

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

BECAUSE the Germans failed to bring up their heavy guns to the first assault against Liège, the forts held out and the town was not taken. When the big guns came the error was rectified. But the error remained nevertheless like a millstone around the German neck. It cost time and it cost reputation. Out of the German error came a new Belgium united and determined, flushed with confidence and confirmed in courage and determination.

The new Belgium was born in a night—August 5th-6th. In the morning Brussels had become another kind of city from the Brussels of the history books and the Brussels of the tourist. The change was not, perhaps, immediately apparent, but it was real. If you have seen a boy addressed for the first time as a man you have seen the kind of change I mean; the exact change is perhaps paralleled when a weaker man defeats a stronger through sheer force of desperation.

I stood that morning in the great square by the Hôtel de Ville and watched the scene for a long time. A strange scene it was in this peaceful city. In front of the Hôtel de Ville with its marvellous gold tracery, paced on sentry duty a member of the civil guard who had been a business man in London a week ago—a chubby-faced boy with