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BELGIAN · LIFE · IN ·  
TOWN · AND · COUNTRY



· DEMETRIUS · C · BOULGER ·





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**OUR EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURS**

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*French Life*

*German Life*

*Russian Life*

*Dutch Life*

*Swiss Life*

*Spanish Life*

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*Danish Life*

*Austro-Hungarian Life*

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OUR EUROPEAN  
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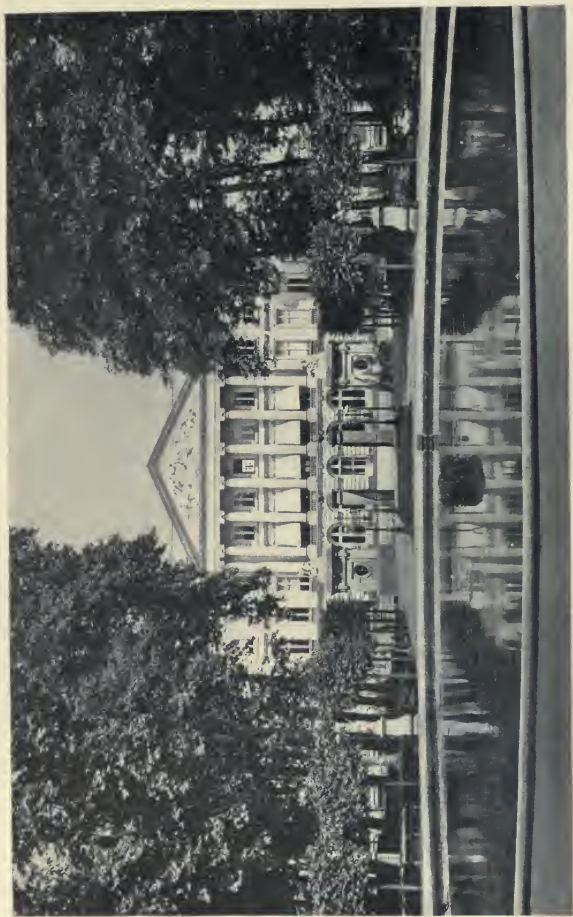
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BELGIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND  
COUNTRY



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THE PALACE OF THE NATION AT BRUSSELS

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# BELGIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY



BY DEMETRIUS C. BOULGER

ILLUSTRATED

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BELGIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND  
COUNTRY

political destiny under foreign and native rulers during more than four hundred and fifty years has removed many natural causes of friction between them, and has created some definite belief in their joint and identical interest. It is a fact, which cannot be explained away, that Flemings and Walloons have never in the long course of their combined history, which commenced with the close of feudalism, engaged in a racial war, and this absence of strife has left an abiding impression on their relations. The strongest link, however, in the chain that connects the two peoples of the South Netherlands is provided by identity of religion; so that the most fruitful cause of all human differences and quarrels has never arisen to create a feud between Flemings and Walloons. There is, consequently, every reason to conclude that the two races, which in the past never came into hostile collision, are now well content to perform their duties together, and to be known as Belgians.

When people talk of the Belgians as a modern people, with a history of only seventy-four years, they should not forget that the Flemings have scarcely changed in character, and not at all in their tongue, since the days of the Plantagenets; and that the Walloons, of Liége at least, are very much what they were in the time of the prince-bishops. Under these circumstances, it would have been natural to expect that one language would have prevailed over the other, or, at least,



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spread, while the other contracted. Such has not been the case. The Flemings still speak Flemish, the great majority of the Walloons French, while the Walloons of the Ardennes and parts of the province of Liége retain, for ordinary use, their old "Romance" tongue, Walloon. There has been no marked change in the proportions which the three languages bear to each other, except that all the Walloons now speak French. A very small section in the Liége province, on the Prussian frontier, have, however, adopted German instead, but numerically they are insignificant.

There has never been any combined or common movement, as might have been expected during the long process of forming a new nation, towards the adoption of a single language in either French or Flemish, and this fact is very remarkable in the case of French, which had chances of spreading, through its hold on society and literature, that to onlookers would have seemed almost irresistible. The powers of resistance possessed by the Flemish race have been well displayed in the preservation of their language, and this triumph is rendered more remarkable by the fact that the Flemings, despite the German origin of their language, have never had any German sympathies, and have never received any outside assistance whatever in the successful maintenance of the right to preserve their own speech. As Flemish national energy is just as intense to-day as it was in the time of the Arteveldes, any project for the

supersession of the Flemish language by French must now be pronounced chimerical. The French propaganda had every chance in its favour, and a fair field between 1831 and 1855, and it signally failed to gain the mastery. The conditions will probably never again be so favourable for it, and in the meantime a decisive Flemish triumph has been achieved. The only practical solution of the difficulty is that all Belgians should be bilinguals. At present, this accomplishment is possessed by little more than ten per cent. of the population, and the bulk of these persons reside in Brussels and the province of Brabant, which is intermodiate between Flanders and the Walloon countries.

The difference in the languages of the two races inhabiting what is now Belgium first attracted attention in the divisions of territory that took place soon after the death of Charlemagne, more than a thousand years ago. The fact that the Flemings speak a German or Tudesque language seems to show clearly enough that they are descendants of the German colonists established on Belgian soil by several Roman emperors. Clovis also introduced German settlers in the Meuse valley, and finally Charlemagne removed a large number of Saxon families from their homes in Germany to the plains of Flanders. The western districts of Belgium were those in which these immigrants, voluntary or forced, congregated. Flemish influence never reached the right bank of the Meuse, and a solid wedge of Walloon territory separated

the Flemings from the Germans. When the Germans became interested in the Netherlands at the end of the fifteenth century, through the marriage of the Archduke Maximilian with the heiress of Burgundy, the Flemings had lost all sympathy with their kinsmen in blood, and so it has remained ever since.

While the Flemish people form the German element in the Belgian nation, ethnologically considered, the Walloons represent the Celtic. They have probably a superior claim over that of the Flemings to be regarded as the descendants of the Belgic tribes of the country, or such of them as survived the sweeping measures of Cæsar, and they are closely akin to the people of ancient Gaul and modern France. They were probably leavened also by marriage between their women and the members of the Roman garrison, established for several centuries on their soil, just as they were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by association with the Spaniards. The Roman and Spanish types are frequently met with in the provinces of Namur, Luxemburg, and Liége; and many Roman names, such as Gambrinus, Fabronius, Mamius, and Marius, are to be found to-day among Walloon surnames.

The Walloons have the more right, then, to pose as the original inhabitants of the country, and their language may be regarded as the "Romance" tongue which marked the transition between Latin and French. As Walloon is a living

language to-day, the vehicle for the thoughts of the people in large districts, such as Liége and the Ardennes, this race has shown scarcely less tenacity in preserving the idiom of a thousand years ago than the Flemings. But there is one marked difference between them. There is scarcely a Walloon who does not now speak French, whereas the vast majority of the Flemings are acquainted only with their own tongue, and find themselves in a foreign state when they visit the French-speaking parts of the common country.

As the two races had preserved their own separate languages during the long centuries that the country was subject to a foreign Power—Germany, Spain, Austria, France, or Holland—it is not surprising to find that the achievement of independence in 1830 was followed, after a brief interval, by the appearance of a language difficulty in modern Belgium. The Belgian rising against the Dutch in that year was primarily a Walloon movement. The Flemings, whose community of language with the Dutch provided them with a certain fellow-feeling, and at least prevented their resenting the proclamation of Dutch as the official national language of the Netherlands, were more disposed than the Walloons to accept the Orange dynasty. They might have dissociated themselves from the insurrectionary movement altogether but for the Dutch measures against the Roman Catholic Church, which roused their religious fervour, and even as it was, they left the

direction of the movement in the hands of the Walloons of Brussels and Liége. On the success of the movement for national liberation, it was only natural, then, that the Walloons should proclaim French as the official language of the country. At that moment, quite half the population did not understand a word of it; but seeing that the fatal act of the Dutch, which entailed their expulsion, had been the proclamation of their language as the national tongue to be employed in the courts, the triumph of French became a necessary part of the national triumph, and any agitation at such a moment on behalf of the Flemish language would have seemed unpatriotic and sympathetic to the Dutch. None the less, a thoughtful man knowing the situation would have declared that such a state of things could not endure permanently. A solution would of necessity have to be found, or the state would split into two fragments at the first crisis or appearance of danger. The only possible solutions were three in number, viz., that the Walloons should give up French and adopt Flemish, which was so inconceivable as to be palpably absurd; or that the Flemings should drop their language and learn French, which, if not so fantastic, was still highly improbable; or that both races should master the two languages and become bilinguists. For this last solution, the most equal and the most flattering arrangement to both races, time and the spread of education were essential elements of success.



The establishment of the modern kingdom of Belgium in 1831 was followed then by that of French in the Chambers, the courts of law, and the colleges as the national language of the new state. It had been employed by society more or less generally since the Crusades. Not a word was raised for or by the Flemings, the vast majority of whom, as has been said, could not at that moment speak a word of French. But before the young kingdom had reached its twentieth year several things had become clearer, and one of these was that the Flemings were quite resolved not to give up their language. The necessary corollary of this tenacity was that they should claim and agitate for the admission of their language to an equal place with French in the country, of which they formed not the lesser part. A French observer, writing in 1855 from Brussels, declared, "The Fleming is slow, but he moves, and when once he makes up his mind to travel, he goes far without stopping." The observation was called forth by the appointment of a Commission to inquire into the complaints of the Flemish population set forth in numberless petitions. The report of this Commission was strongly in favour of Flemish pretensions. It recommended that Flemish should be placed on an equality with French, and that all examinations and pleadings in the courts should be held or expressed in either language or in both. The Government was so surprised at the sweeping character of these pro-

posals that it suppressed the report, and kept it secret. Its purport only leaked out gradually with the lapse of years.

The Flemish movement began at Ghent in a modest way about the year 1836. Half a dozen literary and scientific men founded there a Flemish review called *Belgisch Museum*, and meeting with considerable success, they soon afterwards formed a club, taking as their motto, *De taal is gansch het volk* ("The language is the whole people"). In 1844, Jan Frans Willems, the leader of the movement, summoned a Congress, not, it is true, for a political purpose, but merely to exhort the Government to preserve the literary treasures of Flanders by the publication of its ancient texts. Assent was given to this request, but the necessary funds were not voted for ten years, which proved that the Government regarded the Flemish movement with distrust and even dislike. Willems died soon after the first Congress, but the Congresses went on, and were sometimes held in Holland as well as in Belgium. The work of Willems was continued in a more efficacious manner by Henri Conscience, whose romances stimulated Flemish pride and aspirations, and recalled the great days of Flanders. His "Lion of Flanders" (*Leeuw van Vlaanderen*) became not merely the most popular book of the day, but it idealised for all time the thoughts and longings of the Flemish race. It has, without much exaggeration, been called the Flemish bible.

may be said to have been made complete. Ostracised after 1830, the Flemish language has gained in the last forty years a position of equality with French as the official language of Belgium.

The following statistics will be useful for purposes of reference in connection with the language question. By the census of 1890 the population of Belgium was 6,069,321. Of this number 2,744,271 spoke only Flemish, 2,485,072 only French, and 32,206 only German. With regard to those speaking more than one language, 700,997 spoke French and Flemish, 58,590 French and German, 7028 Flemish and German, and 36,185 French, Flemish, and German. The census of 1900 showed that the population had risen to 6,815,054. Of this total 3,145,000 spoke only Flemish, 2,830,000 only French, and 770,000 the two languages.

The struggle of the languages has, therefore, resulted in what may be called a drawn battle. Flemish has gained the position to which the antiquity and solidity of its pretensions entitled it, but French remains the language of society, of the administration, and of the bulk of the literature of the country, while the common language of the people in the eastern and south-eastern divisions is Walloon. There still remains to be found a solution for the political difficulties that must arise in a community so constituted, and it seems as if it can only be found in the direction of bilingualism. This result must be promoted



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by the stipulation that proficiency in the two tongues is requisite for public employment; but there are still nearly six millions of people in Belgium who know only one language. The Flemings have preserved their language by a rigid exclusiveness, and they have always refused to learn any other. The encouragement of bilingualism by the authorities is now represented to be an insidious attempt to vulgarise French in Flanders. On the other hand, the Walloons are protesting against the waste of time, and the uselessness of learning a language which is never heard in Wallonia. Time may remove these suspicions and complaints, and force home the conviction to the mind of every Belgian that under the peculiar conditions in which his country is constituted, it is the duty of each citizen to master the language of the brother race, which shares the same national fortunes.

The great bond, however, between the two races is religious union. Bavaria, Ireland, and Belgium have been called the three most devoted children of the Church of Rome, and in Belgium to-day the Flemings are the staunchest of Roman Catholics, and the real supporters of the political influence of their Church. Readers of Motley may remember his describing "the great majority of the burghers" of Ghent as belonging to "the Reformed religion." It would be difficult to discover to-day not only in Ghent, but throughout the whole of Flanders, a single Flemish family which

is not attached to the Roman Catholic faith. This religious unanimity makes for the stability of Belgium, because it effectually separates the Flemings from the Dutch, who are practically the same people in race and language. The Walloons never betrayed any sympathies with the Reformation, and their devotion to the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century was the main cause of the preservation of Spanish rule in the Netherlands, and of the consequent split of the provinces into North and South. But at the present time the Flemings rather than the Walloons are the chief prop of Roman Catholic power in Belgium. The reason for this may be found by comparing the characters of the two races. The Fleming is simple in his habits, and somewhat restricted in his views, but with strong feelings, and a capacity for intense devotion to his convictions. He is averse to change of any kind, and having reconciled himself to the Church of Rome, after a brief lapse three and a half centuries ago, for which a severe penance was paid, he shows no tendency to embark on further theological adventures. The Walloon, on the other hand, is given by character to scepticism and free thought. He is far from being a docile servant of the Church, and politically he is quite beyond its control; not that he has any tendency towards any other creed. The Church of Rome has not to fear Protestantism in any form among the Walloons, who include only one church within their religious or politico-

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religious horizon. With them it is a question of the Roman Catholic Church or no church at all. The Walloons are the chief supporters and producers of the advanced Liberals and the Socialists. With the former the religious sentiment is far from being dead, but with the latter the deposition of the Church is an article of their programme. The Liberals, however, have long been a decaying force. For fifty years they possessed political supremacy in Belgium, and the effort has apparently exhausted them. The old leaders are gone, and new ones have not yet been found. The capacity of reproduction seems to have disappeared. The Liberals of to-day have no inspiration and no programme. On the other hand, the Socialists are an active and aggressive body with definite ends, and moving towards a clearly visible goal. In the Walloon provinces they are rapidly winning over, if they have not already won over, the whole of the proletariat. Fortunately for the stability of the country the Flemish population is just as stolid in its support of the Roman Catholic party, which from the political point of view is the only barrier to the spread and triumph of Republicanism throughout the land. The last election, however, favours a belief that the formation of a new moderate central party is not outside the bounds of possibility, and several eloquent speakers have been discovered who, in the course of time, may become popular leaders.

