

Roman Empire 261

Chapter 261: Seigniorage

After much effort, on May 12, 1855, the first currency of the New Holy Roman Empire after its establishment — the New Holy Roman Empire Rhenish Guilder was officially issued to the outside world.

The Austrian government had successfully won the right to mint coins. The reserve gold of the state governments was also unified and included in the central bank reserves of the empire, which for the time being were only temporarily deposited in the various states.

It wasn't that Franz didn't want to do it all at once. Since he'd just taken some meat out of the bowls of the state governments, further stimulating their nerves could easily lead to a backlash.

Since everyone wanted to keep it in their hands, he allowed it. In any case, the central government sent people to supervise and forbid anyone to use these reserve funds.

Undoubtedly, by acquiring the right to mint, the central government could legally collect seigniorage from the state governments. As the name suggests, seigniorage refers to the revenue obtained after deducting the cost of issuing currency.

Of course, in this era of the gold standard, reserves are still needed and the profits from issuing currency are not as significant as in the later era of the credit standard.

Nevertheless, seigniorage was still an important component of fiscal revenue. What were tobacco and alcohol taxes by comparison? They were pitifully weak, simply incomparable.

The British, in their quest to establish the "pound-gold" system, essentially wanted to collect seigniorage worldwide. Clearly, this required the recognition of countries around the world. Everyone needed to be willing to settle international trade transactions in pounds.

There are only two ways to achieve this: either by using force to subjugate everyone or by a mutually beneficial exchange of interests that persuades nations to accept the pound as an international currency.

So far, the British plan has not succeeded. While the Austrian government had adopted the gold standard, the New Holy Roman Empire unfortunately only recognized gold for international settlements.

What is a pound? Can you eat it?

The governments of London and Vienna had communicated on this issue many times, but in the end to no avail.

The British wanted to collect seigniorage, but so did Franz! Austria was not yet qualified to collect all the world's seigniorage, but within the sphere of the Holy Roman Economic Union, it could be collected.

Otherwise, why would the Austrian government take the risk of implementing the gold standard reform? It's important to note that currency reform involves costs and risks.

Under current conditions, Austria's seigniorage revenues would amount to about 0.5-2% of GDP after the currency reform is completed.

The significant variance in the data depends largely on domestic economic development. The more prosperous the economy, the greater the demand for currency on the market, resulting in higher minting tax revenues.

Of course, this is for domestic purposes. Franz can't demand that other countries refrain from issuing currency and use only the guilder. At most, he could encourage others to use the guilder in international trade settlements with the New Holy Roman Empire.

This is a long-term endeavor, and in the short term, people will still transact in gold and silver. The guilder can only be widely used within the New Holy Roman Empire.

It is not easy to convince everyone to join the "guilder-gold" system. Without tangible benefits, why would anyone be willing to pay you this coinage tax?

Once the international currency status was established, the demand for gold reserves would decrease accordingly, as everyone could support the value of the currency through the credit of national governments.

The most common currencies were still gold and silver. These hard currencies were the most widely used. The rest, pounds, francs, guilders, were still ordinary currencies.

The British have already begun to promote the pound, and pushing for gold standard reform is a crucial step. Only when everyone adopts the same standard can the pound-gold system be established.

.....

Finance Minister Karl said confidently, "Your Majesty, the issuance of the guilder is going smoothly. Our current reserves of gold and silver are sufficient to handle any fluctuations."

Thanks to the gold and silver bimetallic monetary system of countries in this era, the Austrian government bringing out silver for international settlements would still be happily accepted by all.

If they wait until various countries abandon the bimetallic standard, it will become difficult to acquire gold from the market. At that time, even if they buy up all the gold in circulation, it won't be enough.

Historically, it was precisely because the market lacked sufficient gold that the governments of countries carrying out gold standard reforms had to compromise with the British by accepting the pound-gold system.

Some countries even had such large gold deficits that they used the pound directly as the standard for their issued currency, pegging their currency value directly to the pound and relying on British credibility to back the value of the new currency.

That's why it's generally believed that the peak of British power came after the Boer War. After obtaining South Africa's gold, the British gained control of most of the gold on the international market, eventually establishing the global monetary hegemony of the pound sterling.

Franz nodded and said, "Do not take this lightly; continue to increase surveillance of the financial markets. If there is a significant outflow of capital, activate the contingency plan immediately."

Although he didn't think anyone would cause trouble at this time, the British's previous actions had already sounded the alarm for Franz. To establish the monetary hegemony of the pound, who knows what else the British might do.

Finance Minister Karl replied solemnly, "Your Majesty, please rest assured. We have already assigned people to closely monitor the foreign capital entering the country. As soon as they start withdrawing capital, we will take action.

We have gathered enough dirt on them, and when the time comes, we can expose it. It should be enough to temporarily confiscate their capital. In serious cases, we can even send them straight to the gallows."

In this era, all capitalists had skeletons in their closets. Even if they came to Austria and restrained their behavior to some extent, the bloody nature of capitalists was inevitable.

In normal times, to promote domestic economic development, people would look the other way, and these problems would be put aside; everyone would pretend not to see anything.

Now, at a crucial moment, if these inconspicuous dark secrets are revealed, it would be enough to make them walk away empty-handed.

With a criminal record, capital becomes stolen money and it can be decided whether it should be seized or confiscated according to Austrian law.

Anyway, as long as there is evidence in hand, regardless of their backgrounds, the Austrian government has nothing to fear.

Franz instructed, "Continue to keep an eye on them. If they want to leave at this time, send someone to persuade them first. If that doesn't work, then use extreme measures.

Pay attention to the evidence we have; it must be convincing enough. Even if we have to take action, we can only deal with a few severe cases to serve as a warning.

We cannot turn against all international capitalists, and when taking action, we must also be careful with our approach. The government cannot directly expose itself to danger."

It was not necessary to do so. Franz still didn't want to fall out with international capital. This kind of thing is like killing the goose that lays the golden eggs; once you've done it once, there's no chance to do it again.

In the future, it would no longer be possible to issue bonds on the international market or to attract foreign investment. Even normal trade with the outside world would suffer retaliation.

The industrialization process in Austria still requires foreign capital. These people still have some value.

If they are shut down all at once, even if the government gets a large amount of money, it won't get the same results.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Karl responded solemnly.

Chapter 262: Scientist Archive

In 1855, British engineer Bessemer invented the Bessemer process, which used a converter furnace to make steel, replacing manual stirring with machinery and greatly improving production efficiency.

In those days, everyone's sense of confidentiality was low, and the news spread quickly. Of course, it was impossible to keep it secret anyway, since filing a patent would reveal the technology.

The Bessemer process was not an advanced technology; the main reason others did not adopt it was a matter of mindset, not because the stirring machinery was difficult to manufacture.

When the news reached Vienna, it immediately caused a sensation. This invention meant a substantial increase in the efficiency of steel production, alleviating the scarcity of steel in the market.

After glancing through the newspaper, Franz remembered that steelmaking technology was still very primitive at the time.

In Austria, the largest steel conglomerate, employing over 100,000 workers, produced just over 500,000 tons of steel annually.

This small production still accounted for half of the New Holy Roman Empire's total steel production and claimed to be the number one steel conglomerate in the European continent.

Austria's steel production was surpassed only by the British, ultimately ranking second globally. Total capacity had already surpassed that of the French.

These figures were enough to satisfy the Austrian government. At present, Austria's steel production capacity is growing at an astounding rate of more than 20% per year, an extraordinarily rapid development.

The main reason for the explosive growth in production capacity was still market demand. The steel market was currently in a state of severe shortage, not only in Austria but throughout the European continent.

Currently, the major international steel exporters are primarily the British, with Belgium also being an exporter of steel. The remaining countries, even those considered industrial powerhouses, do not import steel.

After five years of hard work, the steel production capacity finally exceeded one million tons. This achievement was made possible by the annexation of Southern Germany, without which this milestone would not have been possible.

Franz was not the least bit surprised by the Austrian government's excitement. If you don't compare, you don't despair. Now British steel production was approaching 3.3 million tons, about the same as the whole of continental Europe.

At this point, it was time to push the boundaries. In steel production, the natural resources of Great Britain and France determined the upper limit of their steel production.

Even if breakthroughs in steel technology continue, these problems cannot be solved. In the short term, it may not be apparent, but in the later stages, resource scarcity will limit their growth.

Of course, they have colonies to compensate for resource shortages, but the increased costs also lead to decreased profits, causing capitalists to lose interest in further investment.

Franz asked with concern, “Mr. Algiest, is it possible to adopt the open-hearth furnace with our current technology?”

With so many things going on, Franz had even forgotten to push for innovation in the steel technology field, and there was one more aspect that needed to be explored.

Of course, Franz was not even an amateur in this field. All he knew about the open-hearth process were the three words “open-hearth furnace”. As for specifics, who besides professionals would know?

Algiest looked at Franz in confusion. What on earth was the open-hearth furnace, did it involve laying the furnace flat?

Franz could not answer this question either! He could only explain rigidly: “That is, to improve the efficiency and quality of steel smelting by changing the design of the smelting furnace.”

Algiest nodded thoughtfully, still confused, and answered uncertainly: “Your Majesty, this matter requires a lot of experimentation to figure out. How about I do some experiments first?”

“Very well!” Franz replied without hesitation.

Clearly, this was not just a conceptual problem, but also a technical one. At least Franz could be sure that simply laying the steelmaking furnace flat wasn’t the answer.

After sending Algiest away, Franz decided that in the future it would be best not to blindly insist on such matters of industrial technology. It would be better to just poach talent directly.

Isn’t it the Siemens Family? With Franz’s influence in Germany, is there any need to worry about not being able to recruit them?

Franz could proudly say that after so many years of managing the country, with the exception of the Junker aristocrats in Prussia, who could not be poached, most of the others were just a matter of price.

The Junker aristocrats could not be helped, they really could not be poached. The army owns the country, and Franz can’t give that kind of treatment anyway.

As for the ordinary Junker nobility, however, quite a number of them chose to serve Franz. After all, the wisdom of not putting all one’s eggs in one basket was widely understood among the nobility.

Based on current developments, Germany clearly had more potential as part of the New Holy Roman Empire, which was the most orthodox entity.

Most importantly, Franz’s policies best protected everyone’s interests. Even the member states that had joined the German Federal Empire subtly interacted with the Austrian government.

Although the Paris Conference forcibly divided Germany, this does not mean that the people in the region are willing to accept it.

On the contrary, the interference of the Great Powers has made the idea of Greater German unification even more widespread. Especially among the rebellious youth, they have become staunch supporters of Greater Germany.

The Austrian government already had an advantage in attracting talent. Because of its resources, Franz could also offer higher prices than the other two.

.....

Franz ordered: "Tyron, send people to investigate the Siemens Family."

After several years of reorganization, the intelligence organization had become much more capable. The external intelligence organization, composed of aristocratic networks, mainly collected some basic information.

There were also specially trained intelligence personnel among them. Using these networks, they assumed new identities and infiltrated various governments.

