

A book review by Aleister Crowley from the December 1917 edition of The International.

The History of the Belgian People from the First Authentic Annal to the Present Time.

The International Historical Society.

The late Lord Salisbury, on one celebrated occasion, lamented that the task of a statesman in a democracy was made almost impossible by the fact that people did not read history. But after all, do you know, it was rather hard luck on the people! History was always written with portentous dullness, and it was printed in folios or quartos, each volume of which weighed about 3.785 metric tons. Even an enthusiast could hardly be expected to wade through this kind of book. It was too much like digging. In fact it was very often like digging for gold in a place where there wasn't any.

But there is no reason in nature why history should be dull; and certainly none why it should be presented in steam-roller form. History deals with realities, the lives of actual people; and it is reality alone in which we are fundamentally interested. We have now discovered that fairy stories appeal to us only because they sound symbolically the hidden depths of our *vita sexualis*. We accept stories in so far as we are genuinely touched by them, and where a historical basis helps our conviction of reality, we get one of the highest forms of fiction, the historical novel. There is, however, a counterpart to the plan of buttressing fiction by history; and that is to write history with imagination. Everyone knows how dreadful a sense of unreality is created by the perusal of Blue Books. It is much better to clothe facts with insight, style, and even a touch of romance. Our ancestors certainly possessed skeletons; but they did not walk about without flesh and blood to cover them.

There is, therefore, every reason to rejoice when a history appears which satisfies these conditions and in

addition is presented in a readable form. This volume now under review will go conveniently into a pocket. Yet the type is excellently clear, and large enough to enable even very weak eyes to read without strain. The binding is extremely ornamental and artistic, entirely suited to the character of the works.

This "History of the Belgian People" is uniform with the excellent series of volumes of the "History of the German People." It is a book of extraordinary value at the present moment when Belgium is once more a point of shock between opposing economic currents. Man is determined in his actions by his antecedents. The Belgian people did not descend suddenly from heaven. Their conditions are determined altogether by their history. We cannot understand why a man performs so simple an action as eating unless we go right back through evolution to the nutrition of protoplasm; and the attitude of Belgium in the present war can only be understood by going back to the first origins, and considering how climatic and geographical conditions determined the trend of religious, political and economic forces. In a period like the present when sanity of standpoint, breadth and completeness of view, and probity of judgement are so necessary to combat the hysterical arguments which are so prevalent on both sides of the present conflict, it is of the utmost importance that everyone should grasp the WHY of Belgium. A. C.