There is another direction in which the Flem-

ings have done good work. They may claim that much of the present prosperity of the country has been due in a special degree to their efforts. They are hard workers, and the development of the agricultural wealth of East and West Flanders since Belgium became a kingdom has been unexampled. Industrially they have revived the reputation of Ghent, and commercially they have made Antwerp the first or second port of the Continent. The extraordinary material progress of Belgium, which will form the subject of another chapter, furnishes clear proof that the presence of two distinct races side by side, and running together, as it were, in harness, is not incompatible with the attainment of a high degree of prosperity.





## CHAPTER II

### THE MODERN CONSTITUTION

**B**ELGIUM, one is frequently reminded when writing of the great past of the Belgian races, dates only from 1830. The application of the same arbitrary rule to English history would exclude much upon which the historian has been wont to descant as contributing to the making of England. However, the existing constitution of Belgium was drawn up in 1830 and the following year, and although the name was suggested for the country in 1789, and again in 1814-15, Belgique, or Belgium, was then first adopted as the designation of the nine Southern provinces of the Netherlands. The revolt of the Belgians against the Dutch in 1830 was sudden and unexpected, and Belgians still living, who witnessed its scenes when children, speak of it as a misunderstanding. The King, William I., of the house of Orange-Nassau, was undoubtedly well-intentioned, and his son, the Prince of Orange, of Waterloo fame, was popular everywhere. But one great and irreparable fault was committed. The policy of the Dutch King was ostentatiously shown to include

a systematic attempt to change the language of half his Southern subjects, and the religion of them all. These innovations, and the steps preliminary to them, were entitled reforms and liberal measures; but, as was written at the time, "This King was too much of a Liberal to be a ruler, and too much of a king to be a Liberal." Moreover, Belgium was not Liberal in any Dutch sense of the word; it was Roman Catholic and Conservative, attached to its traditional rights, and proud of the old separate constitutions of the different provinces. The Fundamental Law of August 24, 1815, marked the Dutch ideal, while the Belgians looked to the past when their "States" represented the only constitution to be found on the Continent, and traced back their liberties to the charters of the Baldwins and of Wenceslas.

Events in Belgium were undoubtedly hastened by the French Revolution of July, 1830, which ended the monarchy of the Bourbons, and established a constitutional one in its place. The Belgians had never felt any attachment for the Dutch régime, and for some years had been openly discontented, but the agitation might not have taken a bellicose form if the change of government in France had not furnished some ground of hope that support would be forthcoming for the cause of the people in a country so closely attached to it by the ties of race, religion, and language. On the 25th of August, 1830, during the performance in Brussels of the opera, the *Muette de Portici*, the



populace took fire when the tenor sang the well-known and spirit-stirring words of Massaniello:

Plutôt mourir que rester misérable,  
Pour un esclave est-il quelque danger?  
Tombe le joug qui nous accable,  
Et sous nos coups perisse l'étranger.  
Amour sacré de la patrie,  
Rends nous l'audace et la fierté;  
À mon pays je dois la vie,  
Il me devra sa liberté!

The audience rose in their seats, joined in the refrain, and, stopping the performance, rushed into the streets. They then hastened off to attack the residences of the Dutch Ministers, and pillaged them. There were then very few troops in the town, which passed into the possession of the people of Brussels, who summoned a Council of Notables. King William moved a force of five thousand men under his two sons to Vilvorde, and there can be little doubt that if it had advanced at once it could have stamped out the agitation in blood. King William was not a cruel man, and was all for a pacific solution; while his son, the Prince of Orange, relied on his popularity. Instead of entering at the head of his troops, the latter rode into the city attended by only six officers. He remained three days in Brussels, and when he left he took away a document which may be termed, as the reader prefers, a petition or an ultimatum, containing the formal wish of the

Belgian leaders for separation " under the Orange dynasty."

King William's reply to this message was made ten days later, when in his speech to the Dutch Chambers he declared that he would never yield "to passion and violence." At the same time orders were given to the Dutch troops to recover possession of Brussels, and as the Prince of Orange was loath to take any measures against the city in which he had lived so long, the command was entrusted to his brother, Prince Frederick. Brussels was still a walled city, and on September 23rd, the Dutch attacked four of its gates. At two they were repulsed, but at the other two they were successful, and forced their way to the park facing the Palace. Here they were brought to a halt and found themselves in a trap. The success which had been certain on September 1st could no longer be achieved on the 23rd, for in the interval the Brussels insurgents had been joined by a strong contingent from Liége, and the whole of Walloon Belgium was in open insurrection. The Dutch troops in the park were attacked from all sides, and after three days' fighting, Prince Frederick found himself obliged to extricate himself from a false and dangerous position by a midnight retreat. The Hotel Bellevue was used as a fort by the popular party, and some idea of the severity of the fighting may be formed from the fact that six hundred Belgian citizens were killed during those few days. These





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men are regarded as the Martyrs of the Belgian Revolution, and there is a fine monument to them in the Place des Martyrs, over the trench in which they — *simples citoyens morts pour la liberté* — were buried. After this the Orange dynasty was doomed, and the cry became "Separation and Independence."

A Provisional Government had been formed even before the Dutch troops retreated, and its purpose was revealed in the following public notice: "The Belgian provinces detached by force from Holland shall form an Independent State." Envoys were sent to London and Paris to enlist the sympathy of their governments, while more strenuous measures were taken to expel the Dutch from the country. The Belgian Volunteers, assuming the offensive, gained two successes at Waelhem and Berchem, at the latter of which places the heroic Count Frederic de Merode died of his wounds. Antwerp, excepting the citadel, was occupied before the end of October, and then the five Powers, sitting in conference in London, interposed to bring about an armistice, as the preliminary to some definite arrangement. It had become clear to most minds that the kingdom of the Netherlands, formed in 1815, had practically ceased to exist. If the Brussels movement had been crushed on September 1st, history would have spoken of the participators only as rioters. One short month raised them to the rank of patriots and liberators of their country. On

November 18th, the National Assembly, convoked for that day, declared as its first act "the independence of the Belgian people."

It must always be considered a remarkable fact that the Belgian Revolution of August-September, 1830, was immediately followed by the production of a constitution which has stood the test of seventy years. On February 7, 1831, the Constitution was published, while the Powers were still deliberating over the safeguards to be imposed on the new state for its own protection and for the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe. The Belgian Constitution is an amalgam of the separate constitutions of the provinces. It is based on the principle of absolute liberty, and its 139 Articles cover the whole ground of constitutional law in "a constitutional, representative, and hereditary monarchy," such as Belgium was declared to be. Having formed the kingdom, it was necessary in the next place to find the king. The French prince, the Duc de Nemours, son of King Louis Philippe, was the first choice of the Provisional Government; but his candidature was withdrawn, as it would have added too much to the power of France in the opinion of other states, and entailed a European war. Application was then made to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, who had recently declined the throne of Greece, and by so doing rendered a considerable service to European diplomacy. Prince Leopold, the widower of the Princess Charlotte,

only child of George IV., was then resident in England, and had made a reputation which his subsequent career did not belie. He accepted the offer, declaring that "Human destiny does not offer a nobler or more useful task than that of being called to found the independence of a nation, and to consolidate its liberties." On June 4, 1831, he was proclaimed King of the Belgians, and on July 21st his inauguration took place, with much ceremony, in Brussels. The creation of the kingdom of Belgium supplied the Dutch with an excuse for resuming hostilities, and relying on the supposition that the Powers would certainly quarrel among themselves sooner than allow the French to take up their position in Belgium, a Dutch army marched on Louvain and Brussels.

The Belgian national forces were at that moment badly organised, and the Dutch outnumbered them. After one reverse at Hasselt, King Leopold summoned the French army, which had been held in readiness on the frontier, to his assistance. On the same day that the Dutch invaders arrived in front of Louvain, the French deliverers entered Brussels. Threatened also by the British Government, which prepared to send a fleet to the Scheldt, King William countermanded his orders and recalled his army. Unfortunately for the Belgian national forces, this brief campaign served to increase the reputation and popularity of King Leopold, "whose courage,

coolness, and energy," in the words of General Belliard, "alone saved the Belgian army from annihilation." This remark had special reference to his skilful dispositions after the rout of the Belgians at Hasselt, and to the fortitude he displayed in opposing with half-disciplined and discouraged troops the advance of the Dutch army on the capital. The Dutch troops having withdrawn, the French also retired within their frontier, but the attitude of Prussia, Austria, and Russia towards the new state was more than dubious, and their refusal to receive King Leopold's envoys was calculated to raise Dutch hopes. Curiously enough the Belgians encountered graver perils after the Dutch had retired from the whole country, with the exception of Antwerp citadel and one or two fortified places (Luxemburg and Maestricht), than before. The Twenty-four Articles of the final London Protocol of October 15, 1831, did not accord with the aspirations of the Belgians, who were compelled to cede the greater part of Luxemburg, which is now the Grand Duchy, and the portion of Limburg that lies east of the Meuse. If the Belgians did not like the loss of provinces inhabited by men of their own race, the Dutch openly resented the conditions of the Protocol, and refused to adhere to it. Inspired with hope by the attitude of the three Powers, which formed the Holy Alliance, King William once more prepared for war. During the same period, King Leopold also concentrated all his



efforts and attention on the reorganisation and increase of the Belgian forces. Having succeeded in obtaining votes for military purposes to the extent of three millions sterling, he raised the army to a strength of one hundred thousand men, and, by the admission of impartial observers, it had improved to such an extent from what it was at the time of the battle of Hasselt, that it could have dealt effectually with its Dutch opponents without any external assistance.

During this critical period, England and France stood staunch beside Belgium, and King Leopold's marriage in August, 1832, with the Princess Louise, eldest daughter of King Louis Philippe, strengthened the relations between Brussels and Paris. Notwithstanding that all the other Powers ratified the Protocol, King William refused his assent, and retained possession of Antwerp citadel with a garrison of five thousand men. In October, 1832, it was decided by England and France that this defiance of the will of Europe could no longer be tolerated, and that the Dutch must retire from Antwerp. The Belgians, having one hundred thousand men ready to take the field, were most anxious to be allowed to recover Antwerp themselves, and considerable difficulty was experienced in restricting them to the passive rôle that the powers imposed on them. In November, a French army, fifty thousand strong, commanded by Marshal Gérard, and accompanied by several of the Orleans princes, entered Belgium

for a second time, under the terms of a convention concluded with the British Government, and laid siege to the citadel of Antwerp, which the commandant, General Chassé, refused to evacuate without an order from his sovereign. The defence of the citadel under great difficulties, and against an overwhelming force, was prolonged for over three weeks, but when the wall had been breached, and everything was ready for an assault that could not have been resisted, General Chassé capitulated. His defence excited general admiration throughout Europe, and this was increased when it became known that the Dutch commander of the Scheldt flotilla, sooner than yield up his ships, had burned or sunk them. The closing scenes of Dutch authority in Belgium were thus redeemed by a rare display of fortitude and courage. Immediately after the surrender of Antwerp, the French army was withdrawn; but it was not until 1839 that King William finally gave way by adhering to the London Protocol and withdrawing from the forts on the Scheldt below Antwerp.

The support given by the French army and diplomacy to the Belgians naturally earned their deep gratitude. By the arrangement between the two Powers, France played a more prominent part than England, but those in authority well knew that the latter had as much to do with the establishment of Belgian independence as any other state. If England had not heartily cooperated with France, France could not have



acted at all. In the words of Louis Philippe, "Belgium owes her independence and the recovery of her territory to the union of France and England in her cause."

At the same time, the gratitude of the Belgians in 1832 was more effusive in its expression to the French than to the English. Even now they are prone to magnify the rôle of France and to minimise that of England in the great national crisis of seventy years ago. Marshal Gérard's troops had hardly recrossed the frontier, when a motion was made in the Belgian Chamber to express the gratitude of the Belgian people to France by demolishing the Lion monument at Waterloo. The speaker also disparaged the services rendered by England. The Government opposed this motion, which was defeated, and M. Nothomb, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, paid the following tribute to England, whose share in their liberation and independence is too little appreciated by the Belgians:

"The battle of Waterloo opened a new era for Europe, the era of representative government. I will not say anything about the strange manner in which this speaker has distorted that historical event. I will confine myself to saying that if the battle of Waterloo had been won by those who came to help us the other day, all would have been over with our nation for many a long day, and this capital in which we meet might be no more than the chief town of the department of the

Dyle. I have been asked what England has done for Belgian independence, for the liberty of the world. What has she done? But is contemporary history ignored? She was the last asylum of freedom while a Conqueror held Europe under his iron sceptre; she sustained a gigantic struggle to restore independence to this Continent. What has she done in the last two years? She stretched forth her powerful hand first over France and then over Belgium, and she said to the other Powers, 'You shall not interfere with these two revolutions'; and those two revolutions remain untouched. What has she done for us in particular? She has, among other things, prevented the subdivision of our territory. When the refusal of the Duc de Nemours was known, plans for sharing and distributing our soil became general. It was England who opposed this project with greater energy than any one else. What has she done in the last three months? She concluded in our interest a striking treaty with France, she broke away from all her traditions by her rupture with Holland."

Having attained its independence, Belgium entered on the path of peaceful progress in the character of a neutral state among the nations, and enjoying in its domestic affairs the privileges conferred by the Constitution of February, 1831. Its neutrality was put to a severe test in 1840, when war between England and France seemed imminent, and there were some politicians who hoped

that Belgium, in recognition of past services, would declare herself the ally of the French. The Belgian Government had a more correct view of its position and duty, and declared that its policy was that of "sincere, loyal, and strong neutrality."