These individuals would go undercover for an extended period of time and would only be activated when absolutely necessary. In the short term, bribery is still the primary method because it is still the most effective.

"Yes, Your Majesty!" Tyron responded.

After a pause, Franz added, "Let's set up an archive for scientists, collecting information on renowned and respected scientists worldwide, especially those from Germany.

This should include promising young talents who have the potential to become scientists. Whatever is needed to poach them can be arranged. You can ask Count Hohenberg for help in settling them."

No matter what, in a world of so many scientists, many individuals who did not achieve fame in later years, but who made outstanding contributions in their time, are also worth winning over.

If outsiders could not be fooled, then fooling German scientists by waving German nationalism and patriotism should work, right?

Franz had already thought of the slogan: "Strive for German unity". With generous treatment, he refused to believe that it could not fool people.

When all else fails, Franz doesn't mind resorting to moral coercion. He can approach family and friends, encourage them to do ideological work, and provide patriotic education for stubborn individuals.

As long as these people were deceived, it made no difference whether they worked in government research institutions, private enterprises, or their own industries.

In the mid-to-late 19th century, Germany experienced a significant surge of talent that surpassed other countries in both quality and quantity.

This surge of talent allowed the Second Reich to become an economic powerhouse at the forefront of the Second Industrial Revolution.

Now the foundation of the New Holy Roman Empire was much stronger than that of the Second Reich. Whether in resources or market, the gap was extremely wide.

In 1855, the New Holy Roman Empire had a total population of 51.286 million and a territorial area of approximately 1.026 million square kilometers. Its industrial output was also comparable to that of France.

With this foundation, no other European country, except the neighboring Russian Bear, could compare.

The Russian Bear is a behemoth, with a territory twenty times larger than the New Holy Roman Empire and a population of over 73 million. The Crimean War also contributed to this, otherwise it would have been 74 million.

No need to compare with the Russian Bear, Franz only had to compare with Great Britain and France. Especially France, which 10 years ago had a population of over 35 million but now has barely reached 36 million.

This snail-like growth rate continued to decline, reaching the 40 million mark only during the First World War, when France dropped from the second to the fifth most populous country in Europe.

Faced with this competitor, Franz could boldly say, “No need to worry, let’s take our time!”

With each passing year, the relative power of the two sides changed. In less than twenty years, the population of the New Holy Roman Empire would be twice that of France, completely widening the gap in power.

There was no way around it, facing such an unmotivated opponent, even the salted fish strategy could surpass them. There was no need to target them specifically, the French would fall behind on their own.

Despite Napoleon III’s decent ability for economic development, he can’t change the current situation of low birth rates among the French population unless he abolishes the current inheritance and marriage laws...

In short, the French are not unwilling to have children; they just can’t afford to raise more. The big cities are full of abandoned infants because the working class can’t afford to raise children, or more accurately, they don’t have the time.

The peasants, who should have been the main source of population growth, spontaneously reduced the number of children to maintain their quality of life due to the limited amount of land.

Chapter 263: The Integrity of the Great Powers

Cairo

After mediation by the British and French, negotiations finally made some progress, with Jonas agreeing to make limited concessions. But these concessions were only what he saw as such — the Egyptians would not feel them.

“Mr. Mahmoud, we can choose not to hold your country responsible, but you must pay adequate compensation, otherwise I cannot explain it to my people.

You must pay 1 million guilders for lost cargo, 2 million guilders for pensions, and another 2 million guilders for emotional distress. That is the bottom line of the New Holy Roman Empire,” Jonas demanded extortionately.

5 million guilders was equivalent to 2.5 million pounds or about 18.3 tons of gold. This amount already exceeded the annual income of the Egyptian government, making it a difficult demand to accept.

Mahmoud angrily replied, “Impossible! This is extortion! What do you mean, a million guilders worth of lost cargo? This caravan was only carrying some jars and pots. They were hardly worth anything. The total value of all the goods wouldn’t even exceed 5,000 guilders.

Your side only had three deaths, and you demand 2 million guilders in compensation? This is simply a joke, it should only be 500 guilders at most.

The losses suffered by the Arikus Tribe are ten times greater, should your country not pay their compensation as well? Our demands are not excessive, just offsetting the losses is enough.

As for the emotional distress fees, it's even more ridiculous. Clearly, we are the ones who have suffered losses. Even if there were claims, they should be made by the Egyptian government against your country!"

Jonas explained seriously, "Mr. Mahmoud, you seem to be uninformed. The jars and pots in the caravan are all valuable antique artifacts, each one priceless. The 1 million guilders is a wholesale price; if sold individually, it could easily reach 3 to 5 million guilders.

The three unfortunate victims were the most outstanding talents in the empire. Had they not met with an accident, they could have become great nobles in the future. Therefore, their families are demanding compensation from your government based on the potential nobility status of the deceased.

Considering the emotions of the victims' families, we believe that such a reasonable request should be supported.

The unlawful actions of officials of your government have deeply wounded the hearts of over 50 million citizens of the New Holy Roman Empire. Is a mere 2 million guilders for emotional distress too much?"

Jonas' explanation enlightened the British and French representatives. It seems that they were prepared to learn from this exemplary experience.

Why fear sophistry? In this era, when had the powers ever spoken reason in their overseas actions?

Mahmoud was so angry that he was speechless for a while. How could there be any discussion with such nonsense?

The enemy could lie shamelessly, but they could only speak reason. They had to have enough reasons to get British and French support to keep the Austrians in check.

The French representative De Lesseps persuaded: "Mr. Jonas, your demands are too high, far beyond the capacity of the Egyptian government."

It's okay to start with a high offer because negotiations require some haggling. After all, if you don't haggle, how can you lower the price? But if you insist on it as the bottom line from the start, how can there be any negotiation?

Jonas chuckled and said, "That's okay, if you don't have the money, you can use tariffs, mineral rights, rights to roads or land to pay off the debt.

We're not here for the money; we just want a fair outcome. The Egyptian government can negotiate how the compensation will be paid."

Sensing his opponent's weaknesses, Jonas was a businessman first and a diplomat second. The French did the best business in the Egyptian region and were involved in most industries. The British were second, gaining the right to build roads and expanding their influence.

Austrian businessmen are in an awkward position; they cannot enter many industries, and Austrian goods exported to Egypt are heavily taxed.

Whether others could tolerate it or not, Jonas, who felt the pain directly, could not. He also wanted a share of the privileges enjoyed by British and French businessmen.

Of course, this must be done under the premise of fulfilling the orders of the Austrian government.

Mahmoud roared, "This is impossible! The Egyptian government will never accept your extortion. If you don't want to leave, feel free to stay and eat sand!"

Are they kidding? For a small oasis with no real value, and to pay such a high price for it, do they really think that the Egyptian government is that easy to bully?

Hearing Mahmoud's words, Jonas was ecstatic inwardly, but still said expressionlessly: "The Sinai Peninsula is not worth 5 million guilders. Your country must lower tariffs, abolish restrictions on Austrian goods, and treat Austrian businessmen in Egypt equally!"

Mahmoud, still unaware that he had been duped, thought that Jonas had made concessions. After pondering for a moment, he replied: "Mr. Jonas, your demands are too much. Setting tariffs freely is our sovereignty, we cannot give it up under any circumstances."

Mahmoud had no choice but to worry, for the British and the French also had their eyes on Egyptian tariffs. They would not dare to make any concessions.

Jonas frowned and said, "It's late already, let's all calm down for now. As for the tariffs, we can discuss that tomorrow. What about the other conditions? Are they approved?"

This was the first time in the long negotiations that Jonas had actively asked for a recess. Although confused, Mahmoud did not object.

As he left the conference room, Jonas immediately instructed the recorder sent by the Austrian government: "Will, organize the content of today's meeting and send it back. The Egyptian government has agreed to cede the Sinai Peninsula."

The man named Will frowned and said: "Mr. Jonas, the Egyptian government did not agree to cede the Sinai Peninsula. Isn't what you're doing deceiving the country?"

Jonas scoffed: "How can this be considered deception? Send back the entire contents of the meeting. Based on the interpretation that is most favorable to us, doesn't that fool Mahmoud agree to cede the Sinai Peninsula to us?"

Don't be silly, Will, international politics is that sinister. All we have to do is affirm what is favorable to us and ignore what is not.

In negotiating with these indigenous countries, ambiguous agreements or memorandums are the best way to obtain benefits.

Don't be fooled just because the French seem to be supporting the Egyptian government. When we proposed reducing tariffs, that fellow De Lesseps was also tempted.

No one is a philanthropist in the face of interests. Without sufficient benefits, they will not stand up for the Egyptian government.

Now let our people in the Sinai Peninsula declare our sovereignty. In the future, the Egyptian government will either choose war, or they'll have to continue struggling at the negotiating table.

These meeting minutes are just an excuse to make our actions look more presentable. In essence, this is an invasion!"

Will nodded thoughtfully. Without creating a fait accompli, no matter what the Egyptian government said, they would not cede territory! The Sinai Peninsula had little economic value, but that was no reason to give it up, right?

Although the Egyptian government was influenced by Western culture at this time, its enthusiasm for land was not as great as it would be in later generations. The Egyptian government also feared that making concessions would set off a chain reaction that would lead to being carved up by European countries.

.....

On June 26th, 1855, Austrian colonizers raised the flag of the New Holy Roman Empire over the Sinai Peninsula, declaring sovereignty.

This was met with strong protests from the Egyptian government. Jonas used the minutes of the meeting as a pretext for diplomatic extortion. Eventually, with British and French mediation, the Austrian government agreed to pay 50,000 guilders as redemption money for the Sinai Peninsula.

Under heavy pressure from England and France, the Austrian government made concessions and promised not to seek further expansion in the Egyptian region and to immediately cease colonial activities in the area.

On July 21, 1855, Jonas signed the Sinai Peninsula Land Transaction Treaty on behalf of the New Holy Roman Empire and the Egyptian government. The next day, Austria, Great Britain, and France signed the Convention of Cairo, formally ending Austrian colonial activities in the Egyptian region.

The acquisition of the Sinai Peninsula gave them a foothold at the Suez Canal. The Austrian government was pleased.

They succeeded in excluding Austria from the Egyptian region only by giving up the worthless Sinai Peninsula. Great Britain and France were also satisfied.

The only tragedy was for the Egyptian government, which lost a piece of territory in exchange for a nominal 50,000 guilders as a land redemption fee. This amount was actually returned to them as compensation for the Arish incident and given to the colonial expedition team.

This sum also served as a bounty from the Austrian government to the colonial expedition team, compensating them for the risks they took during their six-month adventure in the desert. As leaders of the colonial expedition team, Leo Haval and Andrea were given the honorary title of knights.

Overall, the matter was concluded satisfactorily.

Chapter 264: Environmental Protection is Everyone's Responsibility

Vienna Palace

Prime Minister Felix proposed, "Your Majesty, our number of colonies is constantly increasing, and it is necessary to establish a Colonial Ministry specifically to manage colonial affairs."

