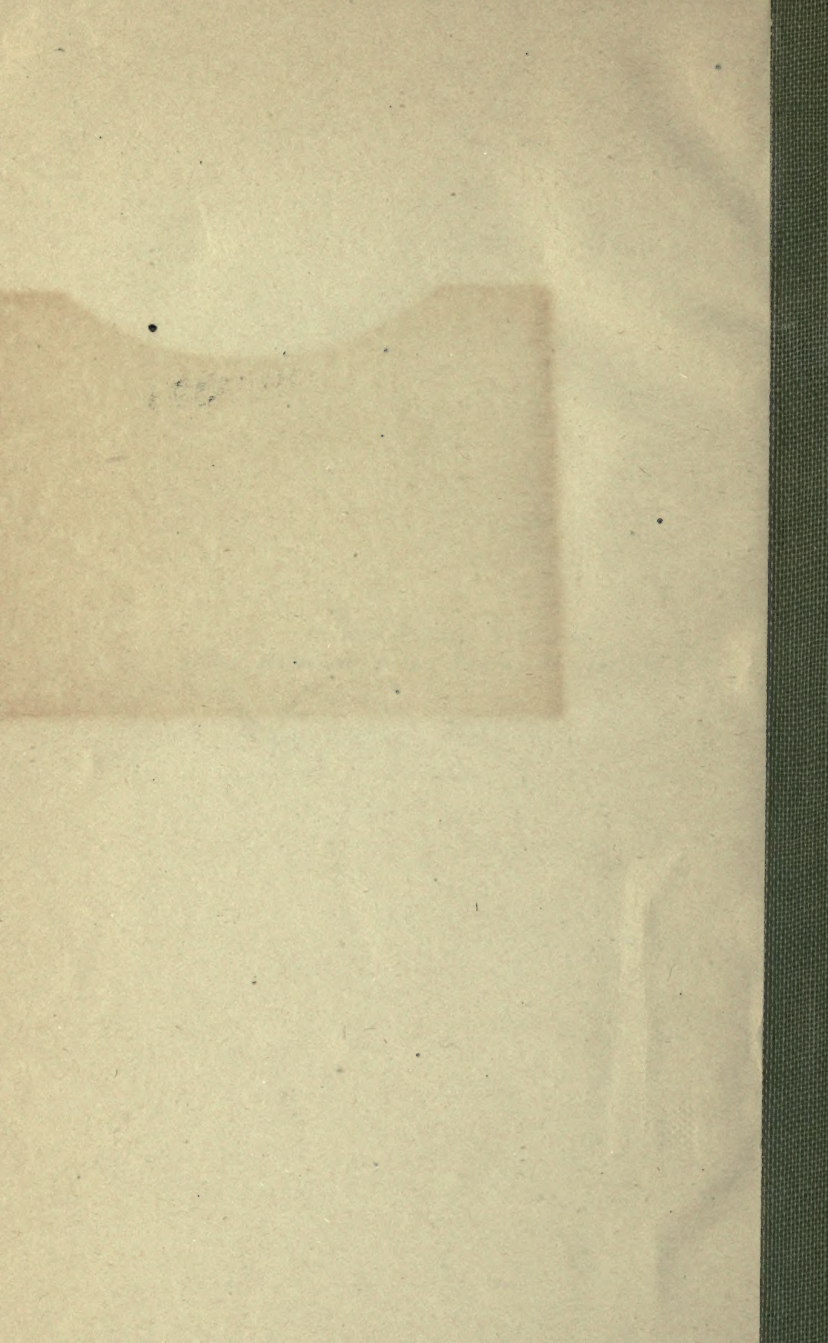
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