In 1870, the Franco-Prussian war confronted Belgium with a fresh crisis. Her neutrality had been proclaimed, but the question in doubt was whether she could maintain it by force of arms, if necessary; in other words, whether it was a "strong" neutrality as well as a sincere one. In 1840, it was only a matter of a proclamation against an eventuality; but in 1870, the responsibility was a real one, and not free from danger. The Belgian army was mobilised, and sent to the frontier to guard it, and after the battle of Sedan a large number of French soldiers fled into Belgium, and were interned there during the continuance of the war. Some German soldiers who crossed the frontier in pursuit were treated in the same fashion. For a second time the principle of Belgian neutrality had been successfully and peacefully vindicated; but in this instance it must always be remembered that the result was largely due to the active intervention of the British Government, which signed a treaty with France, and another with Prussia, engaging itself to declare war upon the Power that violated Belgian territory.

The important point to be remembered is that

while Belgium is a state whose neutrality is guaranteed by the chief Powers, she retains in undiminished force the responsibility of making her neutrality respected, and, in the extreme case of invasion, of affording effective co-operation to those who intervene for her protection. This she could have done in 1840, and in a minor degree in 1870, but a careful reorganisation of her military system is needed to enable her and her friends to co-operate efficaciously in the future.

The Belgian Constitution declared the monarchy to be hereditary in the male line, in the family of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, after his acceptance of the crown. His marriage with Princess Louise of Orleans has been mentioned. Their family consisted of two sons and one daughter. The elder of the sons, born in April, 1835, succeeded his father as Leopold II. in December, 1865, and is still reigning. He married the Austrian Archduchess Marie Henriette in 1853, and by her had one son and three daughters. As the Salic law prevails in Belgium, it is unnecessary to say anything of the female descendants of Kings Leopold I. and II., except that the daughter of the former, the Princess Charlotte, married the unfortunate Archduke Maximilian, who became Emperor of Mexico, and was shot at Queretaro in 1867. The only son of Leopold II. bore the title of Duke of Brabant, and died in 1869, when, failing any subsequent male issue, the succession passed to the King's brother, the Count of Flan-

ders, born in 1837. This prince married, in 1867, the Princess Mary of Hohenzollern, sister of the King of Roumania, and by her has had two sons and two daughters. The elder son, Prince Baudouin, or Baldwin, was endowed with a bright and attractive personality, and he was immensely popular with the people. His death in 1891 was felt as a national calamity. His brother, Prince Albert, the last male descendant of the first King, then became heir-presumptive, and fears were entertained that the house of Saxe-Coburg might eventually become extinct in Belgium, and the state find itself confronted with the dangers arising from a vacant throne. These fears were removed by the marriage of Prince Albert to a Princess of Bavaria in 1900, and by the subsequent birth of a prince, who bears the name of Leopold, and promises to become, in due course, the third ruler of his name. The continuance of the dynasty has been further ensured by the birth of a second prince quite recently.

There is no reason, therefore, why Belgium should not long continue an hereditary monarchy in the family of the prince who took so prominent and honourable a part in founding her liberties. It is also a constitutional state, with safeguards against absolutism, and the monarch's power is strictly circumscribed by the Constitution. The consideration of this part of the subject can be best undertaken in another chapter, dealing more specifically with the politics of the country. The

origin of modern Belgium has been described because knowledge of the facts connected with it is essential to any useful acquaintance with the people or their country; but that would be a very shallow view to take of Belgium which arbitrarily decided to ignore all that preceded 1830, and to treat the Belgians as a nation which, at the furthest, only dates back to Waterloo. In national spirit, as well as in their political privileges, to which the Constitution of 1831 only gave a new form, the Belgians of to-day are the direct and natural representatives of the Flemish craftsmen, the proud burghers of Brabant, and the Walloons of Liége and Luxemburg.







## CHAPTER III

### THE LEGISLATURE AND THE ELECTORATE

THE Belgian Constitution presented on February 7, 1831, to the National Congress, and accepted by it with unanimity, is chiefly remarkable for having proclaimed and established the complete liberty of the people in all the departments of civil activity. It decreed freedom of conscience, of education, of the Press, and also the right of meeting. As a constitution it was far in advance of any system existing on the Continent, and the lapse of seventy years has not rendered necessary any material change in its provisions. The changes introduced in 1894 related either to minor points, or to the important extension of the electoral vote. That is to say, the Constitution remained substantially unchanged while a remarkable alteration was introduced in the qualification and number of the electorate. The second change, in 1900, was merely the modification of the Electoral Law to the extent of subjecting the results of any election to a process of proportional representation for the protection of minorities.

The Constitution provided that the Government

of the country should be formed by a King, a Senate, and a Chamber of Representatives. The King was to be a constitutional sovereign with defined powers, but with the throne hereditary in the male line of his family. The Senate was to consist of seventy-six elected members, and twenty-six nominated by the Provincial Councils, and the period of membership was to be for eight years. The Chamber was to contain one hundred and fifty-two Representatives, elected for a period of four years, but retiring in sections at the end of every two years. No one can become a Senator before he is forty, or a Deputy under twenty-five. An appeal to the country, which could only be made by the King, of course entailed the evacuation of every seat pending re-election. Sons of the King, or Princes of the Belgian royal house, become members of the Senate by right of birth, on arriving at the age of eighteen, but they have no vote before they are twenty-five. Until the revision in 1894, the qualifications of electors were fixed by Article 47 as follows: (1) owners of £80 in the funds; (2) principal occupier of a house valued in large towns at not less than £100, and in villages at £50; (3) holders of diplomas and certificates; and (4) those who pass, after attaining their majority, an examination. By this system the electoral body was small and exclusive, and Belgium presented the anomaly of a perfectly free country, ruled by only the upper class of citizens. These qualifica-



tions were simplified, by the Act of 1893, into the following comprehensive definition: "All Belgians (males) are entitled to one vote on attaining the age of twenty-five, and on having resided in the same commune for one year." The electorate was thus increased so as to include the larger half of the nation. Important modifications and additions were also introduced into the system in 1894 that will require fuller explanation. The revision of this year covered a somewhat wider ground than the qualification of the electorate, although its salient feature was the extension of the franchise. The first constitution related exclusively to Europe, and had not contemplated the possibility of Belgium having colonies or possessions beyond the sea. The formation of the Congo State, with its possible reversion to Belgium, altered the position. A new Article was introduced to the effect that the garrisons of such possessions must be composed of volunteers. Another Article strengthened the hands of the Sovereign by providing that the prince who married without his consent should forfeit all his rights. The Constitution of 1831 had made Belgium a constitutional monarchy, and the subsequent Articles of Agreement with Prince Leopold had fixed the succession in the heirs male of that Prince; but nothing was said as to what would happen if the situation should arise when there were no "heirs male." A new Article, No. 61, was accordingly introduced, providing that "in default

of male heirs the King can nominate his successor with the assent of the two Chambers; and if no such nomination has been made the throne shall be vacant." The apprehension which led to the insertion of this Article has now been allayed in a natural manner by the marriage of the heir presumptive.

The payment of members of the Representative Chamber rendered necessary by its becoming more democratic, was fixed at four thousand francs (£160) a year, with a free pass on the railways between their constituencies and Brussels. Senators, however, remained unpaid, but have the same privilege as Representatives on the railways. These minor changes were quite overshadowed by the important addition of the plural vote, which formed the striking and original feature of the revision of 1894. Up to that date the Belgian citizen who possessed the necessary property qualification had a single vote. In 1893, there were 137,772 voters. The Socialists loudly demanded universal suffrage—the simple formula, one man, one vote—the concession of which it was, and is still, feared would sweep away all the established political landmarks in the country. At the same time it had become clear that the old exclusive system could no longer be maintained. It was useless assuring the Belgians that they occupied the freest country in Europe, so long as the great majority of them did not possess a vote. Something had to be done to satisfy the people,

and at the same time to save society from the real or imaginary perils which it perceived ahead, through an increase of the electorate. Various suggestions were made in the spring of 1893, but none of these found favour until M. Beernaert brought forward his resolution in favour of the establishment of the plural vote. The state of the country, in which strikes and disorders prevailed, lent emphasis to the argument that something must be done to avert grave trouble. M. Beernaert's scheme, by removing the property qualification, gave every Belgian a vote on reaching the age of twenty-five, and by his ingenious addition of extra votes for certain qualifications, which doubled or trebled the voting strength of the wealthy and educated classes, he provided a safeguard against Socialism. He thus satisfied popular opinion for the moment, and allayed the fears of society at the same time. His resolution was carried by the overwhelming majority of one hundred and nineteen to fourteen, and became a law in April, 1894.

A brief statement of the qualifications of electors will make the matter clear to the reader. Every Belgian citizen, on reaching the age of twenty-five, is entitled to one vote in any commune in which he has resided for twelve months. One extra vote is given to every elector on reaching the age of thirty-five, provided that he is married or, if a widower, has legitimate children, and provided that he pays five francs of personal taxa-

tion, or is exempted from such payment by reason of his profession. Two extra votes are given to any elector who is proprietor of real estate, with a minimum cadastral revenue of forty-eight francs, or who has an investment in State stock, or the State Savings Bank, producing one hundred francs annually. The two extra votes are given also to any elector, (1) holding certain diplomas set forth in Article 17, or (2) filling Government offices and professional situations enumerated in Article 19. The maximum number of votes under any heads, separate or collective, is three. The result of this measure was that the number of voters increased from 137,772 in 1893, to 1,354,891 in 1895, and the voters in the latter year represented 2,085,605 votes. As the new law also made voting obligatory, all elections would have to be decided by a full poll. The consequences of this law were not precisely what its author anticipated. M. Beernaert conceived it to be a Liberal measure, which would diminish the power of the Catholic Right, contribute to the more equal distribution of political power between the several parties, and in the end strengthen the Liberal centre. At the time of the passing of the measure, the Chamber contained 93 Catholics and 59 Liberals of all shades of opinion. In the Senate were 72 Catholics and 30 Liberals. A Catholic administration had held office for over ten years. The balance of parties, after the election of 1896, was as follows: 112 Catholics, 12

Liberals, and 28 Socialists. In the Senate the figures were 70 Catholics, 31 Liberals, and 1 Socialist. The Catholic Government is still in power, and the hopes of establishing a strong central party between it and the Socialist are still unrealised. On the other hand, the Socialists have increased in numbers, and have taken as their political cries universal suffrage, and "one man, one vote," which means the abolition of the plural vote which has come to be regarded as the safeguard of Belgian society.

The next and last constitutional reform arose out of the main result of the Electoral Law of 1894, which had confirmed and strengthened the Catholic ascendancy. The originator of that law had always intended to supplement it by a measure in favour of proportional representation, that is to say, for the protection of minorities, and, if his party had not deserted him, he would have carried a law in 1894 to that effect. At last, in 1899, the necessity of effecting some change in the return of representatives was generally admitted. The session of that year was marked by stormy scenes, during which several ministers resigned, including M. Vandenpeereboom, the head of the Government. The scenes in the Chamber found their counterpart in the streets, and the threats of the Socialists pointed under a thin veil to revolutionary proceedings. It is unnecessary to go into the particulars of the discussions that attended the passing into law of the system called propor-



tional representation. It will suffice to describe here what it is as completing the electoral system of Belgium. The result of the plural vote having been to confirm the Catholic party's ascendancy, to strengthen the Socialists who took the place in the Chamber of the Extreme Left, and to weaken the Liberals, it naturally followed that the last named were eager for a change that would bring them nearer to the power they had enjoyed under the limited electorate down to 1884. The victory of proportional representation was prepared by the application of the system to communal elections, and in 1899-1900 it was extended to the election of the national representatives. By this system Belgium was partitioned into a number of electoral districts, and each district has the number of its members apportioned in accordance with the total strength of each party or political programme in that district. As a rule, there are only the three chief parties, but the presence of Catholic-Democrats, or other factions, may raise the number to four, or even five. The number of seats held is divided by the number of parties or opposing candidates, and then distributed in the proportion of the total followers of each. The smallest minority, therefore, is sure of one seat. Sanguine Liberals predicted beforehand that this system would practically equalise parties, and estimated the strength of the Chamber to be returned in 1900 at 80 Catholics and 72 Liberals and Socialists combined, independent of the results in



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the fourteen new seats created. Others thought it would make little or no change except to transfer some Socialist seats to the Liberals. The returns, including the fourteen new seats, which raised the total of representatives to 166, gave the following as the strength of the three parties, after the first election under proportional representation held in May, 1900:—95 Catholics, 35 Liberals, 34 Socialists, and two Catholic-Democrats. In that year there were 1,452,232 voters, possessing 2,239,621 votes.

If the Belgian Constitution, drafted in a time of great emergency, has only required modification in matters which the increase of population and the march of democratic ideas have brought up in every country, it is because it was based on the principles of a very comprehensive and unfettered liberty. The hopes of 1831 were more than fulfilled. In 1856, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the kingdom of Belgium, it was declared that "the King had neither violated one of its laws, nor assailed one of its liberties, nor given any legitimate cause of complaint to any of our fellow-citizens. In the midst of commotions which have shaken so many governments Belgium has remained faithfully attached to her prince, and to the institutions bestowed upon her." Partly to the merits of her Constitution, partly to the tact of her first King, Belgium escaped the troubles of 1848. She has, indeed, had no serious internal troubles in the seventy odd

years of her national history. The general strike of 1893 and the disorders of 1899, however, disagreeable at the time, and perhaps ominous for the future, were merely passing incidents, not entitled to rank as grave national dangers.