After some thought, Franz suddenly realized that Austria had also become a colonial power, at least in terms of colonial territory.

From 1854 to the present day, in just over a year, more than thirty colonial outposts have been established on the African continent, receiving more than 200,000 immigrants.

Among European nations, Austria was the most proactive in developing the African continent. At the time, without a dedicated ministry for administration, it could easily lead to chaos.

After some thought, Franz asked, “We do indeed need to establish a Colonial Ministry. Prime Minister, who do you think would be suitable for this position?”

Prime Minister Felix suggested, “Your Majesty, how about appointing Count Josip Jelačić as Minister of the Colonies?”

Count Josip Jelačić was a Croatian. Historically, he was one of the three heroes who saved the Austrian Empire by leading the Croatian militia to suppress the Hungarian revolt.

As time went on, with the promotion of greater national integration, the Austrian government would inevitably have to appoint ethnic minority officials to demonstrate ethnic equality.

In this context, Josip Jelačić, a loyal supporter of the Empire, stood out.

Franz thought for a moment and said: “Then let Josip Jelačić serve as Minister of the Colonies. I remember that he made great contributions to the suppression of the rebellion in 1848.

In recent years, he has also performed well in his position as a high-ranking official in Croatia. Whether in road construction or economic development, he has achieved commendable results.”

The cabinet cannot be dominated by Germans indefinitely, as this is not conducive to national unity. In Franz’s view, as long as individuals are loyal and competent, they can be promoted and utilized, regardless of their background.

Josip Jelačić could serve as an example. In the previous years, when Franz had just come to power, he still needed the support of the German aristocracy and inevitably had to make compromises with them.

Now that Franz’s position was secure, it was no longer a problem to promote individuals as he saw fit.

What surprised Franz, however, was that before he could take any action, Prime Minister Felix voluntarily brought up the matter. This meant that the prime minister would have to bear the pressure of the Austrian aristocracy.

After some thought, Franz dismissed this concern. Prime Minister Felix was now seen by the Germans as a national hero, no longer the butcher of the past.

With this halo, even if the conservative aristocrats were dissatisfied, they couldn’t shake his position.

The better the New Holy Roman Empire developed, the brighter Prime Minister Felix’s halo became, enough to suppress some opposition.

Archduke Louis hesitated to speak, feeling his influence in the cabinet diminish as the reformers took control. As the leader of the conservatives, he found himself increasingly marginalized.

At this time, confronting the emperor would not benefit him. It might even end his political career prematurely.

The Minister of War, Prince Windisch-Grätz, said hesitantly: “Your Majesty, the Sinai Peninsula is nothing but a vast desert. Except for a few nomadic tribes living in the few oases, there is nothing there.

Stationing two infantry regiments there is truly wasteful. The local area can’t even sustain itself, and during the dry season, water sources become a problem.”

It was a headache-inducing problem. In this era, Franz couldn’t afford the luxury of desalinated water to supply the stationed troops.

But to ensure influence in the region, it was impossible without a garrison. The current strength of two infantry regiments had already been reduced several times.

If they didn’t station troops now, once the Suez Canal was dug, it would not be so easy to deploy troops.

Franz asked, “The government will consider the cost issue. Food can be transported from the homeland. I have never thought about self-sufficiency on the Sinai Peninsula. So, the only problem is the water supply, correct?”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” replied Prince Windisch-Grätz.

A garrison of thousands of soldiers would consume massive amounts of water resources daily just for eating, drinking, and sanitation. The lack of population growth in the Sinai Peninsula was largely due to the lack of water.

Without addressing this problem, even if there were intentions to deploy large forces, it would not be feasible.

Looking at the map, Franz went on to ask, “Prime Minister, how many indigenous people are there in the Sinai Peninsula?”

After some thought, Prime Minister Felix could not give an exact number and reluctantly replied, “Your Majesty, the Egyptians have not conducted a census of the nomadic tribes on the island. We can only estimate that there are about thirty to fifty thousand people.”

When Franz heard this number, he smiled.

“The water problem is easily solved. As far as I know, the locals mainly raise camels and sheep for a living and rarely grow crops.

These livestock are major consumers of water resources. If the hundreds of thousands of livestock on the island were to disappear, then everyone’s concern about water would no longer be an issue.”

Prime Minister Felix reminded: “Your Majesty, these livestock are the livelihood of the local people. If they’re not allowed to raise livestock, I’m afraid the locals will have no means of livelihood.”

Franz, with a solemn expression on his face, replied, “It’s not a big deal, it’s just a few tens of thousands of people. We can ask the Egyptian government if they are willing to take them in. If they refuse, we can resettle them in West African colonies.

Once the locals have all left, the water resources used by these tens of thousands should be enough for our two regiments of soldiers.

The natural environment of the Sinai Peninsula has already been devastated beyond recognition by the locals. Historically, this place was once shaded by green trees, and cattle and sheep covered the fertile land.

If we don't protect it now and let them continue their destruction, it won't be long before the local ecological balance collapses. The once beautiful Sinai Peninsula will become a wasteland.

By relocating the local population, prohibiting agricultural production, and banning livestock, we can conserve the region's precious water resources.

Our stationed troops can use their free time outside of training to plant trees and grow grass on the island, constantly expanding the oasis area and doing their part to beautify the earth."

At that moment, Franz seemed to have become an environmentalist. He emphasized that the relocation was not just to solve the water supply problem for the stationed troops!

Hundreds of thousands of livestock were significant water consumers, depleting a significant amount of water resources each year.

If this precious fresh water was used for afforestation instead, it could easily increase the forested area by dozens of square kilometers each year. If it were used to grow grass, the increase would be even greater.

Although it seemed negligible now, this was a virtuous cycle! Theoretically, hundreds of years of such efforts would complete the desert oasis plan for the Sinai Peninsula.

Seeing an opportunity, Archduke Louis applauded enthusiastically, "Your Majesty, your words make perfect sense. For the sake of the natural environment of the Sinai Peninsula, we must take immediate action."

Of course, no one would disagree with Franz's proposal. The development of the African continent required a huge population. Relocating and dispersing the population of the Sinai Peninsula would kill two birds with one stone.

Of course, it would be even better if the Egyptian government would be willing to accept these people, thus saving the Austrian government some money.

Finance Minister Karl said with a pained expression, "Your Majesty, let's put aside the issue of immigration from the Sinai Peninsula for the time being!

The refugees we have accepted in Dalmatia have not all been transported over yet. Blindly increasing immigration now would place too much logistical pressure on the colonies.

Last year, the net loss of our colonies was 588,000 guilders, and this year, the net loss is expected to exceed 1.2 million guilders. Quickly turning losses into gains is our top priority."

There was no choice; Austria's colonial activities were currently in a net investment phase. It would take time for the colonies to enter a production phase to reap returns.

In the current African colonial outposts, aside from establishing local farms, the only options were fishing and hunting to supplement food shortages.

The lumberyard is already under construction, but due to attacks from local indigenous tribes, it is currently being cleared and cannot be put into production in the short term.

As for the so-called cotton plantations, rubber plantations, coffee plantations... all are in the planning stage, with capitalists and nobles sending people to inspect.

In the short term, these industries won't be profitable; if they don't find mineral resources, it's difficult to break-even within three to five years.

This was also the reason why nations were unwilling to invest in colonies. The return on investment was too long. It was better to find colonies with gold and silver mines to develop, or to exploit the natives directly.

It was a difference in management philosophy. Franz's development of the African continent was primarily to solve domestic resource shortages and reduce emigration.

Although the African colonies had only recently been established, more than 30,000 people had voluntarily joined the migration effort due to its promotion by the Austrian government.

These people are the main force in the development of the African continent. Now, anyone who signs up can be employed by the government, receive double the salary of the locals, and even serve as a low-ranking official in the colonial government.

If they wanted to get rich, they could join the pioneer teams. All the spoils of wiping out the native tribes were kept by the members. They could also collect bonuses for completing their tasks.

Franz said confidently, "Don't worry. Our colonies in Africa are still in a primitive state and have never been developed. According to geologists, alluvial gold deposits are very likely to occur along river banks. There are also traces of gold in collected river sand, with a high probability of the presence of gold mines.

As long as we discover a large gold mine, all our investments will be recouped, and we'll also have vast, fertile lands that will ensure substantial profits."

Chapter 265: Gold Mine

Guinea

At this time, most of Guinea was still an undeveloped tropical rainforest. Now, during the rainy season, the jungles were even more dangerous.

But this did not dampen the people's enthusiasm for making money. The Austrian colonizers had already begun to move inland. They didn't even need a government to organize them; civilian armed groups who wanted to get rich had already taken action on their own.

In this era, Europeans who voluntarily ventured into the colonies were known for their boldness and courage, much more so than those who were forcibly relocated by the Austrian government.

This was also related to the proportion of young adults among the refugees. Due to the effects of the Balkan wars, massive casualties among young adults meant that most of the refugees going to Africa were women.

This was also good for the development of the African continent by the Austrian government. The colonization activities of this era were basically all done by men. All nations had a headache about

the gender imbalance in the colonies. This problem resulted in a large number of mixed-race children being born in the colonies.

Well, there's no need to worry. The influx of large numbers of female immigrants has solved this problem. Once they start families, things will mostly stabilize.

Franz has already devised a propaganda plan; all that's left is to discover the gold.

There was no alternative, Europeans of this era only recognized gold mines. For most people, mining gold was the easiest way to become rich overnight.

To attract immigrants, Franz reluctantly had to give up the plan to monopolize the gold mines. Of course, not knowing the exact location of the gold mines was also a major reason.

.....

After the rain, Baron Falkner set out with the colonization squad. As a traditional German military aristocratic family, his father's generation had failed to keep up with the times of great change, and the family business had slowly declined.

Originally, the output of the land was not substantial, and after the abolition of serfdom, his income became even less. Relying solely on the income from his land, he could no longer maintain his extravagant aristocratic lifestyle.

To avoid becoming one of the bankrupt nobles, after the Austrian government opened up African colonies, Falkner mortgaged his estate to the bank and organized a colonial armed force of two hundred men.

Unlike other colonial forces, all of his troops had a connection to him; they were all private troops formed from the tenant farmers of his fiefdom.

Falkner's family cultivated these people over many years. Even after the abolition of serfdom, the locals remained loyal to him.

Although his team was only middling in size among the colonization teams going to Africa, its combat power was top-notch.

This was the foundation of an aristocratic family. Even in decline, the remaining capital could not be matched by upstarts.

.....

"Baron, the scouts up ahead have spotted a tribe of natives hunting. There are about one hundred and fifty of them, mainly armed with bows and bone spears." A middle-aged man said solemnly.

Falkner frowned. He deeply disliked dealing with these purely native tribes. There was simply no way to communicate with them.

He was not a slave trader, and he had little interest in capturing slaves. By this time, however, American slave traders had already appeared at the colonial outposts specifically to buy slaves, and they paid well.

