

*A book review by Aleister Crowley from the January 1918 edition of The International.*

***The History of the Belgian People.***

Volume 1 of this history takes us from the very earliest period covered by authentic record up to the Hundred Years War. It is interesting to note that the mixed blood of the present Belgians, their division into Flemish and Walloon, is represented in the very dawn of her history. From the first they were half Celtic and half Teutonic. Belgium was, in fact, the original point of impact and it was in Belgium that the idea of democracy of the modern type first took shape.

It is necessary for us to picture the physical geography of this country, which was indeed one of the most miserable. It was a marsh constantly subjected to flood both from the sea and from the rivers. The northwestern part was a waste of sand and heather, the south an impassable jungle. It was only in the center that anything like habitable land was found. The climate was at that time also very unhealthy and unpleasant. The history of Europe can hardly be understood unless we realize fully the improvements of the changes caused by the gradual alteration in the course of the Gulf Stream.

The first impact of civilization upon the isolated barbarians who inhabited this country was made by Julius Caesar. The ruin of the Roman empire involved Belgium in the general devastation. Ultimately a dual control was set up to resist the assaults of the barbarians of the north, the ecclesiastic system on the one hand and the feudal on the other. However, the extraordinary position of the country under the new arrangements in Europe made it not only the battlefield of Europe but the market. Learning sprang up under the impulse of the monasteries, and commerce also flourished enormously. The result was that after a period of desolation due to Viking attacks, feudal states became very powerful and

in the security thus offered cities sprang up whose merchants, becoming powerful, began to oppose themselves to the extractions of the nobles. We then find that by the Thirteenth Century, industrialism had become of supreme importance to the country. This system was protected by the famous guilds. The commercial idea having become dominant, public works were instituted and the country was gradually redeemed from the depredations of the sea. In this period of comparative prosperity, we find art and religion flourishing.

Up to a certain time France had been contented with peaceful penetration of the country, but towards the end of the Thirteenth Century, France wished to complete her influence by annexation. The burghers resisted with violence. It is not too much to say that the French invasion created a national spirit. Ultimately, France had to be content with a partial triumph. The excessively French part of Flanders, including the cities of Lille and Douay, became part of France. What was left of Flanders tended in consequence to be more exclusively Germanic. But it is impossible for rich weak states to survive in the midst of predatory neighbors. It is, in fact, immoral that such states should exist, since they afford a constant temptation to more virile and less laden races. The Low Countries have been in the nature of prizes since the rise of the Free Cities, and the balance of power in Europe has been constantly unstable because of the value of these teeming plains with their immense natural resources. The modern use of coal has, of course, merely accentuated the intensity of the struggle.