Latterly there has arisen a cloud on the horizon of Belgian political life in the Socialist party. Socialism is a spectre in other Continental states, and it was regarded with apprehension in Belgium long before there was a Socialist Deputy in the Chamber. Perhaps it was more dangerous before it could send thirty loud and angry voices to disturb the harmony of the Palace of the Nation. Its programme is still summed up in one phrase and one chief demand, the concession of the principle of universal suffrage. As, however, so much is said and written about the programme of the Socialists, and of the dangers that would follow from its realisation, it may be as well to give a summary of its purport. In the first place, it demands universal suffrage for both sexes over twenty-one years of age; some of the Socialists have since modified their opinion on the enfranchisement of women and would abandon the clause relating to the voting of women. The next claims are the abolition of the plural vote and of the Senate. So far the points are political. The social demands are more serious; among them, State support of all children attending schools; freedom of justice, the State to bear all costs; salaries, the maxima and minima, as well

as the hours of labour to be fixed by law and scheduled; and all mines and forests to be public property, and worked for the benefit of the people. This is the programme of the party led by M. Vandervelde, and as it is directed against the rights of property and capitalists it can easily be imagined how hateful the mere name of Socialist is to the moneyed classes. Curiously enough, M. Vandervelde, the Socialist leader, is a wealthy man himself and rather appreciative of the good things of this world. Some of his opponents have suggested that he should carry out his own theories by subdividing his property among his followers.

All the Socialist programme, however, must not be pronounced shadowy and unattainable. A wise Conservative administration would not delay in making concessions on reasonable points such as the hours of labour, and by these concessions it would do much to remove existing dissatisfaction. With regard to the plural vote, it must be evident that it constitutes a system that cannot permanently endure. It was the temporary expedient of a society easily frightened by the raising of spectres, and it has secured a lull until men's minds become more reasonable and tranquil. How long it will continue in force no one can pretend to know, but the consideration that makes it impossible to regard it as a permanent feature in Belgium's political system is that it is based on distrust of the Belgian people themselves. The day must come when the Belgians,

who enjoy so perfect an equality in most respects, will insist on their having also an equal power in voting. The very failure of proportional representation to seriously diminish the Catholic majority, or even to shake its long retained ascendancy, makes this result all the more certain, and brings the change nearer.

Nevertheless, there is no immediate likelihood of the existing Chamber voting what it would consider its own destruction any more than there is of the Socialists gaining a majority at the elections under the present system. Things will go on in the present temporising fashion until the opinion of the country has become formed as to fresh issues. The Socialists may never be able to put their programme into force; but, on the other hand, they are prevented from abandoning it, because their followers would resent it as an act of treachery. They have attained political importance, partly by asserting the legitimate rights of labour, and partly by taking advantage of the deplorable ignorance of the masses who have supported them. What that ignorance is may be gathered from the incident that, when the troubles of 1893 occurred, the *mot d'ordre* was given out that the miners of the Borinage were to go into Charleroi to bring back Universal Suffrage. Accordingly, each woman provided herself with a bag or a basket, and when they reached Charleroi they replied, to those who asked them why they carried this article, that "it was to bring back the S. U."

The recognised leaders of the Socialist party are Messrs. Vandervelde, Lorand, and Anseele. Of these, M. Vandervelde, long considered the leading orator in the Chamber, has been already mentioned. That he is not devoid of caution was shown in 1899, when he arrested the development of the Socialist outbreak with the caustic remark that the revolvers of his followers would be of little avail against the Mausers of the Garde Civique. M. Lorand is a good debater, but as he is opposed to everything, he is a destructive, and not a creative, politician. M. Anseele is the most extreme of all the Socialist deputies. His harangues indicate the man of action rather than the orator. He has more of the stuff of a mob-leader, if acts were substituted for words, than either of his colleagues.

At the same time there are reasons for thinking that the worst danger from Socialism in Belgium has passed by, not because the Socialist programme has undergone any change, but because safeguards have been provided against its realisation. These are of two kinds. In the Chamber itself the return of the Liberal party in considerably increased numbers, which places it on an equality with the Socialists, and with the addition of several new men of undoubted ability and promise, as the result of the 1900 election, has imposed some restraint on the Socialist members. The Liberals operate to some extent as a brake, on the extreme violence of the most advanced



section of the Chamber. The presence of gifted orators, such as M. Paul Hymans and M. Huysmans have proved themselves to be, imposes a limit to the authority of M. Vandervelde, whose influence through the fervour of his language was felt even by his opponents. The second safeguard is of a more definite character. In 1892-3, when the outbreak of Socialism was more violent, the forces at the disposal of the authorities were insufficient, and if its leaders had realised the weakness and unpreparedness of the Government at that moment a revolution might have been brought to a temporarily successful issue. Warned by this experience, the Government determined not to be caught napping again, and in the following year it organised the Garde Civique. This step was tantamount to arming the bourgeois class in its own self-defence. There is no doubt whatever that this body of armed citizens would, on any serious occasion arising, deal promptly and resolutely with all rioters in the chief cities. It may be compared to the force of special constables organised in London on any great emergency, with this important difference, that its members are armed with rifles and bayonets instead of staves. The recent addition to the army of fifteen thousand professional or long-service soldiers as volunteers will add greatly to the trustworthiness of the army in times of civil disturbance and effectually dispel the growing Socialist hope that the youthful conscripts would not fire upon them.

It is safe to say, none the less, that the Belgian Constitution has answered its main object, which was to keep the Flemings and Walloons joined together in one state, and to ensure that its form of government should be an hereditary monarchy. The country has been exceedingly fortunate in weathering both internal and external perils during three quarters of a century, and the one serious danger that has revealed itself from Socialism is less acute than it was a few years ago. The praise that has been lavished upon it by the public men of Belgium, read in the light of history, does not appear ill-deserved or excessive. The revision of 1893-4 removed some doubtful points and added new clauses to meet fresh circumstances. Even if the laws applying to the discovery and manifestation of public opinion have to be further modified at some future date, by the abolition of the plural vote and the adoption of universal suffrage, the Constitution would not need any alteration so long as Belgium remains "a constitutional and hereditary kingdom."





## CHAPTER IV

### THE COURT AND SOCIETY

THE Court of Belgium, although it was created under what might almost be called popular influences, has established as severe an etiquette as exists at larger and older courts with historical associations and an inherited ceremonial. This tendency was certainly increased under the influence of the two successive queens, Marie Louise of the House of Orleans, and Marie Henriette of that of Hapsburg. The first King was a great upholder of the monarchical dignity, and, during a long period of his reign, showed it by keeping himself in a state of seclusion from his Ministers. He was never easily accessible to any one. Such a charge cannot be brought against his son, King Leopold II., who is sometimes accused of being too easily accessible, because he wishes to see men with his own eyes, and to judge them and the public questions with which they are connected, for himself. But, notwithstanding this personal condescension, the regulation of Court ceremonial has been just as strict under the second Leopold as under the first. The seat of the Belgian



Court is the Palace of Brussels, facing the park, at the opposite extremity of which stand the "Palais de la Nation" and some of the Government offices. Despite its plain exterior, its interior is bright and attractive, and the throne-room is one of the finest in Europe. The palace was built in the middle of the eighteenth century by the Austrian Archduchess Marie Christine. The old palace of Brussels, known either as the Castle of Caudenberg, or as the Palace of Brabant, in which the Duchess of Parma received the celebrated Protest of the Beggars, was destroyed by fire in 1731. It occupied the ground now covered by the Place Royale, and its extensive grounds included the site of the present palace, the park, and much of the boulevards. Prince Charles of Lorraine, during his long governorship, resided in the Palais de Nassau, the residence of William of Orange, which has now been converted into the record office, library, and museum of modern pictures. During the Dutch régime the present Palace of Brussels, was occupied by the Prince of Orange. At present the palace is flanked on one side by the somewhat unsightly building which was formerly the residence of the D'Assche family, but which is now used as the office of the Civil List, the rooms and stables of the guard intervening between the two buildings. At the other end of the facade is the Hotel Bellevue, the proximity of which is certainly incongruous with the dignity of a palace. It was constructed at the

same time as the palace, under a favourable lease granted by the Empress Maria Theresa, and in external aspect harmonises with the palace. An arrangement for the acquisition of this hotel has recently been made on behalf of the King of the Belgians. It has thus become possible to extend the front of the palace from the old Hotel d'Assche to the corner of the Rue Royale, which will allow of the expansion of the existing palace into one of the finest royal residences in Europe. A law was passed in the summer of 1903 for the necessary appropriation of land, including a portion of the park.

The Brussels palace is used as the official headquarters of the Sovereign, rather than as a residence for the King. The Court receptions at the New Year, and all royal banquets or other entertainments, are held there, and the official work of the King, in his dual capacity of Belgian ruler and Sovereign of the Congo State, is performed in this building. The Court officials—the Court Grand Marshal, the King's Private Secretary, and the Superintendent of the Civil List—are also located in the palace. But the residence of the royal family is at the *château* of Laeken, which stands in a fine park to the north of Brussels, and about four miles from the palace. The old *château*, which was a favourite residence of the first Napoleon, and which was made historically famous as the place from which he dated the order for the Russian campaign, was destroyed by fire

in 1889, though it was soon rebuilt on the same spot. Laeken is more remarkable for its orangery and glass-houses than for the *château* itself, although the new additions to the main building may in a few years alter this description. In the lifetime of the late Queen of the Belgians, the two garden-parties given at Laeken always marked the close of the Brussels season. One of the most popular excursions of the Brussels citizens at the end of the summer is the visit to the Laeken conservatories and gardens, which are opened to the public for a certain number of days after the Court has gone into the country to Spa or Ostend. There are reports that it is proposed to add considerably to the size of the *château* at Laeken, but its charm will always be its rural position on the verge of a great city.

Other royal residences in Belgium are the royal *chalet* at Ostend, the late Queen's villa at Spa, and the *château* of Ciergnon. Of these only the first is in regular use, and it is the King's favourite summer residence. The villa at Spa was left by the Queen to the controller of her household, and has ceased to be a royal residence. A new royal residence is being built at Ostend, and when it is completed the old *chalet* will be devoted to some public use. The *château* of Ciergnon, beautifully situated on the Lesse, has not been occupied for many years, but its situation, in close proximity to the royal preserves at Villers, will make it a favourite residence again whenever the sovereign

happens to be fond of sport. The present King, unlike his father, has never taken any interest in covert or any other shooting. The Comte de Flandre, the King's only brother, has a fine palace in the Rue de la Regence, facing the Gallery of Old Masters, and also the Château des Amerois, with large coverts and wild-boar shooting, in the Ardennes, close to the French frontier. His son, Prince Albert, heir-presumptive to the Belgian throne, occupies a house in one of the fashionable squares, and has latterly used Ciergnon as a country seat.

Society in Brussels is divided into several clearly distinguishable groups. There are, first of all, the few representatives left of the old Netherlands nobility, with their pedigrees and papers dating back to the Crusades and the founding of the order of the Golden Fleece in the Burgundian epoch. These families, restricting the list to those who have preserved their ancient importance, are those of De Ligne, D'Arenberg, Chimay, Croy, Merode, D'Assche, and Lalaing. Of these families De Ligne and D'Arenberg are more Austrian in the first case and German in the second than Belgian. The Prince de Ligne maintains a house in Brussels, the famous park at Belœil, which is the cradle of his race, and a *château de chasse* in the Ardennes; but his palace is in Vienna, and his titles and honours are Imperial and Austrian. The Duke D'Arenberg represents in the female line the German family of his name,

also a branch of the Croys, and still a third of the De la Marcks of the Ardennes, but in the male line he is a De Ligne. His favourite residences are in Germany, and his chief functions are those of an officer of the Garde du Corps. But he still keeps up a country place at Aerschot, and his residence at Brussels is the most famous private hotel or palace in the city, and was formerly well known to tourists for its picture gallery, but this has lately been removed to Germany. The Hotel D'Arenberg stands above the little square called the Petit Sablon. It is surrounded for the greater part by a high wall, which effectually conceals its extensive and well-wooded garden, in which there are several ponds. Part of the old building was destroyed in the fire of 1889, but the wing then saved, which represented the residence of the famous and splendour-loving Count Egmont, has lately been demolished and rebuilt. A little farther up the Rue des Petits Carmes was the Hotel Culembourg, in which the famous Oath of the Beggars was taken in 1566. It has long been demolished, and the new barracks of the Grenadiers now stand on the spot which was formerly occupied by a convent, and afterwards by a prison. There have of late years been repeated rumours that the present Duke D'Arenberg contemplates selling his Brussels residence to the town, which is desirous of making some improvements in this quarter. It is probable that sooner or later this scheme will be carried out.



The five other families in the list are more exclusively Belgian than the two great houses just named, which have their seats in other countries as well. They have not merely their estates in the country, but the careers of many of the scions of these families lie in its public service. They have held all the chief posts in the Government or the diplomatic service of the country. A Comte de Merode has been Prime Minister, and his grandfather was put forward as eligible for the office of first Belgian King or President in 1830. Prince de Carignan-Chimay was long Foreign Minister; and Count de Lalaing has just been appointed Minister in London. Others have proved that they are worthy descendants of the men whose names figured in the first list of the Golden Fleece. This small and exclusive set stands at the head of Belgian society.

Other clear social divisions are composed of the officials, the *haute finance*, literature, and artists. Political personages enjoy no special consideration socially on account of their being members of the Legislature: indeed, it is rather the reverse. The majority of them are regarded as persons requiring or seeking emolument; those whose material prosperity is beyond doubt are held in some way to diminish their own importance by becoming Deputies. There are, of course, a few exceptions to this rule, as, for instance, in the case of M. Woeste, who is regarded by the Catholic party as sacrificing his own convenience for the benefit of

the cause. These remarks do not apply either to the Senators, who are unpaid, conduct their proceedings in a dignified manner, and have comparatively little legislative work to occupy their time and attention.

It is very different with the permanent officials of the great departments. Employment in the cabinets or secretariats of the chief offices is much sought for, and considerable social influence and position are needed to obtain admission into them. The permanent officials of Brussels are, therefore, a highly representative class, and contain in their ranks some of the best ability in the country. A leading English statesman once declared that the real rulers of England were the permanent officials. This remark might be applied with equal force to Belgium, in the sense that the officials, if not rulers, are the directors and manipulators of the Administration. An official who has risen to be head of a department has therefore a recognised place in society, and is often a welcome guest in the most exclusive set, where the financial magnate could never gain admission. It is certainly curious and not easily to be explained why this is so, but there is no disputing the fact that the bureaucrat occupies a place in the social scale superior to that of members of the bar and men of letters or art. The explanation is perhaps to be found in the wish to know what is going on, and the permanent official is supposed to be the depository of many secrets. But it is none the less



the fact that, as an observant foreign member of the *corps diplomatique* at Brussels once said to the present writer, "At the dinners of the most exclusive families there will always be *one* official."