As a nobleman, Falkner couldn't lower himself to become a slave trader; he felt it would dishonor the family's name.

He had always looked down on those teams that degenerated into profiting from the slave trade.

The Austrian government had also outlawed the slave trade. Soon after Franz's ascension to the throne, they passed the "Slavery Abolition Act", which provided the legal basis for the emancipation of serfs in Austria.

Of course, this law doesn't apply to the African continent for the time being. As long as slaves are not brought to the Austrian mainland, no one will interfere.

Whether it's Americans or Portuguese engaged in the slave trade, the colonial government never questions or controls them; in Africa, might is right.

Relying solely on the one battalion of Austrian soldiers in the colonial outposts, they were probably no match for the slave traders.

The reality was just that cruel. Overseas colonization also had to take costs into account. Austria has opened more than twenty colonial settlements on the African continent, with the forces of a single infantry division distributed among all of them.

In addition to the government military, the various large and small civilian colonization squads were an important part of the colonial forces. Individually, they seemed insignificant, but collectively they were the equivalent of two infantry divisions.

From the moment they entered the colonies, they became reserve units of the Austrian army. In case of emergency, the colonial governments had the authority to call up all squads.

Falkner asked: "Can we avoid them?"

He had come to seek his fortune by prospecting for gold, not to fight the native tribes. Such conflicts would bring him no glory and would only use up precious weapons and ammunition.

The middle-aged man thought for a moment and said, "I'm afraid not. They're blocking our path, and if we don't stop our advance, it's unlikely we'll be able to avoid them.

Moreover, even if we manage to get around them, there's a good chance we'll be ambushed on our way back. Several teams have been ambushed in the settlements by indigenous tribes.

And these people often wear human skulls on their waists; they are probably cannibal tribes, not friendly folks. We have no reason to be polite to them."

"Bang, bang, bang..."

Before Falkner could give the order, gunfire erupted.

"What's happening?"

"Baron, the enemy has spotted us and is attacking us," a soldier hurriedly reported.

Upon learning that the enemy had attacked, Falkner immediately ordered without hesitation:

"Vinnie, take men to kill them, use guns directly, don't be foolishly engage them in hand-to-hand combat!"

"Yes, sir!"

.....

Gunshots rang out 150 meters away.

“Bang, bang, bang...”

There was no suspense; the battle ended quickly. Dealing with natives stuck in the era of cold weapons didn’t require much effort.

Once the enemy had been routed, Baron Falkner did not order any further pursuit. He was not a slave trader and had no interest in taking prisoners.

A soldier who went to inspect called out excitedly: “Gold!”

“Baron, these natives have a piece of gold. We may have stumbled upon a gold mine!”

The appearance of gold meant that there must be a gold mine nearby. In this era, the range of activity for native tribes was limited, usually within a 180-kilometer radius.

Once the scope was determined, finding the gold mine would not be difficult. Everyone was excited. After months of toiling on the African continent without success, it would be strange if they were not desperate.

Grateful for the discovery of gold, Baron Falkner, in a cheerful mood, said, “Father, give them some last rites!”

The priest replied with obvious disgust, “Forgive me, Lord Baron, they are not believers in God. Besides, I don’t think this evil cannibal tribe deserves a place in heaven; their only destination is hell!”

Savage cannibal tribes were beyond what normal people could accept. Except for brainless idealists, most normal people could not recognize that “cannibalism is a culture”.

Baron Falkner had just been in a good mood and had shown some kindness on a whim, overlooking the identity of the enemy. This did not mean that he had any goodwill towards the savage cannibal tribes.

“Very well, let’s continue searching for the gold mine.”

.....

As if God had played a joke on him, the nearby gold mine did not appear. Instead, the colonial team suffered several attacks from jungle predators, resulting in three deaths and five injuries.

Faced with these apex predators, Falkner’s colonial team found it difficult to cope. The team’s morale inevitably dropped.

“Our supplies are low. If we still don’t find the gold mine after searching this area, we’ll return to the outpost for supplies first. Let’s start preparing food. After eating, except for those who are assigned to the night watch, the rest of you should rest well. If there are still no results tomorrow, we’ll come back next time.

Don’t worry, the gold mine is underground, it won’t run away. This is a God-given opportunity, and our current predicament is a test for us!” Baron Falkner reassured them.

After the reassurance, the mood of the team stabilized. Searching for a gold mine was never smooth sailing, and encountering setbacks was part of the process.

The legendary man-eating flowers, cannibal trees, devil sorcerers — they encountered none of them, only some poisonous bugs and ferocious beasts. That could already be considered good luck, Falkner consoled himself.

His funds were running low, and if he couldn't find the gold mine, he would have to become a mercenary, serving the colonial government for a fee or working for slave traders to earn commissions to keep the team going.

After a long hesitation, family honor finally prevailed. He still could not stoop so low as to serve slave traders.

Serving the colonial government was still serving the Empire. Although the income might be less, the status was different!

As a nobleman, it would be a problem if he could earn merit but still couldn't rise to a high position in the colonies.

At that moment, a familiar voice sounded: "Baron, this is the river sand we found in the river ahead. It seems to contain gold."

After speaking, the man handed the river sand shimmering with gold to Baron Falkner.

After examining it, Falkner quickly said, "Hurry, please bring Father Bartig here. We may have found a gold mine."

During this time, European priests often had multiple roles, such as teachers, scientists, engineers, and more. Without family responsibilities, they had ample time each day to acquire knowledge, resulting in a generally decent level of knowledge.

Father Bartig was recruited by Baron Falkner with the promise that once they found the gold mine, he would sponsor the construction of a Catholic church and help him spread the Gospel in the colonial settlement.

The camp was not very large, and Father Bartig, who was in the midst of prayer, was called upon to determine if the glittering substance in the river sand was indeed gold.

Father Bartig held a magnifying glass and observed carefully for a while, saying, "God bless you, Baron, you've finally found a gold mine. However, I still need to personally explore the riverbank to determine the gold content in the river sand. If it exceeds 5 grams, then it has development value.

Judging from this handful of river sand, the gold content in this area should be quite high. Based on my experience, it should not be less than 5 grams."

Falkner replied eagerly, "No problem, Father. It's late, so we'll rest for the night. Tomorrow we can go out and explore the area."

The presence of gold in river sand was no secret, but the content was often meager. In over a hundred tests, the gold content per ton of river sand never exceeded 3 grams.

This number might be considered a rich ore deposit in later times, but at that time it had no mining value at all. Even if they were to forcibly mine it and refine it, there would be no profit.

At first, Baron Falkner was enthusiastic about testing the river sand, but he gradually became disheartened. It was only when he saw the glint of gold in that handful of sand that he paid attention to it.

Since it was visible to the naked eye, the gold content was obviously not low. However, this handful of river sand was not indicative, and actual field exploration was required to determine the exact gold content.

Father Bartig replied, "Baron, I have no objections. You can make the arrangements for these matters."

Chapter 266: Sensation

After a week of investigation, Father Bartig made the final judgment, "Congratulations, Baron. You are about to become rich. This is an alluvial gold deposit. The alluvial sands on the surface contain 8 grams of gold per ton and sampling of the ore underneath shows an astounding 16 grams of gold per ton.

This gold deposit extends for two kilometers along the river, and the estimated reserves may reach up to 50 tons. As long as it is reported to the colonial government, it is yours."

When they heard the news, everyone was excited. Such a rich vein was rare in Austria.

The ecstatic Baron Falkner forcibly suppressed his emotions and immediately declared, "Not only will I get rich, but we will all get rich. Everyone, please be assured that the original agreement remains valid. This gold mine belongs to all of us, including the young men who sacrificed themselves to find it.

I can use the honor of the Stryi Family to assure everyone that once the registration is completed in the colony, half of the profits from the gold mine will be yours. Now, let's work together to defend this gold mine that belongs to us!"

The discovery of a gold mine also meant that the most dangerous time had arrived. In overseas colonization, conflicts arising from huge interests and unequal distribution were common.

Forget about internal conflicts, even leaks before securing ownership from the colonial government were very dangerous.

In the face of immense profits, betrayal and internal conflict were not uncommon. In the vast expanses of Africa, the most dangerous adversaries were not the jungles or the cannibalistic indigenous tribes, but the large numbers of fellow colonizers.

Baron Falkner's financial resources were limited, and he spent most of them on providing weapons and equipment for everyone. As a result, he couldn't afford to pay salaries.

Without money, he had to rely on the promise of a share of the profits from the gold mine as the main incentive to keep the team together.

Clearly, the Stryi Family's reputation still carried weight with these men. Were it not for long-standing notions of status, the atmosphere would be even more heated.

"Generous Baron, please be assured that we will defend the gold mine with our lives!"

“Esteemed Baron, don’t worry. The mine will not be lost as long as we still draw breath!”

.....

The crowd reassured him with a cacophony of assurances.

After receiving their assurances, Baron Falkner smiled with satisfaction. To ensure the safety of the gold mine, he had to register and report to the colonial authorities.

Even with ownership established, that did not mean the gold mine was safe. In Africa, there was no shortage of desperados, making the security of the mine a top priority.

For some weaker colonial teams, even if they discovered a gold mine, they lacked the strength to exploit it and could only sell it to the colonial government in exchange for a one-time reward.

Obviously, Baron Falkner was not a shortsighted man. Selling the gold mine to the colonial government might net him 500,000 to 600,000 guilders at most, but if he were to exploit it himself, the final profit could reach several million guilders.

.....

After Baron Falkner secured ownership of the gold mine, news of the discovery in Guinea quickly made its way back to the home country.

Sch?nbrunn Palace

Franz, who was busy making babies, was also excited by the news. A gold mine meant wealth, and it was expected that Guinea would soon experience a gold rush.

Franz had some recollection of the Gold Coast in the Gulf of Guinea, but the exact location of the gold mine was unknown.

Many geographical names from the future did not exist in this era, and even if he remembered them, they wouldn’t be of any use.

Just like the gold mine discovered in Guinea now, whether it was in the future region of Guinea or not, was a big question mark.

The African continent was still an unclaimed land. The colonial governments had no concept of sovereignty. Whoever occupied it owned it, and that was that.

It was at the Berlin Conference that the future boundaries of the African nations were established. Before that, the various regions had no clear borders. Whoever occupied it, it belonged to them.

The harsh reality caused Franz to give up the dream of digging for gold to strike it rich. However, the news of gold was still an excellent way to attract immigrants.

Among gold prospectors, only a very small number ever struck it rich. Most of them ended up spending all their money without finding gold, eventually having to stay in the colonies and find work to sustain themselves.

Africa is known, among other things, for its vast tracts of land. With an abundance of labor, developing the local land can yield profits that far exceed the output of one or two gold mines.

A maid’s voice sounded: “Your Majesty, the cabinet ministers have arrived.”

“Yes, I’ll be right there,” Franz replied.

The allure of the gold mines was enormous, especially for a large rich vein, attracting many covetous glances that even the Austrian government cabinet was no exception.