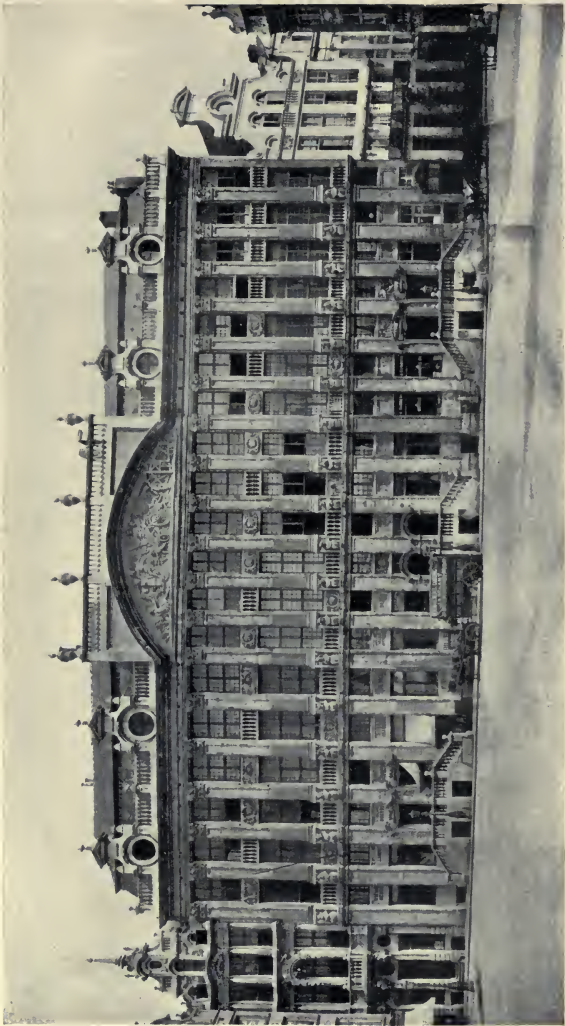
Members of the bar, judges, and officers of the Army, as such, do not by virtue of their rank command the recognition that they receive in other countries. This is equally true of writers, artists, and musicians. The Belgians are not great readers, and perhaps this explains why literature as a profession does not stand as high in their estimation as it ought to do. Music and painting are far more appreciated, and Belgians will even get enthusiastic about the works of their compatriots in these arts when the prose of the most graceful writer is practically ignored outside his own comparatively small circle. But the painter and musician, however admired and appreciated, does not effect an entrance into society by right of his talent. As the consequence of this the successful painter generally quits Brussels for Paris, where all doors are opened to him, and the successful musician becomes cosmopolitan, spending the greater portion of his year in the capitals of Europe and even of America.

The members of the *haute finance* form another set, or almost a colony, in the Belgian capital. Some of the largest fortunes in Europe commenced in a very small and humble way at Brussels. The threads of many important undertakings might be traced to a single reel in that

city. Some of the finest houses on the boulevards and in the avenues are occupied by men whose names are pillars of strength in the stock exchanges of Europe. The majority of these financiers are Jews, not Belgians, and their predominance in the world of finance almost revives the time in the great age of Flemish prosperity, when "only Jews and Lombards were allowed to deal in money." As Belgium is essentially a business country, it naturally follows that the financial magnates of Brussels stand high in society. Their establishments are the best appointed, their carriages and horses are the most showy, and their dinners and entertainments the choicest and most sought after in Brussels. Their influence is the greatest in the land—greater than that of the permanent officials, whose means are limited. But there are some circles into which all their wealth will not gain them admission, and among the mass of the bourgeois classes there is felt for them a strong and increasing dislike, which may one day develop dangerous tendencies. It is quite a common complaint to hear Belgian journalists and politicians declare that their country is being exploited by the Jews. There is, of course, no real truth in this assertion, but certainly the Jews are not popular among the Catholics.

In addition to Brussels society the three important cities, Antwerp, Liége, and Ghent, have social sets of their own, each marked by special features and characteristics. At Antwerp the rich

merchants who inhabit the fine mansions along the avenues that have been laid out over the site of the old *enceinte* entertain hospitably, and give the tone to the life and fashion of the place. The society is mainly Flemish, and employs that language in familiar conversation. At Ghent and Liége the social magnates are manufacturers rather than merchants. At Ghent, where society is more exclusively Flemish than at Antwerp, there are still to be seen the residences of some of the old Flemish families which constituted the civic nobility of the cities of Flanders, and in which the dignities of sheriff and burgomaster had become hereditary. The governors of the Flemish provinces are carefully selected from their ranks, and such names as Liedekerke, Ryhove, and Van Kerckove preserve to the present age families which were prominent in the days of the Artevelde. At Liége, society is just as pronounced from the Walloon point of view. Here French is the language of society, and Flemish is never heard. The great source of wealth is manufacture, and the workshops which have turned Seraing and Liége itself into a vast congeries of chimneys and furnaces support a considerable society in a state of luxury. At Liége, unlike Ghent and Antwerp, a large number of the wealthy residents have villas and country houses outside the city, and consequently the streets of Liége do not present long rows of fine houses as at Antwerp. On the other hand, the



PALACE OF FLANDERS AT BRUSSELS



surrounding hills which make the Liége panorama so fine are dotted at frequent intervals with fine suburban residences in charming gardens. The prosperity of Liége is in no way behind its Western rivals, and Walloon society is quite as gay and hospitable as that of Flanders. It is said, however, that there is an increasing tendency among those who have made their fortunes or who have retired from the active direction of their business concerns to migrate to Brussels and to settle down in the capital, where the attractions are undeniably greater.

Speaking generally, society throughout Belgium is controlled by local considerations, and even in the capital is not comprehensive of several sections of the community. Class keeps to class, profession to profession, interest to interest. There is the society of Brussels, which is partly noble, partly official, and partly financial. It has not yet assimilated literary, artistic, or even political elements. In the other great cities society is exclusively commercial and industrial. The Court life of Brussels is not of sufficient activity to provide an instrument for the fusion of classes. The occasions when the palace opens its doors are few. The formal receptions show the invited in groups, and in groups they remain. The State banquets are given to definite bodies—the Senate or the Chamber. The less formal dinners have as their motive some business negotiation, or the discussion of an external question,



which may relate to a railway in Africa or a concession in China.

On the whole, however, society in Brussels manages to enjoy itself, and if the *vie intime* is simpler than in London or Paris, the social intercourse is on a sufficiently active scale to make the Brussels season a very gay one. It commences with the close of autumn and the return of the families from their holiday at the seaside or the country. A country trip, whether it lasts for three months, as with the leisured class, or for only a fortnight, as with the well-to-do shop-keeper, is regarded as an indispensable condition of existence. All have returned by November, and the opera season has begun a month earlier and it continues until the following June. Lent imposes a break on the round of festivities, and the very wealthy flit to the Riviera or the Côte d'Azur, as it is generally called in Belgium. After Easter the season reopens with renewed fervour for a short period. The drives down the Avenue Louise to the Bois de la Cambre, the gallops around the sinuous tracks made for horsemen between the alleys of lofty limes and sycamores, become more crowded, and are often continued further afield through the forest of Soignies to Groenendael or Tervueren. Of late years horse-racing has taken a firm hold on the public fancy, and the race-meetings in the Bois are frequented as much by the populace, which goes there by train or tram, as by society, which has its own



carriages and motor-cars. The popularity of the race-meeting, which was at first looked at askance by society, furnishes evidence of the scarcity of outdoor amusements. As the summer advances the outdoor concerts of the Vauxhall Gardens, which form part of the park, are substituted for the opera, and for the good people of Brussels, unable to prolong their *villégiatura* beyond a fixed period, they provide an agreeable and never-failing attraction. Society has taken up in turn croquet, lawn-tennis, and ping-pong; but as its most favourite rôle is to find amusement without exertion, these games have had only a fleeting vogue and success.





## CHAPTER V

### BURGHER LIFE IN BRUSSELS

THE typical life of the Belgian people is perhaps to be found best revealed in the household of the Brussels citizen. Leaving aside the very small stratum of what may be called Society, the mode of life among the great body of citizens, above the working classes, is very much the same, notwithstanding differences of income, occupation, and education. Whether the head of the household be a lawyer or a trader, a manufacturer or a shopkeeper who is well enough off to live away from his shop, there is less class difference, so far as the daily routine of life goes, than would be found in any other European community. The explanation is, that at heart the Belgians are a simple people, whose chief characteristic, strengthened by harsh experience for many generations, is thrift. There is a complete absence of all ostentatious display. It would be as impossible to estimate a man's income from the interior of his house as it would be to assign his profession or business from his appearance in the street. This appearance of equality is very largely due to

the two not disconnected facts, that the first object with every Brussels citizen is to become proprietor of his own house, and that the houses of Brussels are built very much after the same pattern. This, of course, does not apply to the fashionable boulevards or the Avenue Louise, but in all the by-streets and suburbs now spreading out in every direction, houses are being run up, lofty and narrow, all seemingly fashioned by the same architect. The Belgians have an aversion to being mere tenants, regarding the payment of rent as so much loss of money; and a house, or the money to purchase one, is considered the best kind of *dot* that a young woman can bring to her husband. The price of a house containing seven rooms besides kitchen, runs from a thousand pounds in the fashionable suburbs like St. Gilles, to five hundred in the outer suburbs like Etterbeck. There is, in addition, a tax of ten per cent. payable to the commune, with a share to the State, on the conclusion of the purchase. Having paid the price, the proprietor is practically relieved from all annual payments, for the taxes to the commune are exceedingly low, and do not amount to more than six per cent. on the estimated rent, which is about one eleventh of the purchase sum. Ten per cent. will pay the commune, the supply of water, and that of gas as well, and for this reason Brussels has been called the paradise of the small householder. There is no doubt that the free possession of a house lies at the root of the Belgian citizen's

comfort, and explains how, with a very small income, he can occupy a decent house which externally does not differ materially from one the occupant of which may have ten times his income.

It is only on entering these houses that some idea can be formed of the status of the occupant. Among those families whose income is not in proportion to the exterior of their residence, the interior will reveal the fact by its bareness and absence of decoration, whereas those who are comfortably off will expend large sums on painting and gilding. The Belgians are noted for their good taste in the way they decorate the inside of their houses, and as the house is really theirs, they do not mind spending very considerable sums in this way. It is the same with the furniture, which is always as good as the owner can afford in the reception-rooms. Every Belgian house has what may be called its show-rooms, and their contents will give the clue at once to the degree of prosperity the family has attained. There may be a thousand pounds' worth of furniture and *objets d'art* in the room, or there may be only ten pounds' worth. In either case it is the best that the owners can show.

There is one thing that these rooms have in common, no matter what the position of the occupant, and that is the air of being rarely used. It is more like the model-room into which the furniture provider invites his customer for the pur-

pose of deciding the style in which he proposes to furnish, than an actual living-room. The Belgian's first investment is to buy his house, and his second is to lay in a stock of furniture. As both are intended not merely to last a lifetime, but to be handed down in the family, the most scrupulous care is taken of every article. A shade of anxiety may be traced on the worthy owner's face if a visitor moves in a chair or brushes past a table. Sometimes these good people let a floor, often to English visitors, with the view of saving something for a holiday, or through some needed economy; and if the rooms are well furnished, the urgent request is made not to spoil the furniture (*il ne faut pas abimer les meubles*). I knew of a case where the iteration of this injunction became so irksome that the English tenants left twenty-four hours after entry, because they were afraid to sit on the chairs.

Into the regular living-rooms no stranger is allowed to penetrate, but the casual opportunities afforded during long residence in the country enable one to see that they are very bare and plain. As a rule, the dining-room is in close proximity to the kitchen, so that the necessary domestic service is reduced to a minimum. There is, of course, in most houses a dining-room upstairs, but this is only used on the very rare occasions when an entertainment of some sort is given. The Belgians are not prone to the display of much hospitality

among themselves. They do not dine often at one another's houses. The members of the same family meet occasionally, but, as a rule, their dinners in common are to celebrate some family event, such as a marriage, or an engagement, or a first communion. The case is practically unknown of taking a friend home to have "pot-luck." To do so would seriously disconcert the lady of the house, who is usually in *négligé* until she goes for her afternoon promenade.

The life of the house, like the life of the whole country, begins at an early hour. By eight o'clock, probably every family in Brussels will have finished its breakfast, and in the vicinity of the markets in the lower town or in the communes, each of which has its market, the day's provisions will have been purchased as well. This early rising is indispensable, as all the offices, and in fact the whole business of the city, commence at nine punctually. This means that the person engaged must leave his house between eight and half-past, in accordance with the distance he has to travel; but as there are electric trams now in all directions, the journey, from even the outer suburbs, can generally be accomplished with much rapidity. The Belgians take only a light breakfast, which is almost universally *café au lait*, rolls and butter; but of late years the doctors have been recommending a more substantial meal, after the English fashion. Those who are not too pressed in the morning by their occupations are



now adding to their breakfast one or two dishes, but such luxuries, as they are called, are taken by but a very small number of persons.

The offices close at twelve, and all business is stopped at that hour for the purpose of dining. The men, who have rushed off in the morning to be at their posts in good time, rush back to their houses at a still greater speed to enjoy the chief meal of the day. By this time the stimulating effect of the morning coffee has long worn off, and the bread-winners are simply faint and famishing. It is perilous to protract an interview with a Belgian official when the clock hand points to ten minutes to twelve. Politeness will scarcely prevent his displaying the anxiety and displeasure with which he begins to apprehend that some minutes of his cherished two hours are going to be poached from him. The best business in the country is done before eleven o'clock in the morning. After that hour it is no exaggeration to say that the needs of exhausted nature begin to assert themselves.

The mid-day meal, which commences as a general rule at half-past twelve, is the most substantial of the whole day. It is always a hot repast and is always begun with a soup. The Belgians are hearty, not to say great, eaters, and it takes a good hour to allay their hunger. The general drink is beer—wine is drunk rarely and sparingly—and a cup of black coffee is taken at the end as a digestive rather than as a stimulant, and then



the journey is made back to the office or business, which resumes work at two o'clock. The work of the afternoon is done more leisurely than that of the morning, and consists chiefly of the correspondence resulting from the transactions of the morning. The offices work late, always till six, and often till seven or after. Then the more or less weary toiler returns home to his supper, which is a simple meal, probably the remains of the dinner, assisted with something purchased on the way back, from a *charcutier*. Having to get up so early, the Brussels citizen goes to bed in good time. Very soon after nine o'clock all the lights will be out in the ordinary household five nights out of the seven. The Belgian is not a reader; the morning and evening newspapers satisfy all his wants in that direction; hence there is nothing to keep him from his well-earned repose.

The life *au restaurant* is a far less marked feature in Brussels than in Paris. It is rather expensive, even at the cheapest restaurants, and the family man will indulge in it only occasionally. Those whose work lies in the lower town, where the bourse and business offices are, sometimes are obliged to take their dinner in one of the numerous second-class restaurants off the Boulevard Anspach. In any of these a hot *plat*, with beer and coffee afterwards, can be obtained for a franc and a half. In the same quarter of the town, but chiefly round the Grand' Place and the square of the Monnaie theatre, are some of the first restaur-

ants in the city: the Filet de Sole, the Riche, the Etoile, no longer what it was in the reign of M. Dot, and the Gigot de Mouton. These are not so well known to the tourist as those in the upper town, *e. g.*, Frères Provençaux, Regence, Globe, and Strobbe, the last named in the Avenue Louise. Fashion and excellence vary, suddenly and without apparent reason; but perhaps the best cooking in Brussels is now to be had at the Filet de Sole and the Provençaux, while at the Globe, which is far less expensive than either, the *cuisine* is surprisingly good. But if the Brussels paterfamilias does not habitually patronise the restaurant, he makes a great effort to dine out on Sunday evening, and to take the grown-up members of his family with him. He may not, in the majority of cases, be able to do this more than once a month, but during the summer he will probably patronise every week one or other of the cafés encircling the Bois de la Cambre, and take his Sunday supper with his family *al fresco*. Even if the repast is limited to one dish for himself and his wife, and *tartines* or *gauffres* for the children, he will sit there the whole-evening drinking, not immoderately, light beer, such as gueuze lambeck or bock. It is a significant indication of the prevalence of the same views of life throughout the nation, that while the humble citizen is enjoying himself in the less pretentious cafés, Society is doing very much the same thing on the terrace of the fashionable Laiterie in the Bois, or farther off

at Groenendael, which is reached by a delightful drive through part of the old forest of Soignies. Then the concerts given in the Vauxhall Gardens by the orchestra of the opera are an additional attraction, and on Sundays in particular bring together a large audience outside the enclosure. To get an idea of the real life of Brussels, one must go about the boulevards and to the popular resorts on Sunday evenings. Then the people can be seen enjoying themselves in their own quiet, undemonstrative way, and if there is some music going on, their contentment is complete. A band is maintained by the municipality, and plays daily in the park facing the palace. Military bands also play there occasionally, and in the Bois. The band of the regiment of Guides is first-rate, and has been heard in London and Paris.

One of the most marked predilections of the Belgian character is his enthusiasm for music. Most nations are ruled by laws, but it would be easier to govern the Belgians by music. Every commune, not merely in Brussels but throughout Belgium, has its band or *symphonie*, and most of those of any size or importance have two, for politics come into the question. There will be the Catholic Band and the Liberal Band, and even the Socialists—with a programme destructive of everything else that is national—conform to the popular feeling, and march to the sound of drums and trumpets. The chief or at least the most frequent occasion for the public appearance of these

bands is for the funeral of some old or prominent resident, when the *symphonie communale* will attend and lead the procession to the strains of the Dead March. But in their own halls they always give one or two concerts in the course of the year.

Bearing in mind this trait, it is not surprising that the opera is exceedingly popular. Théâtre de la Monnaie is an opera house, not a theatre, and is noted for the excellence of its orchestra and general management. It has a remarkably long season, beginning in October and going on without interruption to May. A very fair company is attached to the theatre, and occasionally singers with a European reputation are engaged for a time. This is especially the case after Easter. Formerly, *débutantes* of exceptional promise rather inclined to the Monnaie as the scene for their first appearance, because they might feel sure that, if they had the least claim to merit, the appreciative Brussels audience would give them a cordial greeting; and in the event of failure none would be more indulgent.

Brussels is well known in the musical world for its excellent College of Music, and, indeed, the facilities for studying music in all its branches are great, and to be enjoyed at a very reasonable charge, any Belgian student of promise paying nothing at all. For this reason many English and other foreign families take up their residence in Brussels, and send their sons or daughters to the Conservatoire, in the Rue de la

Regence, where they have to pay only eight pounds a year. This institution enjoys a State subsidy, and is more or less under State direction, showing that the Government recognises the important place music has in the estimation of the public. The concerts given by the students at the end of each term, in connection with the distribution of prizes, are attended by great crowds. Owing to the large number of persons interested, tickets are distributed only to the relatives of the students attending the college. A large number of Conservatoire certificate-holders have become subsequently famous in the ranks of musicians and singers. Concerts are given occasionally by Monsieur Ysaye and other well-known performers at the Salle d'Harmonie, at the bottom of the Montagne de la Cour; and, when that hall is too small for the audience expected, in the large theatre called the Alhambra. There is not a house exclusively reserved for light opera in Brussels, but the Monnaie has of late years somewhat extended its programme from its old restricted cultivation of the grand opera.

There are a considerable number of theatres in Brussels, but not one that could be singled out as the theatre *par excellence* of the city. A national theatre is, indeed, a conspicuous want in the capital of Belgium, and it is surprising that the State, which looks after most things, has never thought of supplying one. In the upper town there are only two theatres, both very small, viz.,



the Parc, which is the more fashionable, and the Molière, near the Porte de Namur. In the lower town there are half a dozen or more, none very distinguished, and all devoted to light comedy. The drama is sometimes to be seen at the Alhambra, and the Flemings have a theatre of their own, in which a play of the great days of old, like *Thys van Uylenspiegel* sometimes creates a sensation. As a rule, the theatres arouse but languid interest, if compared with the opera, unless the latest Paris success flits northward to amuse and attract the Belgians for a short spell.

One of the most striking features of Brussels is the long avenue, bordered with two rows of noble lime trees, which forms the centre of the boulevard in the upper town, forming a half-circle, from the top of the Jardin Botanique to the Porte de Hal. These trees were planted by Prince Charles of Lorraine, in the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time the old walls of the town followed the same curve as this avenue, and immediately beyond it. After the war of independence the walls were demolished and several new quarters were constructed, such as the fine Rue de la Loi, and the Quartier Leopold. Less than thirty years ago the Avenue Louise was completed with its promenade of one mile and a half under limes and chestnuts, its ride for the same distance, and the broad carriage drive between. Part of the roadway is occupied by the electric tram-line. The avenue is bordered on

each side by fine modern houses, many of them in a blue grained stone, which is very effective. Although these houses are quite modern, and contain many improvements which are not to be found in the houses of the older quarters of the town, the Quartier Louise is not so fashionable as the Quartier Leopold. On the other hand, the former contains the bulk of the English colony, and its fine gravel soil adds greatly to its reputation for healthfulness. The Avenue Louise terminates at the entrance to the Bois, and it runs in a southerly direction, parallel with the road that leads to Waterloo. Within the last six years another fine avenue has been laid out in an easterly direction to the Park of Tervueren. This avenue is really a prolongation of the Rue de la Loi, beyond the grounds of the Cinquantenaire, where the last exhibition was held. It is about six miles long, and a large number of handsome houses have been constructed for a considerable distance along the route. When all the arrangements have been completed, it will be one of the finest drives in Brussels. There is an electric tramway along the avenue to Tervueren, which was once a royal park. It is now occupied by the Congo Museum, and excursions there are very popular. There are some fine woods and several large lakes in the grounds. The old castle of Tervueren was the country seat of the Dukes of Brabant, and in the Abbey Church hard by many of them were buried. Half-way the route is intersected by the

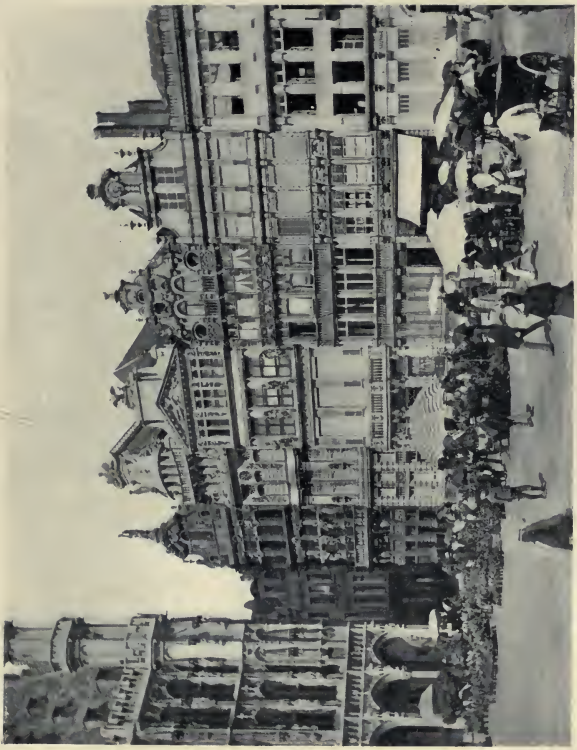


road to Groenendael, which eventually arrives at the village of Waterloo.

For a city which, with its suburbs, contains not much over half a million people, Brussels covers an immense extent of ground, and as the tendency of the inhabitants is to move out into the suburbs, a rapid and cheap means of conveyance is absolutely essential. This has been provided in the admirable service of electric trams which run in all directions. Without these it would be quite impossible for so large a number of the Brussels population to live at a distance of three or four miles, and even more, from their work. No one who has enjoyed the facilities of getting about in Brussels can have failed to regret that London has not been provided with some similar means of locomotion. Insular prejudice has kept the antiquated horse-bus on the streets for twenty years after the introduction of the electric tram on the Continent; and even now that a change is practically decided, the prejudice against laying down a tram-line in the streets is so great that motor-omnibuses are to be allowed to pursue their independent tracks at the discretion of their drivers—expert or inexperienced, cool or nervous—through the crowded thoroughfares of London, instead of adopting the simplest and safest system. The Brussels trams work in a regular fashion, without interfering in the least with the vehicular traffic. The driver keeps his finger incessantly on the alarum-bell, and at first the continuous noise

offends the ear, especially in the more narrow streets; but this soon passes off, and the "klinging" of the tram-car attracts no more notice than the jar of the omnibus along the roads in London. Indeed, the noise of a heavy waggon on the paved streets is far greater and more difficult to get accustomed to. I remember when I first went to Brussels saying to a Belgian gentleman that the Brussels streets were very noisy, whereupon he rejoined, "And so are London streets." It seemed to me at the time that he was quite mistaken, and even that he had said something absurd; but when I returned to London some months later, I found the noise far worse than the noisiest Brussels street, which is evidence in its way of how thoroughly one gets accustomed to whatever goes on around.

The main electric tram-line in Brussels is that which connects the Northern and Southern railway-stations by the upper boulevards. These stations are on the same level, and between them run the broad boulevards of Anspach and Hainaut. By this direct road, paved with asphalt, the distance is about one mile and a half; whereas by the route followed it is over five miles. At the Porte de Namur and the Porte Louise there are cross routes, both starting from Schaerbeek, and proceeding either to the Bois or to Uccle, a suburb at the end of the Chaussée de Charleroi. One of these routes passes in front of the King's Palace, while the other continues across the Place



A STREET SCENE IN BRUSSELS



Royale, down the Rue de la Regence to the Palais de Justice, and then up the Avenue Louise. Among other important lines may be mentioned that down the Rue de la Loi to the Cinquante-naire, and the line starting at the back of the Chambers for Tervueren. There is another line by the Chaussée of Waterloo to a point not far from that village which is, however, four miles from the Lion. Besides these regular tramways there are still some horse-omnibus routes, a few running along rails, between the upper and lower towns, as well as along the lower boulevards; but during the summer of 1903 an electric tram was laid between the two stations, and continued to Laeken. The tram-lines are admirably managed, and the fares are cheap. Each carriage is divided into two compartments—first and second class—and the platform at each end is also used for passengers. There is a driver and a ticket collector to each car; but when the train is made up of two carriages, as is generally the case, there is only one driver. The fare in the first-class is only a half-penny more than the second, and threepence will take one from the Bois to either of the chief stations. The tram-cars have fixed stopping-posts; but there are numerous *arrêts facultatifs* which it takes some time, however, for the stranger to discover. The only drawback is that the platforms, especially in fine weather, are often so crowded as to make it difficult for fresh arrivals to get on to the tram or into the interior, which

may be empty. The Belgian passengers are not very active in making way—it is not intentional rudeness—and sometimes there is a little more hustling than is pleasant or necessary. But anything of this nature in Brussels pales into insignificance beside the free-fight for a seat on a London omnibus at a crowded hour of the day.

The extreme facility for getting about in Brussels by means of the trams is one of its chief attractions as a place of residence. As has been said, it is the main cause why the suburbs are spreading far out in every direction, so that there are now streets of houses leading to places that only a few years ago were primitive country villages. It is one of the privileges of the Belgian citizen that he can generally fix his home in a suburb which is almost the country, where he can have his vegetable garden and his poultry.







## CHAPTER VI

### THE COMMERCIAL CLASSES OF ANTWERP

TO a very great extent, the prosperity of Belgium is revealed in the commercial activity of Antwerp, and the commercial classes of that city form a community which more nearly resembles an English community than any other in Belgium. The pursuit of over-sea commerce has broadened the view of the merchants and shippers of the great port on the Scheldt, and there is less of the communal, or as we should say, parochial, spirit about them than about any other section of the Belgian people. They are stationed at Belgium's window to the outer world, and they realise better than the rest of their countrymen the precise place filled in it by their small country. They know, for instance, that the affairs of this planet are not bound up in the petty questions that engross the attention of professional politicians in the Rue de la Loi. Consequently they keep aloof from politics and concentrate their energies on making money.