When gold is converted into money, its appeal is greatly diminished. One ton of gold is worth only 273,200 guilders, and fifty tons of gold is worth just over 13 million guilders.

In reality, there are costs associated with mining gold, and the final net profit may only be around 3 to 4 million guilders. In addition, mining gold takes time, and the average annual return may only be around 100,000 to 200,000 guilders.

For Franz, this could be considered a relatively small sum. For the Austrian government, it’s just one day’s worth of annual revenue.

Clearly, the calculations are not that straightforward. The primary use of gold for the government is as a reserve to issue currency, harboring much greater potential profits.

.....

The Minister of Finance, Karl, said confidently, “Your Majesty, a large gold mine has been discovered in Africa. After analysis by geological experts, there may be other gold mines in the surrounding areas. The colonial government has already blocked the news.

If we organize manpower now for a comprehensive survey, there will certainly be huge profits. The African colonies can turn losses into profits immediately.”

Franz was puzzled. He hadn’t heard of a large concentration of mines in Guinea. The discovery of one large gold mine wasn’t surprising, but the discovery of an entire region of gold mines should have caused a sensation.

However, Franz was not in a hurry to deny the finance minister’s words. In this era, the colonies were all developing freely. If a colonization team had gone beyond Guinea and discovered gold, he would not find it strange at all.

Guinea was not large. Colonization forces could not be expected to operate within the borders of the future. Only they knew how far out they went.

The Minister of Colonies, Josip Jelačić, suggested: “Your Majesty, the Gulf of Guinea has long been known as the Gold Coast. Now that gold has been discovered again in Guinea, it means that the gold in this region has not been fully exploited.

Now, while the news hasn’t leaked out, let’s send troops to occupy the entire region and then slowly search for gold mines!”

Franz shook his head, drew some lines on the map, and asked: “We can expand in the Gulf of Guinea, but the British, Portuguese, Dutch, and French all have outposts along the coast.

We can’t get into conflicts with so many countries at once. The best method is to avoid these outposts and expand inland. Is that feasible?”

The name Gold Coast was too well-known. Although few new gold mines had been found there in recent decades, it had already become the center of the African slave trade, with slave traders from various countries gathering there.

Though their individual strength might not be formidable, once united they could pose a significant challenge. Moreover, it was a delicate situation where one move could trigger the involvement of the various countries behind them. If Austria wanted to monopolize the Gold Coast, it would be nothing but a pipe dream!

Josip Jelačić replied confidently, “Your Majesty, most of the colonial strongholds established by these countries in the region are private endeavors, not organized by their governments.

We can send in private armed groups to compete with them. Even if we don’t drive them out, it is possible to establish additional strongholds in the coastal areas.

As long as we have a sufficient number of immigrants in the local population, we will seize the initiative in colonization. Before there is a widespread discovery of gold mines, the involvement of various governments will be limited.

As long as we build up enough of an advantage before then, things can be negotiated later. Nothing more than everyone sharing interests, dividing territory according to actual strength in the region.”

Private armed groups were the main force in the overseas colonization activities of nations. Even when they skirmished, there was room for maneuver. Governments would not be directly drawn in.

After a moment’s hesitation, Franz circled several regions on the map of Africa and then said, “Let’s make these areas our contested targets. They are all regions which may have significant amounts of gold.

But our primary goal is not gold. The most valuable asset in Africa is the undeveloped fertile land, followed by some natural minerals, and finally gold.

Even if the gold is plentiful, what can we do? The annual extraction is limited, and it’s not worth investing a significant amount of resources and getting into conflicts with other countries.

So if the situation is unfavorable, we should just let it go. There may be gold in the coastal areas, but there is even more in the inland areas.

We may not have the capability to extensively develop the inland, but authorizing private organizations to act freely for development is a good idea.

If other countries focus their efforts on competing for Ghana and the Ivory Coast, then we can take on the challenging task of Nigeria. It’s a good opportunity to clarify our interests in West Africa.”

Everyone was shocked when they heard Franz’s explanation. Only a land power like Austria could say such a thing. If it were a maritime power, such talk would be nonsense.

It’s not that everyone is short-sighted, but the reality is that gold mining can be profitable in just one or two years, while plantations and cash crops can take five to six years to see results.

It also required a sufficient number of immigrants. Unfortunately, the major colonial empires were all short of people. Their domestic populations were already inadequate; where would they find the ability to develop colonies?

Small countries like the Netherlands and Portugal with less than 5 million people didn’t even need to be mentioned. Even Great Britain and France had only about 30 million people, growing at a snail’s pace. With so many colonies, there was no way to develop them all.

Austria, on the other hand, is in a better position. With fewer colonies and a substantial domestic population, coupled with a higher population growth rate than Western Europe, it has the human resources necessary for in-depth development.

Finance Minister Karl reminded: “Your Majesty, if the government relinquishes the monopoly on the gold mines, I’m afraid our colonies will be operating at a loss for a long time.”

“This kind of loss is within our tolerance. Giving up the benefits of monopolizing the gold mines can bring a large influx of immigrants.

By artificially controlling the situation, the gold rush can last at least five to six years. As long as a third of these prospectors decide to stay, our foundation on the African continent will be solid,” Franz replied calmly.

Not everyone involved in the gold rush may make money, but those who provide logistical support to the prospectors are likely to profit.

What the government needed was to establish a colony with long-term and sustainable development, not a colony that prospered because of gold mining and then declined when the gold was exhausted.

Is the colony really in the red? The answer to that question depends on how you calculate it.

If we simply calculate tax revenues and administrative and military expenses, the books may show a loss. However, the gold rush will also create a local market that will expand the sales of Austrian domestic industrial and commercial goods.

For example: tents, kettles, shovels, hardware, ships...

With so many related industries receiving orders, massive tax revenues would inevitably be generated and fed back into the annual revenues.

Even if it doesn’t completely cover the losses, the government can buy gold locally, use it as a reserve currency, and collect currency taxes. That way, there should still be a profit, right?

Many colonies of various countries are running at a deficit, but they haven’t given up. It’s clear that there are hidden benefits behind the scenes.

.....

The Austrian government lifted the news blockade. News of the major gold discovery in Guinea quickly spread throughout the new Holy Roman Empire and then throughout Germany.

This was only the beginning. Following Baron Falkner’s discovery of the gold mine, others began to find gold mines as well, although these mines were not as large.

But that didn’t matter, as long as there was a gold mine. Even some mines with so little gold that they had no mining value were shamelessly advertised by the unscrupulous Colonial Ministry.

After all, they were all gold mines. The authorities only announced the reserves and gave vague figures for the gold content of the ore.

For example: 0.8~45 grams. The gold content of 0.8 grams per ton might not even be the lowest amount in actuality, but the 45 grams per ton would undoubtedly be the highest, perhaps even far exceeding the actual highest gold content.

This data was enough to fool the masses. The gold content varied from ore to ore, and such a wide range was normal. Even the crappiest gold mine could occasionally produce high-grade ore!

The media cooperated seamlessly in the propaganda. Stories of someone becoming rich overnight during the gold rush were circulated, and Baron Falkner became a well-known figure, known to everyone as an overnight millionaire.

As for the wealth that is still underground and the cost of mining gold, the media has chosen to ignore these facts.

Chapter 267: Gold Rush

No one could resist the temptation of gold. Ever since Baron Falkner discovered the first gold mine, it seemed as if God had opened a door and gold mines of various sizes were discovered one after another.

The scope is no longer limited to the Guinea region. Gold mines have also been discovered in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Mali, and other regions.

Even the most conservative nobles in Germany could not resist. They sent their family members to organize overseas development groups to compete for this huge cake.

Vienna Palace

Lopez, the chairman of the German Cultural Exchange Association, said: "Your Majesty, recently many German nobles have expressed their goodwill to us, hoping to participate in this competition for gold mines. What do you think about letting them participate as well?"

After the Paris Conference, Franz ordered the formation of the German Cultural Exchange Association, whose main purpose was to continue to raise the banner of reunification.

It is very popular among the youth, arts, and education circles in Germany. Through the association, the Austrian government organizes the German Cultural Exchange Conference every year.

Not only people from the New Holy Roman Empire, the German Federal Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia, but also people from independent countries like Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands participated.

The conference venues also rotate among the member states of Germany. The funds are nominally from civilian donations, but in reality, a large part of it is provided by the Austrian government.

The German nobles mentioned by Lopez were probably not from the domestic nobility of the New Holy Roman Empire, since those families interested in such matters had probably already joined. Instead, these nobles probably came from other regions.

"As long as they identify with the Germanic culture, anyone can join, whether they are nobles, civil organizations, or individuals. You can promote that point.

The land we are developing in Africa is not only for the New Holy Roman Empire but also to open up living space for the entire German nation.

We welcome every compatriot to join and contribute to our second homeland.

The Austrian government is formulating laws to encourage immigration. All German immigrants will enjoy the best conditions."

Franz was still worried about the lack of immigrants, so how could he refuse them to join?

At that time noblemen who ventured into gold mining wouldn't go alone. Without organizing an armed team, even if they discovered a gold mine in Africa, they wouldn't be able to defend it.

The abolition of serfdom in the German region has not been so long ago, and the influence of the nobles has not yet dissipated. If they take the lead in organizing armed immigrants, it will be much more effective than government propaganda.

As long as they can lure people, Franz is not afraid of them leaving. At worst, he can distribute land. This has no appeal to capitalists but is very different for poor ordinary immigrants.

Are you afraid that farms won't be able to retain people? After all, there was plenty of unclaimed land in Africa. First, they could do some logging and sell the timber, and then they could develop farms and plantations.

Once one is lured, a whole family is lured. For people who can't even eat their fill back in their home country, suddenly they have their own farm. They certainly won't hesitate to immigrate!

While conditions in the United States might be better, there was also a lot of uncertainty. Achieving ownership of one's own farm could take a lifetime for many.

In Africa, Emperor Franz had a lot of land to distribute. The prerequisite was to overcome local diseases that posed a high personal risk.

To increase the number of immigrants, Franz had to arouse people's patriotic enthusiasm. "Building a second homeland" was the government's slogan for immigration.

.....

Guinea

The Royal Bank has been established on the African continent for more than a year. Since the stabilization of the colonial outposts, the Royal Bank has opened branches here, becoming one of the first banks to enter the Austrian colonies.

Now they have added another service — providing loans to cash-strapped mine owners. Developing gold mines requires substantial investment, and most prospectors cannot come up with the necessary funds. As a result, there is a need for loans.

While everyone else was rushing to find gold mines, Franz did not follow suit. He was well aware that not everyone who prospected for gold would necessarily make a profit. Providing logistical services, however, would undoubtedly be profitable.

Newly rich mine owners who had just discovered gold were the bank's most valuable customers. With gold mining rights as collateral, there was no need to worry about their ability to repay.

.....

The bank's account manager, Tendris, smiled and said, "Lord Baron, these are already the most favorable loan conditions. If you don't believe me, you can go out and inquire. In Neubruck, is there any other financing channel with lower interest rates than the Royal Bank?"

Baron Falkner shrugged and said, "Mr. Tendris, the Royal Bank is the only bank in the entire Neubruck area. Where can I go to inquire?"

If there are other financing channels outside, they must be usurious loans from the underworld. You can't possibly follow in their footsteps as that would damage the glorious image of the great Emperor Franz!"

Baron Falkner also knew that he didn't have much room to negotiate. At present, there was only one bank in the entire Austrian colonial territory of Africa, and he could not possibly go back to the mainland just to get funding.

Time was of the essence in the development of gold mines. The sooner they started development, the sooner they could extract gold and make a profit.

He certainly had not forgotten the mountain of debt back home, with his family fief as collateral. Although the land does not produce much income, he does not want to become the prodigal son who lost his inheritance.

Unfazed, Tendris replied, "Lord Baron, you have quite a sense of humor. Is there any reason to doubt the credibility of the Royal Bank?"

You should be aware that the cost of doing business on the African continent is much higher than in our home country. Currently, Neubruck is in its infancy and we have hardly any business here.

Interest rates are slightly higher than in the home country, mainly to amortize operating costs. As the economy in Neubruck becomes more stable and our customer base grows, these interest rates will naturally come down."

Baron Falkner said helplessly: "Mr. Tendris, your loan interest is not just a little higher, 1.5% monthly interest is a full three times higher than domestic loans.

Even for the highest-risk commercial loans, the interest is no more than that. I have pledged part of the property rights of the gold mine as collateral. You really don't have to worry about defaulting at all."

Tendris shook his head and said, "Baron Falkner, you can't calculate it like that. This is the African continent, and there are always risks.

Threats from indigenous tribes to the gold mine, threats from diseases in various countries. Your gold mine reserves may be good, but the development environment is challenging, and accidents can happen at any time.

In the worst-case scenario, we will suffer irreparable losses.

The Royal Bank is a compassionate institution. If you are unable to meet your obligations due to force majeure, we will only take possession of the collateral without pursuing your personal liability.

In fact, we have already shared the risks with you. At that point, the property rights to the gold mine would be virtually worthless.

In addition, if you encounter difficulties during the mining process, the Royal Bank will shield you from external pressures. If you decide not to use this service, we can still negotiate the interest rates."

The last point was the most appealing to Baron Falkner. Bringing the Royal Bank into the picture might deter the prying eyes of hungry wolves.

As for whether he would be swallowed up by the Royal Bank, he is not worried at all. A small gold mine is not even worth the Royal Bank staking its reputation on.

After a moment's hesitation, Baron Falkner said, "I can pay with gold. Can I at least get a discount?"

Tendris smiled and replied, "Certainly, we can settle at 98% of the international market price for gold, and that's already the maximum discount.

I can assure you that the future price of gold in Neubruck will not exceed 95% of the international gold market, which is common practice in all gold-producing regions."

After pondering for a moment and feeling the price was decent, Baron Falkner did not hesitate further. He directly picked up the pen and signed the contract.

After the transaction was completed, Tendris continued his sales pitch, "Baron Falkner, I believe you'll need mining equipment as well, and there are ready-made options in Neubruck.

We have a partnership with the Austrian Machinery Group. If you haven't made any purchases yet, you might want to check them out. Their quality is definitely equal to or better than any similar products."

Baron Falkner replied politely, "Thank you. I've heard of the Austrian Machinery Group's reputation in the mainland. As long as the price is reasonable, I'm more than willing to work with them."

Baron Falkner wasn't interested in delving into the relationship between the Royal Bank and the Austrian Machinery Group. How big shots make money wasn't his concern.

However, he did need machinery now, and ordering from the homeland would take months, which was impractical.

He was willing to accept as long as the prices were not exorbitant. The profits from the gold mine were more than enough to cover all these investments, and all he lacked was time.

.....

The discovery of large quantities of gold led to a gold rush. After the year 1856, the local situation was no longer under the control of the Austrian government. People from various countries, including the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and Americans joined the gold rush.

Almost every day prospectors were rushing in from all over the world. In just one year, the population of Guinea's Gold Coast increased by nearly 200,000.

This number was only the beginning, as more people continued to arrive from all corners of the world. Conflicts among immigrants and between governments also increased.

Especially in the region of Ghana, where the influence of great powers was complex and the number of discovered gold mines was the highest, it became the focal point of conflicts between different powers.

Austria, which acted first, undoubtedly gained an advantage, at least in terms of the number of immigrants.

At this time, propaganda played a role. The German Federal Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia had little influence in this competition. The majority of German immigrants gathered under the banner of the New Holy Roman Empire.

Combined with the earlier immigrants in the region, the New Holy Roman Empire's total population in its colonial territories in Guinea's Gold Coast colonial surpassed 200,000 at this point, exceeding the combined total of gold prospectors from other countries.

The saying "strength in numbers" is absolutely true, at least when it comes to searching for gold mines, as it provided a clear advantage by allowing the preemptive occupation of a large number of gold mines.

To deal with colonial conflicts, Franz appointed a governor for the Gulf of Guinea, incorporated all German prospectors into the reserves, and raised a division of infantry troops to the domestic garrison.

It can be said that Franz could mobilize a force of up to a hundred thousand troops with a single command, enough to sweep away all colonial territories of other nations in this region.

Austria had the advantage on land, while Britain and France had the advantage at sea. Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and other countries, though not as powerful, also had a share of the interests.

How to manage relations with various countries became the primary task of all parties involved. No one country could dominate alone, as no one could face so many enemies.

In addition, the gold mines might look very tempting, but due to the limitations of mining technology, only about 180 tons of gold could be mined annually in this region. After deducting costs, the remaining profits were clearly insufficient to pay for the war expenditures.

Chapter 268: West African Conflict

At the beginning of 1856, Franz received good news — the Empress was pregnant. Now the entire Vienna Palace was focused on Princess Helene's pregnancy. Everyone in the House of Habsburg attached great importance to the new heir.

At times, Franz couldn't help but wonder, "What if it's a princess?" Not that he disliked having a daughter, but politically, he needed an heir.

Although there was precedent for a female ruler in the Habsburg dynasty, it didn't necessarily mean that conservative Austria would readily accept another empress.

Ever since Princess Helene became pregnant, Archduchess Sophie became nervous. For women at that time, pregnancy was like walking through the door of death. They had to be extremely careful.

"Franz, now that Helene is pregnant, you must keep a certain distance from her. Being too intimate will affect the safety of the fetus. You know what I mean, right?"

In an awkward situation, Franz could only nod in agreement. He truly wanted to retort, "Do you think I lack a sense of propriety?"

There was no way around it. In his mother's eyes, he was still just an immature child. Arguing back would only lead to a scolding.

Franz changed the subject and asked, “By the way, Mother, how are the preparations for Maximilian’s wedding going?”

Maximilian’s bride this time was Princess Carlota, daughter of Leopold I, King of Belgium. It was a purely political marriage, without any romantic considerations.

Franz took a serious approach to the affairs of his younger siblings, instituting a strict military-style management. Any deviation from the established principles was promptly suppressed.

Confidently, Archduchess Sophie replied, “Rest assured, I will handle it well. But after Maximilian’s wedding, how do you plan to arrange his responsibilities?”

In European royal families, the younger members were also expected to make a meaningful contribution, not just live a life of leisure.

Franz replied, “It depends on what he likes to do and the extent of his personal abilities.”

Franz wasn’t sure how to deal with this younger brother. In history, Maximilian had hardly ventured out before falling prey to liberal ideas.

While serving as viceroy of the Italian territories, he directly undermined the rule of the Habsburg monarchy in the region.

From a historical perspective, Franz believed that the most appropriate roles for Maximilian would be those of an artist or a botanist.

This is entirely determined by his personal abilities and interests. However, Franz didn’t dare to make this suggestion. In the eyes of Archduchess Sophie, Maximilian was still very outstanding.

If he doesn’t allow his younger brother to experience a few setbacks, he’ll likely end up being a coddled idler at home. People may even think that Franz is suppressing his brother.

Moreover, is Maximilian really willing to accept Franz’s arrangements? Remember, historically, he went off to Mexico to become an emperor.

Without ambitions, how could he possibly wade into such troubled waters? Franz is well aware of the situation in Mexico — it’s a country misled by liberalism.

As an emperor, you shouldn’t fear a country being conservative; what you should fear most is an excess of freedom, losing the most basic constraints.

Franz is not prepared to wade into such troubled waters. If Maximilian has exceptional personal abilities, possessing extraordinary talents, then investing in him might yield returns exceeding the costs.

To say nothing of Maximilian, even Franz himself didn’t believe that he could solve the internal conflicts in Mexico. Otherwise, the imperial crown wouldn’t have fallen so easily on Maximilian’s head.

.....

Vienna Palace

Metternich expressed his concern: “Your Majesty, the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is becoming increasingly complex. Various forces from different countries are gathering, and armed conflict could erupt at any moment.

Two months ago, a Portuguese infantry battalion set out to confirm the ownership of some gold mines. Accompanied by more than 500 civilian militiamen, they all disappeared without a trace, and there has been no word to date.

Well, there are various speculations. Some say they discovered a super-rich gold mine and were silenced; others say they encountered supernatural forces and were all killed.”

The situation in the Gulf of Guinea was created by Franz himself. Without the extensive propaganda of the Austrian government, there would not have been such an influx of prospectors.

Order has yet to be established on the African continent. Within colonial outposts, a semblance of order can be glimpsed, but once beyond these outposts, control is completely lost.

Not discovering a gold mine is one thing, and even if there’s a skirmish, it usually doesn’t escalate too much. But once a gold mine is discovered, that’s when the real fighting begins.

When a small, armed colonial team discovers a gold mine, the first priority is to keep it secret and then sell the information to the colonial government. Openly mining is out of the question.

Without enough strength, if you were ambushed outside, you wouldn’t even know who the attacker was.

In the beginning, it would have been enough to send a few people from the colonial government to scout out the gold mine and establish ownership. Now, without a military escort, if their movements were discovered, it would be strange if they weren’t swallowed whole.

Attacking government forces is unprecedented, and unless you can ensure complete secrecy, even the slightest leak can have disastrous consequences.

Franz asked, “Could it be the work of a military force from another country?”

The fighting ability of the Portuguese army is not impressive. It’s easy to defeat a Portuguese infantry battalion, but it’s not so easy to wipe them all out.

As for the supernatural claims, Franz dismissed them out of hand. Austria had been involved in African colonization for so long, and no extraordinary creatures had been discovered. How could they suddenly appear?

Metternich replied, “I do not know, but there is certainly a traitor within the colonial ranks. Without internal collusion, it’s impossible for them to be completely annihilated.

The fact that so many people have disappeared without a trace and no bodies have been found points to a serious problem. Someone is covering up the truth.”

It didn’t matter to Franz what the truth was, the problem now was that the most likely suspect was Austria. There weren’t many armed forces in the Gulf of Guinea capable of doing this, and Austria’s local colonial troops had that level of strength.