Of all the cities of Belgium there is not one with a more interesting past, or a more prosperous

present, than Antwerp. When Bruges lost the premier place as a centre of commerce, through the closing of the Zwyn, Antwerp stepped into its shoes, and, in the time of Charles V., it attained the zenith of its prosperity. Its population exceeded one hundred and thirty thousand, and some authorities have put it as high as two hundred thousand. Guicciardini, the Italian envoy, at the beginning of the reign of Charles's son and successor, Philip II., described in glowing terms its commercial activity, which exceeded that of Venice. Alva first arrested its prosperity and Parma dealt it the final blow. The city which in 1566 could boast of one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, contained in 1589 no more than fifty-five thousand. A large proportion of its citizens and their families had sought and found new homes in England. After the cessation of the troubles of the sixteenth century, Antwerp suffered from the closure of the Scheldt by the Dutch, and when the French occupied Belgium in 1794, its population did not exceed forty thousand. Its modern prosperity began one hundred years ago, when Napoleon, believing that he could make it the first port of the Continent, assigned large sums for the excavation of two docks and a line of quays. It did not, however, receive the impulse which has made it one of the most important ports of the Continent until 1863, when the freedom of the Scheldt was obtained by purchase from the Dutch Government. Since that

occurrence the number of ships making use of the port of Antwerp has trebled, while their tonnage has increased fivefold. In consequence of this increase, Antwerp needs a larger port, and schemes are under discussion for providing new docks and quays, and even a fresh channel to the river, by means of what is called the *grande coupure*, which would save a considerable bend in the Scheldt between Antwerp and the sea. This large project has encountered quite as much opposition as it has received support, and is never likely to be carried out. But there is no doubt that Antwerp does not possess the accommodation it has need of, and that the port will have to be enlarged.

If the traffic has outgrown the port, so also has the population the town. When the Scheldt was freed in 1863, it had one hundred and twenty-five thousand people, it now contains three hundred and thirty thousand. Antwerp is, as is well known, a fortress of great strength, but the town is surrounded by an *enceinte*, which is the finest work of its kind in the world, except where the river makes it unnecessary. The present *enceinte* was finished in 1860, and replaced the old one of the Middle Ages. It signified a very large addition to the area of the town for the new *enceinte* is eight and a quarter miles in length, as compared with the two and a half miles of the old. But the growth of population has proved so rapid that people say there is not room for the present inhabitants. The large suburbs of Berchem and

Borgerhout absorbed by the new *enceinte* afforded some relief, but the pressure within the town has again become serious and must, before many more years, be relieved by some means or other. One proposal is to remove the *enceinte*. Another is to extend the town down the Scheldt on land reclaimed by means of the *grande coupure*. A third is to develop the land on the left bank of the Scheldt and to connect it with the town on the right bank by several tunnels passing under the river. It has never been forgotten locally, that Napoleon considered the left bank of the river the preferable side, and wished to found a town round the fine fort known as the Tête de Flandre.

Antwerp, although it lies fifty-six miles up a river, part of which might be called more appropriately an arm of the sea, is a seaport open to the largest steamers. The principal portion of its trade, therefore, is that of transmitting and receiving merchandise. It is the gate of Belgium from and to the oceans, for Ostend, its only rival, is limited to the conveyance of passengers and of light articles, such as vegetables and fruits, to and from England. There is not, and never can be, any serious rivalry between the two places. Ostend is in communication with Dover and the Thames, while Antwerp is in touch with all the countries of the world. Shipping, therefore, plays the preponderating rôle in the commercial life of Antwerp, and it is certainly strange to find that notwithstanding all their enterprise and in-

dustry, the Belgians have practically no marine of their own. Almost the whole of their trade is carried on in foreign vessels. The only important exception is the line of steamers plying to and from the Congo, which is subsidised by the Congo Free State. These steamers were built at Hoboken, three miles above Antwerp, on the Scheldt, where the Cockerill firm of Seraing have a yard. Statements have frequently been made that this yard is to be enlarged, and that shipbuilding is to be taken in hand on a large scale, but up to the present nothing important has been accomplished. There is, however, valid reason to believe that something is to be done before long, and a training-ship for young officers is being constructed.

Be that as it may, the present high prosperity of the place has been reached without a Belgian marine, and, as a matter of fact, the great bulk of its trade has been carried on under the British flag. Of late German competition has been creeping up, and makes a good show in the port statistics, but it is still a long way behind the English. In the agency business on shore it is different. Not merely are there a great many more German firms than English, but they are so numerous that they appear almost as the equals of the Belgians. They are careful, however, to screen their nationality as much as possible, and as an instance of this it may be mentioned that they do not claim the usual foreigner's exemption from service in the Garde Civique.



Apart from the shipping interest, the Antwerp market is one of the most important in Europe for several articles of commerce. The prices of rubber and ivory are practically regulated on the Continent by its quotations. Antwerp has greatly benefited by the import of caoutchouc, or rubber, from the Congo State. In 1902, the value of this raw material was estimated at five million kilogrammes (five thousand tons), sold at an average of seven francs a kilo, or about £1,500,000, and Antwerp now ranks after Liverpool, but, of course, at a respectful distance, in the rubber market. Coffee, hides, leather, and timber are dealt in to very large amounts. The daily transactions on the Bourse are very considerable, and the activity displayed in the sale and purchase of securities reveals the presence of a wealthy and enterprising business class. It is here that the real stock exchange transactions of the country are carried out. There are Bourses at Brussels and the other large towns, but their business is small in comparison with that of Antwerp, and they generally follow its lead. The Bourse of Antwerp is a fine building, constructed thirty years ago on the site of the old edifice, which was burned down in 1858. The original Bourse, one of the finest Gothic buildings in the country, was built in 1531 at the cost of an Antwerp merchant, named Van der Beurse, who presented it to his fellow-citizens as a meeting-place for merchants. It is said that the word "Bourse" is derived from his name. The magni-



tude of the commerce of Antwerp may be gathered from the fact that Belgium's exports exceeded one hundred and twenty-nine millions sterling, and her imports were over one hundred and forty-five millions in 1902, and that, so far as they were sea-borne, nine tenths of them passed through Antwerp.

The wealthier of the Antwerp merchants reside in fine and attractive-looking houses that border the broad boulevards laid out over the line of the ancient wall. These houses are singularly bright, and many of them are highly artistic. Unlike the Brussels mansion, which is uniformly white, except in the new parts of the town, such as the Avenue Louise, the Antwerp residence is generally brick of several colours with bright green wooden shutters, or *volets*. The boulevards form a semicircle in the town extending from the fine new picture gallery on the Place du Peuple in the south, to the Grand Bassin in the north, and the centre is occupied by gardens, decorated with statues, as well as by a broad carriage and tram-road. As the line of boulevard extends for over three miles, the effect is impressive, and it is certainly increased by contrast with the older parts of the town, where the streets are narrow and tortuous.

The Antwerp merchant, probably on account of his larger knowledge of the outer world, and his greater intercourse with it, is far more hospitable in his habits than any other class in Belgium.

He will invite a foreign visitor to dinner, and he will get friends to meet him. He will make it his object to reveal his own manner of life, and what his class think on the social side of existence. He likes to be a little ostentatious in his entertainment, and to bring forth the best of his wines and his cigars. Nor is this done by any exceptional effort, as is so often the case in Brussels, where one cannot help feeling that any special entertainment has been provided only by upsetting the whole household. In Antwerp, it is made perfectly clear that the host is quite accustomed to receiving friends and visitors in the intimacy of his family life; it is an everyday occurrence. In another point Antwerp society leads the country, and that is in respect of conversation. In other cities the conversation is very limited in the range of subjects, being generally devoted to local or family matters, but in Antwerp interest is taken in any questions that may happen to attract the attention of the world generally. No Belgians read much beyond the newspapers, but the Antwerp citizen reads more than any other Belgian.

If one wishes to get a good general impression of Antwerp society, the place to go to is the opera at the Théâtre Royal on Sunday afternoon. The house is always packed. In the stalls, the boxes, and the parquet, especially the last, which corresponds to the English dress-circle, may be seen the most prominent representatives of the wealth and prosperity of Antwerp. As the opera season is in

the winter, the show of furs is imposing, and a double row of carriages awaits to bear the representatives of the city's plutocracy back to their homes. A very similar scene is repeated at the Flemish Theatre in the evening, but here the middle class of merchants and shop-keepers is more in evidence. In both the scene suggests a high order of comfort, and the possession of material blessings, and speaks volumes for Flemish energy and its results. It must be borne in mind that the Walloons have had no part in the building up of the modern prosperity of Antwerp. It is altogether a Flemish achievement, and Antwerp of the twentieth century renews in a modern dress the life in Bruges of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of its own in the first half of the sixteenth.

Reference has been made to the hospitality of the Antwerp citizens in their own families. But entertainment generally plays a large part in its daily life. There are at Antwerp some of the best restaurants to be found anywhere in Belgium, and at the principal hotel, the St. Antoine, the *cuisine* has a well-deserved reputation. The civic entertainments are generally held in the large hall of the Zoölogical Society on account of the number of guests, and the only complaint that can be made against them is that there are too many courses and that they last too long. It is not at all unusual for a banquet that commences at eight to reach the last line of the menu only at midnight.

These banquets bear some resemblance to those at the Guildhall or Mansion House, and the burgomaster and sheriffs (*échevins*) often attend them in state. The present burgomaster, M. Van Ryswyck, has long held that office, and is famous among his countrymen for his oratorical gifts. His reputation has not been gained without good justification for it.

In the Middle Ages the Belgian cities were distinguished from each other in the following distichs:—“*Nobilibus Bruxella viris, Antwerpia nummis, Gandavum laqueis, formosis Bruga puellis, Lovanium doctis, gaudet Mechlinia stultis*”—which may be translated thus: “Brussels for its noblemen, Antwerp for its moneyed men, Ghent for its neck-cords (referring to its submission in 1540), Bruges for its pretty girls, Louvain for its learned men, and Malines for its fools.” It is said that Malines got this reputation because one night a citizen declared that the cathedral was on fire, and all his neighbours turned out to extinguish it, when after many efforts they discovered that the fire was only the moon shining through the open towers of St. Rombaud. With regard to Antwerp, it may still be pronounced famous “for its moneyed men.”

In speaking of Antwerp, it is impossible to forget that there is another side to its life besides its commercial character. It is a great fortress—the bulwark, as it has been called, of Belgian freedom. When this statement is made, the minds of most

people revert to the siege of Antwerp in 1832, but the citadel, which General Chassé defended so courageously against a French army twenty times as numerous as his own force, has long disappeared with the rest of the old fortifications, the old Scheldt Gate on the Steen being the only survival of that period. Antwerp, as a fortress, is quite as new as it is as a town. The left bank is defended by the strong fort Tête de Flandre, which might almost be regarded as a citadel, and lower down the Scheldt are Fort Isabelle and Fort Marie. These and the *enceinte* built round the town in 1859-60, supplemented by the small fort of Berchem, constitute the inner defences of Antwerp. In their way they are admirable, and the *enceinte*, with its wet ditch and *caponnières* thrown out to protect each of the seven gates on the east and south sides of the rampart, is a very remarkable work. The *caponnières* mentioned are used as the arsenals of the place. But these defences are now out of date, or rather, they are reduced to a second order of utility. They are useless to keep off the fire of long-range artillery, but they provide an efficient defence against any attack by infantry or cavalry. They guarantee the rich city behind them against a *coup de main*. Those persons who lightly propose to remove the *enceinte* so that the town may spread out, have overlooked the fact that this would render possible the capture of the city, and of the government which presumably had found shelter therein, by a raid of the



invader's cavalry, notwithstanding that the forts surrounding the place might still keep the foe at bay. Considering Antwerp in the light of a national refuge-place, an *enceinte* is absolutely indispensable, and if there is no other way of getting over the difficulty from the increased population, a new one will have to be constructed along a more advanced circumference. As this must entail enormous expense and a corresponding advance of the outlying forts in order to keep the new portion of the town out of the range of the enemy's guns, it is possible that some alternative plan will be adopted, such as that of building a new town on the left bank.

In addition to the *enceinte*, the scheme of defence of 1859 provided for the construction of eight forts in a semicircle, drawn about two miles in advance of the *enceinte*. These forts commence on the north near Wyneghem, where the country that would be flooded in war time ends, and terminate in the south near Hoboken. In 1870, they were further strengthened by a new fort at Merxem, and two redoubts. The increased range of artillery soon showed that even these forts would not save the city of Antwerp from destruction, as it could be bombarded over their heads.

It was consequently decided in 1878 that a second line of advanced forts should be built at a distance ranging from six to nine miles from the *enceinte*. It was also decided that these forts should number fifteen; but after five had been



constructed, the fit of energy passed off, and for years Antwerp has been left in a practically defenceless state. In 1900, two more were taken in hand with the view of protecting an uncovered gap of fourteen miles in breadth on the Lierre. Eight forts are still to be built to complete what was pronounced to be necessary as long ago as 1878. Considering the vital interests at stake, the apathy shown in dealing with this matter is extraordinary and inexplicable. A sum of £600,000 has at last been voted for the completion of the missing forts.

In 1878, the defences of the left bank were also improved. They then consisted of Fort Ste. Marie, which, supplemented by the small fort of La Perle, and the large Fort St. Philippe, guarded the river below Antwerp. In the year named, the forts of Cruybeke above Antwerp, and of Zwyndrecht west of the town were added, and the entrenched camp of the left bank is even now considered fairly complete. What would be the military requirements should a large town be created on the left bank as well does not come at present under the head of practical questions.

The commercial side of Antwerp somewhat obscures its military rôle. The busy merchants who jostle one another as they hasten through the Place de Meir, or the Rue Longue Neuve, overshadow the large garrison that is always present at Antwerp. But it is impossible to overlook the fact that the one cause of its importance is closely

connected with the other. Antwerp is the large and prosperous centre of commerce that it is, because it is the bulwark, or, if not that, then the last ditch, of Belgian independence. If there is a vigorous Belgian nation in any part of the country, it is to be found at Antwerp. Its commercial classes stand in the forefront of the life of the country, and they represent its highest form of patriotism. They are in great need of effectual protection for their city, which justifies this digression on the subject of the fortifications of Antwerp.





## CHAPTER VII

### THE MINERS OF THE BORINAGE

ONE of the most remarkable centres of national life is to be found in the coal-mining district known as "le Borinage," which signifies the place of boring. Here is to be found a state of society that does not exist in any other part of the country, and the miners are a type quite distinct from the rest of their countrymen. It would be unfair to judge other Belgians by the mining population which has been allowed to sink—not merely by the character of its work, but by the deficiencies of education, supplemented by the poisonous effect of the fiery and deleterious beverages which the miners too freely imbibe—into a state of physical and mental decay.