Among the armed teams registered in the Austrian colonial outposts, there are twelve teams with more than 500 members each. These teams were formed by German states or collaborations of several nobles.

All these people had the strength to do this. With so many suspects under them, suspicion was unavoidable.

Franz does not worry about these suspicions. Without evidence, the Portuguese can't do anything. Also, just because troops disappeared didn't necessarily mean they were completely annihilated; it was also possible that they got lost and turned into savages in the jungle.

While the likelihood of this is low, there have been precedents where some colonial teams have suffered heavy casualties due to getting lost in the jungle.

“The truth is not important to us, and the place where the Portuguese disappeared is not under our control. We have no obligation to investigate on their behalf.

The current issue is that we must quickly stabilize the situation in West Africa. If conflicts between various countries continue, it could likely escalate into larger conflicts.

In the event of a major conflict in the region that causes the situation to spiral out of control, many immigrants who originally planned to settle in the Gulf of Guinea may abandon their plans and decide to migrate to various countries in the Americas instead.

Without a sufficient population, it will be difficult for us to control the West African region. To quickly stabilize the local situation, we must work with the governments of various countries to establish the most basic order in the region.”

It's not that Franz doesn't want to find the real culprit, but he doesn't dare to continue the investigation. Franz can only confirm that the Austrian government forces did not attack the Portuguese. It's hard to say whether civilian armies were involved.

If a conflict erupted over a huge gold mine, and they resorted to killing to keep it under wraps, Franz wouldn't be surprised. In the face of interests, people's moral principles often take a back seat.

If the investigation led back to their own people, that would be a big problem. One misstep could trigger an even larger political crisis, and Franz had no interest in such self-inflicted hardship.

Apart from the Portuguese themselves, he guessed that the attitude of every government was the same — investigate seriously and you might get burned, better to play dumb.

Metternich replied: “Your Majesty, the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is extremely complex, with various national forces intricately intertwined. It would be very difficult to demarcate territories at the negotiating table.

The best solution is joint international administration. Everyone can help to form a colonial government together, and as for the gold mines, let the civilian armies compete freely, each using its own methods.”

Franz still wasn't sure if this was the best choice, the only thing certain was that it was the best for Austria.

In free competition, the side with the greater number of people would naturally have an advantage. And this order would only exist in areas controlled by the colonial government anyway, once you're out in the wilderness, who could enforce order?

Franz smiled and said, “Agreed. Regardless of the kind of order, having order is always better than having none.”

Chapter 269: Lack of Manpower

Guinea

With the earliest discovered gold mine already in operation, the chaotic situation immediately dashed Baron Falkners thoughts of continuing to search for gold mines.

There were simply too many competitors and examples of cutthroat competition for profit were plentiful.

Guinea was relatively better off. It was fully under the control of the Austrian colonial government, and a basic order had been established.

As long as ownership of gold mines was registered and reported to the colonial government, even if something happened to the mine owner, the government would reclaim the rights, ensuring that they never fell into the hands of others.

Attempts to seize gold mines by force were severely punished by the colonial government, with perpetrators facing the gallows if caught. This effectively curbed large-scale conflicts.

Just because they couldnt seize the gold mines didnt mean there was peace. After the gold is extracted, it still has to be sold, and the most dangerous moments are during transportation.

To combat the gold bandits, the colonial government had used garrison troops on several occasions, even resorting to entrapment, but the effects were minimal.

With no other options, everyone could only strengthen their defenses, increase the number of escorts, and even go the extra mile to reduce the amount of gold transported each time. This was the only way to prevent such situations.

Lord Baron, the production of our gold mine has increased to 1,800 pounds per month. At the current rate of transporting 100 pounds at a time, its far too slow.

Its not safe to have a considerable amount of gold in the mines. If word of this gets out, well be in danger, warned Father Bartig.

Worrying about a high gold production might sound like a joke if spoken out loud, but now he was genuinely troubled by it.

His gold mine was more than 200 kilometers away from Neubruck, passing through forests along the way, making it vulnerable to ambush.

Whenever they transported gold, they didnt dare plan the route in advance for fear of leaks.

Theres no way around it; Baron Falkners colonial team is not large, and they have to leave guards at the gold mine. The escort team cant exceed seventy people at a time.

Baron Falkner said with a pained expression, Lets wait for now. Ive already spoken to the Neubruck Colonial Government. They will send people to collect the gold and provide us with logistical support.

For the sake of safety, Baron Falkner had to sell the gold to the colonial government at a lower price, allowing them to send military forces to collect the gold.

He hadnt ruled out using mercenaries, but their fees werent cheap, and safety wasnt guaranteed.

Father Bartig said with relief, This is the best solution. There is always money to be earned, but safety comes first.

But you still have to consider one problem: the shortage of gold miners. The workers we've hired so far can't do it for the long term, they basically leave after earning a certain amount of money.

Labor shortages are a common problem faced by all gold mines. Falkner had considered hiring local workers, but unfortunately, they weren't suited for the job.

They were undisciplined, disregarded the rules of the gold mine, and operated without regard to regulations. In addition to their inefficiency, the frequent occurrence of accidents was a critical issue.

After a month of persistence, he was in despair with these people. Obediently, he paid high prices to hire prospectors from colonial outposts.

Baron Falkner said uncertainly: I've already written to friends back home about this, asking them to help recruit a number of workers to come here. Wages here are three times higher than it is domestically so we should be able to attract people.

This was the African continent, and even though the wages were higher than in the mainland, the death rate was high! Of those who came with him to seek their fortune, a tenth had already fallen, from illness, from battle, and from all kinds of accidents.

Daring, ambitious people will come rushing over of their own accord without needing recruitment. However, for the ordinary folks, unless they find it impossible to survive in their homeland, who would willingly come here to take risks?

The workers Baron Falkner needs are precisely these ordinary people those who can work steadily without causing trouble, thus ensuring the work can be carried out long-term.

Prospectors only come to work when they need money. As soon as they make some, they leave to look for gold on their own. It is always better to look for gold for oneself than to risk one's life for others.

These independent prospectors are different. When they find gold, they sell it directly to the colonial government, take their money, and leave.

Father Bartig nodded and said, That is best. If possible, I hope we can have the church built by the end of the year.

He serves Baron Falkner primarily to have his own church rather than working under someone else.

Neubruck already has a Catholic church, built with funds from the colonial government. This is a tradition of European culture, as the church has become an integral part of people's lives.

Baron Falkner promised: Rest assured, Father. As soon as the mine is on the right track, I'll finance the construction of your church. But have you decided on a location for the church?

After pondering for a while, Father Bartig finally spoke, Originally, I was planning to build it in Neubruck, but there's already a church there. As a latecomer, it wouldn't be easy for me to develop a congregation locally.

Now I'm lost, and I don't know where to build a church. Lord Baron, do you have any suggestions?

Baron Falkner analyzed: Father, your purpose for building a church is mainly for missionary work, so it must be in a populous area.

Naturally, the first choice is Neubruck, and the second would be the new colonial outposts, but those places already have churches.

Since everyone is working to spread the Lords Gospel, theres no need to be too close together. How about building the church near the gold mine? When all the workers are here, the population wont be less than five thousand.

The terrain is flat, the land is fertile, and theres plenty of water, making it suitable for agricultural production. Ive already applied to the colonial government to establish a small town here. Once the gold mine is on the right track, I plan to develop a farm here.

Also, Ive spoken with my subordinates, and theyre also interested in setting up farms here and bringing their families over. Theres no need to worry about the future development potential.

Moving here is essential; the gold mine cant be relocated, and they wont be able to leave without extracting all the gold. Who would be willing to abandon their own gold mine?

Baron Falkner was a traditional nobleman, reluctant to get involved in trade and industry, but he was exceptionally fond of establishing farms.

Hes not alone; many Germans have a fondness for farms. This is evidenced by the fact that a significant number of farm owners in the United States in later years were of German descent.

Since they will be staying here for a long time, starting a farm and becoming self-sufficient in food production is also a good choice.

It is extremely difficult to acquire land in Austria, but the situation is different in Africa. At the moment, people are being encouraged by the colonial government to develop farms and plantations. The person who develops the land will own it, and such opportunities are rare.

Baron Falkner was very clear about the domestic determination to develop the Guinea region. The current turmoil wouldnt last indefinitely. Once the situation stabilized, investing in agriculture was a good choice.

Even if its just to solve the food problem for the mine workers and avoid buying from a base over 200 kilometers away, its a worthwhile investment.

After hesitating for a moment, Father Bartig said somewhat incredulously, Lord Baron, youre not planning to exchange your domestic fiefdom for this place, are you?

Baron Falkner denied: No, I will not give up the familys ancestral property! Its just that I have a lot of children. If I dont leave them with a few more properties, it wont be enough for them.

According to Germanic tradition, the eldest son inherits the family business and the younger sons can only receive a small portion of the inheritance. This is based on the assumption that the family is wealthy.

If the economic situation is not good, the eldest son inherits the family business, and the younger sons have to venture out on their own.

Venturing out is not that easy unless one achieves great feats on the battlefield and rises to prominence overnight. In other industries, progress is slow, and one might gradually fade into obscurity.

It is only because Austria is in the process of colonial expansion that Baron Falkner himself does not have to worry about economic matters. What about the next generation? Given the opportunity, he naturally wants to provide a better foundation for the next generation.

To deal with the international political crisis caused by the situation in the Gulf of Guinea, Metternich sent diplomatic notes to six nations: Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and the United States.

London

Frankly, Prime Minister Grenville has no intention of provoking an international political crisis at this time. The British government has been extremely busy of late.

They had not succeeded in defeating the Russians in the Near East War, and now the Russian government was not staying put at all, and lately, it was even supporting the Persian government in making trouble.

In the Far East, the British have just turned Burma into a colony and are still suppressing a rebellion. Australia and New Zealand are also in turmoil, with the indigenous population resisting their rule. Even the situation in the Indian region is becoming unstable.

Compared to these colonies, the interests in the Gulf of Guinea were not worth mentioning. Even if gold mines were discovered, they were not in their hands!

The interests of seven countries are intertwined, and the disturbance of the interests of one country would have repercussions on the whole situation. The British government cannot at this time interfere with the interests of any one country.

Prime Minister Grenville asked, Is the situation in West Africa already out of control?

Colonial Secretary William responded solemnly, Yes, Prime Minister. The Gulf of Guinea is a historical gold-producing region. We originally thought that after so many years of extraction, the local gold would be completely exhausted, so we didn't expect so many new gold mines to be discovered.

Having let the New Holy Roman Empire take advantage, over 80% of the gold mines there have now fallen into their hands. We have no way to compete with them.

Prime Minister Grenville asked, puzzled, How could the Austrians, who had just begun colonization, have so quickly established such an advantage in the region?

As the world's leading naval power, they have been in a dominant position in most overseas colonial contests. Now they suddenly find themselves at a disadvantage. Prime Minister Grenville is very much at a loss.

William explained, They have too many immigrants. Not only do they have immigrants from the New Holy Roman Empire, but also from the German Federal Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and even some from the Italian region and Russia.

The New Holy Roman Empire now has over 200,000 immigrants in the Gulf of Guinea, while we have less than 10,000. Even with naval superiority, we still cant compete with them on land.

Chancellor of the Exchequer John Russell asked: How can there be so many immigrants?

William explained, Nearly half of them are refugees from the Balkan Peninsula who were thrown on the African continent by the Austrian government.

The rest are prospectors attracted by the gold mines. We have too many colonies, and there are too many places for domestic immigrants to go.

With so few Austrian colonies, the populace didnt have many options. Add to that the lure of the gold mines, so naturally more people went there.

John Russell explained, No, Earl William. Im not asking why there are more immigrants from Austria. What I mean is, why are Italians, Russians, and Germans all going to Austrian colonies?

Colonial Secretary William explained: Mr. Russell, I think you have misunderstood. Italians go to Austrias colonies because they still occupy Lombardy and Venetia. Most of these immigrants came from territory under their rule.

Its even easier to understand why Russian immigrants are heading over there. We just fought the Russians, so given the national sentiment, their choice is hardly surprising.

People in Germany have a high level of acceptance of the Habsburg monarchy, and Austrians are considered their own people.

Of course, the fact that the Austrians have the most colonial outposts in the Gulf of Guinea is also a significant factor. Many people who arrive there immediately enter their territory.

These gold prospectors have already been incorporated into the reserve forces by the Austrian colonial government. In the event of war in the Gulf of Guinea, they can mobilize an army of up to a hundred thousand.

The number one hundred thousand shocked everyone. Prime Minister Grenville said sternly: It looks as if we shall have to restrict the Austrians a little. Otherwise, relying on the advantage of the number of immigrants, no one would be able to compete with them in overseas colonization.

Colonial Secretary William thought for a moment and said: This question is really very simple, just divide these immigrants. For example, let the German Federal Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Italian states also participate in overseas colonization.

Of course, we can also be more aggressive and send the navy directly to interfere with their colonization activities.

Prime Minister Grenville glared at him and said: Earl William, everything youve suggested is a terrible idea, and is completely impractical.

This world is not infinite. Every competitor we add means less profit we can make. You actually want to create a bunch of competitors.

Using warships to interfere with Austrias colonization activities for no reason? I dont dare to implement such an idiotic idea, even if you dare to think of it.

There are many ways to restrict competitors, but war is the worst option. Can you use your brain a little?

Obviously, Prime Minister Grenville was just venting his long-standing dissatisfaction with Colonial Secretary William.

The reason was simple: the colonies were in turmoil at the moment, and many of them were facing unrest, which he believed was a reflection of the Colonial Secretary's incompetence.

Chapter 270: Controlling the Mortality Rate

The labor shortage in the colonies was somewhat unexpected for Franz.

At first, he thought that with so many immigrants there would be enough manpower. But reality proved otherwise. Most of these immigrants were gold prospectors, and expecting them to work peacefully was quite a challenge.

Everyone dreamed of getting rich quickly, and it was difficult for them to settle down unless those dreams were shattered. Even if they did settle down, very few would be willing to work in the mines.

Franz was not concerned about the shortage of gold miners; that was the concern of the mine owners. He believed that these individuals could use their initiative to solve the problem. If all else failed, they could simply take their time with the mining operations.

The main purpose of the immigrants was to establish plantations and an agricultural economy in the region, providing raw materials and markets for domestic industry and commerce.

Prime Minister Felix said: Your Majesty, our immigration rate is already quite fast. The labor shortage in the colonies has already affected our plans to develop the African continent.

Germany is becoming overpopulated. Every year, a large number of bankrupt individuals choose to emigrate overseas, and a significant portion of them have to worry about travel expenses for immigration.

Many immigrants to the United States are required to sign labor contracts in advance, with the employer paying for the travel expenses. These contracts are usually unequal, and people sign them out of desperation.

If we promise to reimburse the round-trip ship fare, I believe many people would be willing to try their luck in Africa, and we should be able to retain a significant number of them.

Franz pondered and said, Increasing immigration is easy, but how can we control the mortality rate? Although we have strict health regulations, our implementation leaves a lot to be desired.

Currently, immigrants traveling to Africa experience an astonishingly high mortality rate of three percent within the first year due to diseases. This number is excessively high and must be brought down.

We're attracting immigrants to develop the African continent, and such a high mortality rate will undoubtedly dampen everyone's enthusiasm for immigration.

The high mortality rate among immigrants in the colonies is largely attributed to deaths from accidents and disease, with disease being a major culprit.

These diseases include HIV/AIDS, respiratory infections, diarrhea, and malaria. As a result, Franz first convened medical experts to develop preventive measures.

Respiratory infections can easily be overlooked because this disease primarily affects the middle-aged and elderly. Since early immigrants tend to be young and strong, this problem can be ignored. After all, the average life expectancy in most countries is less than forty years.

Diarrhea was mainly due to poor nutrition. Special diets were formulated for this purpose, but for the time being, only the military and colonial officials could enjoy them. The government couldn't yet monitor the eating, drinking, and excretion of ordinary immigrants.

As for the carriers of the HIV/AIDS virus, they are among the local indigenous population. In theory, as long as intimate contact between immigrants and locals is prohibited, there should be no problem.

With the advent of the industrial age, quinine could be mass-produced after 1850, and the mortality rate from malaria had already dropped.

To reduce the spread of disease, items such as mosquito nets, mosquito repellents, insect repellents, and more were included in the logistical supplies. These were initially distributed free of charge to immigrants.

Theoretically, if immigrants strictly adhere to safety and hygiene regulations, the mortality rate from disease should not be so high. Since the current immigrants are mostly young and robust, their resistance is much stronger, and under normal circumstances, the mortality rate should not exceed one percent.

Don't just look at the two percentage difference; as the population base increases, this gap becomes more significant. If the immigrants are elderly or frail, the mortality rate could double.

Disease is only one factor in the overall mortality rate of immigrants, and other factors must be considered. For example, in addition to disease, another significant cause of death among gold prospectors is conflict with others outside. This is the second largest contributor to the mortality rate.

According to preliminary data compiled by the colonial government, the mortality rate for immigrants in the first year is as high as 5.8%. Such a high mortality rate leads directly to a negative natural population growth rate for the local immigrant population.

Other unexpected accidents will naturally decrease as the local situation stabilizes.

The high mortality rate due to disease must be addressed as a matter of urgency. If left unchecked, the colony's population will experience negative growth for an extended period of time, relying solely on incoming immigrants.

Could disease mortality be effectively controlled? The answer was yes.

This could be seen in the different mortality rates at different immigrant outposts.

In Neubruck, the first settlement, the mortality rate due to diseases has been controlled to 1.4%. However, in later-established colonial outposts in Ghana, the disease mortality rate is as high as 3.9%.

The main reason for this difference is that early immigration was government-directed, and everyone strictly adhered to safety and health regulations. In contrast, later immigration was spontaneous, and government regulation was not as effective.

If this situation is not corrected, the high mortality rate will undoubtedly cause panic and make it difficult to attract immigrants in the future.

Colonial Minister Josip Jelai explained: Your Majesty, the current immigrants come from different parts of the world and often traverse the jungles. The colonial government finds it difficult to monitor them effectively.

If we impose regulations that are too strict, it may lead some private colonial teams to choose to leave and settle in other countries outposts.

Franz said sternly, If they want to leave, let them leave. On our territory, they must abide by our rules.

Enact and strictly enforce safety regulations in all colonial outposts. Violators will be fined, and persistent offenders will be put out of business.

In any case, I don't care what methods the colonial government uses, but diseases must be controlled within certain limits.

Starting next year, the mortality rate due to diseases among immigrants must be limited to 2%.

If the seven nations reach a consensus in the negotiations, the annual immigrant mortality rate will also have to be kept below 4% next year.

Within three years, the annual mortality rate for immigrants must be suppressed to 3.5% or less. If they fail to do so, they can retire early.

The cabinet should expedite promotions and demotions based on the completion status in various regions. If they can't, replace them with a new batch of officials. We lack everything but capable officials!

If bureaucrats aren't pressured, don't expect them to produce results. Franz didn't implement everything at once, but rather in stages over time.

At present, the mortality rate for immigrants in the colonial territories of Britain and France is mostly limited to 3%, except in the Gulf of Guinea, where the death rate is exceptionally high due to the search for gold.

If activities are limited to coastal areas, the targets set by Franz may be achievable, perhaps around 3%.

As for lower rates, Franz isn't overly optimistic. It's better to wait until the number of medical personnel increases and medical technology improves!

In an era without medical equipment, doctors rely primarily on experience and individual accumulation of knowledge. The training period for doctors is inevitably long.

Since Franz ascended to the throne, the Austrian government has intensified the training of medical professionals. The earliest students still have about a year before graduation.

To improve domestic medical conditions, short-term training was provided for local doctors, eliminating traditional bloodletting methods and introducing them to new medical knowledge.

However, attention to overseas colonial territories was limited. In this era, doctors were typically middle-class, and the government couldn't force them to go where they didn't want to go.

Currently, the government can only ensure that each colonial outpost has one hospital, typically staffed by two or three doctors along with a few apprentices.

The problem of insufficient medical personnel will take a few more years to solve. Starting next year, Austria will produce 12,000 new doctors a year, transitioning them from the campus to the healthcare system.

Taking into account the traditionally trained doctors through apprenticeship, Austria will have an additional 20,000 doctors each year, which will significantly alleviate the shortage of medical personnel.

In comparison, the training of nursing staff is much faster, with batches of 20,000 to 30,000 people trained every two to three years.

These people mainly serve as nurses. At a time when there is a severe shortage of doctors, they cannot diagnose diseases, but they can sell medicine based on patients' symptoms.

Unfortunately, if you make a wrong diagnosis that leads to adverse consequences, it will just be considered bad luck. This era is known for its harsh realities, and medical conditions are only at this level.

Prime Minister Felix replied with determination, Yes, Your Majesty!

After a moment's hesitation, he added, Your Majesty, since we aim to cultivate the safety and hygiene awareness of immigrants, why not start from our homeland?

In the past, we have only recommended that everyone follow safety and hygiene guidelines, but we have never enforced them. What if we now pass a law mandating their implementation among the civilian population?

As long as people develop good habits, they will naturally follow the rules when they arrive in the colonies.

Compared to the colonies, where enforcement is difficult due to high mobility, enacting legislation to promote safety and hygiene guidelines domestically is much more feasible.

Newspapers have been promoting these concepts for a long time, and the majority of people have already accepted the idea of safety and hygiene. However, accepting it and adhering to it are two different things.

Now, with mandatory legislation, it goes a step further in promoting these guidelines.

Very well, we need to improve the education on safety and hygiene in our country.

In Franz's view, this is a beneficial initiative for the nation and its people. If everyone adheres to safety and hygiene guidelines, it would go a long way in curbing the spread of disease.