The Borinage district lies south of Mons, but it extends westwards as far as Quiévrain, on the line to Valenciennes. The mines now extend farther north than the original Borinage district, and the railway from Tournai to Charleroi, passing by Mons and Marchienne, traverses for a great part of the distance the mining district, the trollies passing from the collieries to railway trucks, or

canal barges overhead, as the train glides along. The whole of the southern portion of the province of Hainaut is given up to mining operations, and more than one hundred thousand persons are actually employed in them. Some idea of the importance of this industry may be gathered from the fact that whereas the output sixty years ago was only two million tons a year, it now exceeds twenty millions, and has shown for many years past a considerable annual increase. There seems to be no valid ground for apprehension lest this increased activity should entail an early exhaustion of the mineral. The extension of the coal area to districts not included in the original Borinage has also contributed to banish that fear. The mines are owned and worked by *sociétés anonymes*, or joint-stock companies. There are no royalties to landowners, and the State waived any claim to participate that it might have advanced in the first place, because its main object was to develop national industry. It is understood that it will not show itself so disinterested with regard to any new coalfields that may be discovered and made productive. The mines of Hainaut have, therefore, been exploited to exceedingly great profit by the small body of capitalists who became interested in them in the first place, and who tried to keep them a close preserve until the shares were got rid of at high premiums on the Bourse. The halcyon days of the mine owners were those before the organisation of labour. Then the Bel-

gian miner toiled for as many hours underground as he would have done above, and he received a wage which, in the most favourable case, did not reach a pound a week. That is more than twenty years ago, but it had been the general practice during more than two generations, and it has left a deep, if not indelible, mark on the old mining families. Among these it seems as if there had sprung up a fresh race of dwarfs, men under four feet eight inches, women shorter still, and children who look as if they will never reach even this height. They are stunted and emaciated, and they are easily distinguishable from the rest of the population as the third and fourth generation of the old mining population. At Frameries and Paturages, where mining has been in existence for a century, this type is very obtrusive.

In no country of Europe did the miners have a harder battle to fight in order to obtain more indulgent treatment and a fairer living wage than in Belgium. The extreme ignorance and illiteracy of the miners left them more or less at the mercy of their masters, and outside sympathy and support were long arrested by the grave assurance that, if the miners were to work fewer hours and to receive more wages, the Belgian mines could not compete with foreign mines, and would have to close altogether. Of course there was not the least ground for this assertion, but it served its turn, and enabled the owners to remain for a longer time masters of the situation. This state

of things could not have endured as long as it did but for the extremely small sum upon which a Belgian workman can maintain himself and his family.

There comes an end, however, to any system that does not take into account the actual necessities and the natural aspirations of the men who support it. Capital had ruled the roast for so many years in Belgium, that it looked as if its position was inexpugnable, and as if the miners were consigned to perform the part of helots to the end of the chapter. But the labour party had been growing steadily in influence and organisation long before its members possessed a vote, and the spread of Socialism was, it must be admitted, strengthened by the legitimate grievances of the labour classes. The movement of the Parti Ouvrier reached its height in the year 1892, when a general strike was carried out, and after intense suffering the mining population rose in what was practically armed rebellion the following year. At Charleroi, and throughout the Borinage generally, riots occurred, and even when the military were called out the result was left doubtful. A more serious calamity indeed seemed not impossible, as the loyalty of the young troops was called in question. At this juncture the mine owners gave way under pressure from the Government, and a new scale of payment was introduced which, if not all that the men desired, was fair and reasonable. By this scale the average miner's wage



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was raised to between twenty-five and thirty-five shillings a week, and that of women and boys to between twelve shillings and one pound. The maxima might, indeed, be greater but for the protective measures adopted by the miners themselves in the restriction of the output. The labour party organised a scale of production which, while it restricts the maximum earnings of any workman, ensures the prolonged existence of the mines themselves. The limit thus placed on the output of any single mine has rendered it the more necessary to discover fresh mines, both in Hainaut and elsewhere. The fifty per cent. increase in the coal produce of the country during the last ten years represents the total furnished by these new pits, some of which are in Hainaut, while others are in the Liège district.

Satisfactory as the arrangement of 1893 was in the main, especially as it was followed in the next year by the conferring of the franchise on every Belgian on attaining the age of twenty-five, so that the victory was twofold, the miners have, on one or two occasions since, displayed a feeling of resentment toward their employers. The differences between labour and capital in Belgium are far indeed from being finally composed, and the relations between the miners and the mine owners are not merely wanting in cordiality, but reveal marked antagonism and extreme enmity. In 1899 the troubles of 1892-93 were near breaking out afresh. It was difficult at the time

to discover whether the miners had any serious grievance, or whether the Socialist agitators were merely resorting to the cry of labour wrongs for the purpose of strengthening their political programme for the attainment of universal suffrage. At all events, while the political agitation was at its height in the streets of Brussels, the miners of the Borinage and their close confederates, the men engaged on the iron and steel works at Charleroi, made demands for an improved scale of pay and for shortening the hours of labour.

The owners of the mines and the smelting works declared that these requests were inadmissible, and that they could only be granted by their accepting a loss which would soon compel the closing of the mines, and the consequent cessation of all enterprises dependent upon them. Notwithstanding the firmness of the owners and the general belief that they were within their rights, all the preliminaries for a strike were arranged, and in some cases the men even came out; but in the meantime the agitation in Brussels had collapsed. The Socialists, finding that the Government had made the necessary preparations to put down disorder, and that the bourgeois class was quite equipped to take action by means of the Garde Civique, abandoned the campaign, and orders were issued not to proceed with the strike. Evidence was thus furnished that the grievances of the miners could not have been very great, and that their position was far from being intolerable,

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as it undoubtedly was in 1892. The rate of wages and the hours of labour reverted, after the 1899 scare, to the scale established in 1893, but it is impossible to say whether general contentment remained behind. Whether the last chapter is written or not in the struggle between capital and labour, one thing is certain. The hands of the authorities are now much stronger than they were in former years, and labour questions will have to be fought out on their merits, without the interposition of political agitators.

A visit to the Borinage is not a pleasant experience, and the closer the acquaintance made with the life of the mining population the less attractive does it appear. All mining work, apparently, must be accompanied by a deterioration in the moral as well as the physical qualities of the population so engaged, and this must be especially marked where the education of the people has been notoriously backward and neglected for generations. In Hainaut the majority of the miners are illiterate, and this condition of things will not be altered until the State makes education compulsory, and places restrictions in the way of the indiscriminate employment of children on the mines; for their non-employment underground is no real remedy. No one has interested himself in the moral and intellectual development of this class of the population, because the State, in carrying out its theory of perfect liberty, does not concern itself with such matters, and leaves the whole

responsibility to the commune and the parent, while the Church, having lost all influence over the mining population, is only too glad that these hostile classes should be left in a condition of almost utter ignorance.

But the most potent of all the reasons which produce this result is that boys and girls, as soon as they have the physical strength, which is supposed to be at twelve years of age, are taken on the mining establishment and employed above ground. They thus become bread-winners, and the smattering of learning that they may have acquired as infants is soon reduced to the capacity of signing their names. The employment of children of tender age lies at the root of the ignorance of the people of the greater part of a large province. It is this practice which has led to the following custom among the mining population. Immorality, and especially that which takes the distressing form of girl-mothers, is general and widespread. It has always been the concomitant of the close employment of the two sexes in mines and mining operations, and if it seems somewhat worse in Hainaut than in the English Black Country, it is because the mining population in Belgium is so completely detached and cut off from the rest of the community. To the proprietors, with rare exceptions, the miners are mere beasts of burden, in whom they do not affect to feel the least interest. No steps whatever are taken to improve the lot of the miners, to elevate their

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ideas or even to provide them with amusement or recreations. There are no clubs, except the *cercles* of the Socialists, and the only places of resort are the *estaminets* and *cabarets* that are to be found in practically every third and fourth house. The custom referred to is that the miner seeks as a wife the woman who has had the greatest number of illegitimate children, because they will contribute to the household income. It is quite a common thing to find in a miner's house a married man with one or two children of his own, and four or even more sons and daughters of the wife by different men in the pre-nuptial state. It is scarcely going too far to say that morality does not exist in the Borinage; but the greatest curse in this community is the large number of immature mothers, and the consequent inseparable deterioration of the whole race. The evil has been allowed to reach such a pass that the success of any remedies must now be slow and uncertain, and as yet none are even talked of. But certainly something could be done to improve education and to restrain the employment of children. No doubt the miners themselves would at first be the most determined opponents of any such change, because the existing evils are mainly due to their own selfishness and evil habits. The consequent diminution in the earnings of the family could, however, be made up by the increased exertions of the men.

Ignorance and immorality explain the low con-



dition to which the mining population has sunk, but even these causes would not have produced so appalling a result if they had not been supplemented and aided by the prevalence of drunkenness. As there is no restriction on the sale of drink, every house can retail intoxicating liquors, and in many places where it is procurable there is no external appearance of the place being a drinking-shop. The room of the cottage will contain a few chairs and benches, besides a table, and the liquor comes from a cupboard or an inner room. In warm weather the table and chairs are placed outside, and on Sundays and feast days there is not one of these houses which will not be crowded with visitors. The only amusement known to this people is to drink and to get drunk. There are no abstainers or half-abstainers among them. The only distinction lies between beer-drinkers and spirit-drinkers. The beer-drinkers are the more reasonable drunkards of the two. Having soaked themselves with *faro*, they sleep it off. Not so the spirit-drinkers, for when they have finished their orgies they are half-mad with the poisonous alcohol which they have imbibed, and the greater number of crimes are perpetrated by this class among the miners. Crime of all kinds is prevalent, and the reports of the Hainaut assizes are not pleasant reading. The true explanation of the evils that follow this spirit-drinking is to be found in the character of the spirit itself. In name it is gin, or *genièvre*, but it bears little or no



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trace of that origin. What it is, no one outside the place of manufacture—which appears to be unknown—can correctly declare, but by the smell it would seem to be mainly composed of paraffin oil. This beverage, called *schnick*, is the favourite spirit with the miners. It is sold at one penny for a large wine glass and one halfpenny for a small, and official statistics show that a large majority of the miners drink a pint of this stuff every day of their lives, while it is computed that there are not fewer than fifty thousand who drink a quart. In the latter total are no doubt included many who are not miners, but the majority of them are. In Belgium the drink question is aggravated by the poisonous nature of the intoxicant and by the admitted inability of the Government to devise any means of preventing adulteration. Lest the reader should imagine that there is some exaggeration in the figures just given, it may be mentioned that the total consumption of spirits in the country during a year exceeds fifty quarts per head of the population. This being the case it will not appear surprising that an extreme toper consumes a quart of spirit a day. The consequences of this excess are to be seen in the increasing number of lunatics and alcohol-maniacs confined in the State asylums, and it is observed that of late years the proportion of women has been largely increasing, so that it is now not much short of one to two.

The Government of Belgium is, of course,

aware of these facts, and a visit to the Borinage will quickly convince the most sceptical of the extent of the mischief already done, which becomes more glaring every year. But the Government has been afraid to grapple with the difficulty by passing, for instance, a law to oblige all places where drink is on sale to have a licence. The absolute immunity of the drink shop from all control, the tacit permission given to every house to be at the will of its occupant a public-house, and the fact that there is in existence one drinking place for every five adults explain the situation. The State has refrained from interference so long, through its regard for the liberty inscribed in its constitution, which includes its citizens' liberty to get drunk, that the difficulty has assumed appalling proportions. To interfere with a practice in which every one can put forward some evidence of a vested interest is a perilous step.

On the other hand, the Government is confronted with the prospect that if the evil is allowed to continue unabated, the deterioration of the race which has become marked in certain districts like the Borinage must bring about a national decline that will constitute a grave peril to the country. If the Government is afraid to diminish the number of houses by imposing licences, it might well grapple with the minor problem of arresting adulteration, and putting an end to the consumption of pernicious substitutes for gin. Unless it does

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something practical for the mitigation of the evil it will be confronted one of these days with a peril that may overtax its resources, and that must damage its reputation. Ignorance, immorality, and drunkenness have made the mining districts of Belgium a black spot in the national life, and the sooner an era of reform is commenced the better. "Ces gens là sont des brutes," a Belgian nobleman once said to me, when speaking of these very miners; but a wise Government admits no brutes among the nation committed to its charge. It cannot help individual exceptions, but in Hainaut the description applies to a large community counted by tens of thousands.

Coal is the most important product of Belgium, and its possession lies at the base of much of its prosperity. The output for the year 1902 was 23,462,819 tons, of which only 7,000,000 were exported. Belgium also imported 3,600,000 tons from Germany and England. When the Hainaut mines began to be worked with greater activity, there were fears that they would not be able to stand the increased output, and it was a common opinion among Belgian experts that they would soon be exhausted. Such has not proved the case. The output has largely increased, and signs of exhaustion are still absent. None the less there has been considerable relief, owing to the discovery of an entirely fresh coal area in the district of Campine, which is part of the province of Limburg. It may be some years before this

coalfield can be put into active development, because intricate questions of law have to be decided as to private owners' rights and the claims of the State. What seems already established, although contrary to English law, is that the owner of the surface of the earth does not possess the mineral deposits which lie under it. Should the State establish its claims, and decide in favour of making the Campine mines a national undertaking, then it must be hoped that steps will be taken to prevent the repetition of some of the vicious, unhealthy, and degrading practices that have grown up in the province of Hainaut.

In the last session of the Chambers, the Belgian Government brought in and passed a bill increasing the excise on spirits by fifty per cent. This measure may do some good, but the concoction in which spirit has no part will obviously escape duty. The temptation to put deleterious liquors on the market will be increased, and even should the new Act increase the revenue, it will not diminish intemperance.

By the last census, the official deductions from which are not yet completed, 277,997 men and boys, and 15,266 women are employed in the mines and metal industries. The larger half, say, 150,000, work on the mines. The railway system of Belgium, it may be remarked, is excellent, and managed for the greater part by the State—State railways, 2516 miles; private companies, 334 miles. Travelling is cheap, the trains are

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punctual, and the system of season-tickets is admirable. Light railways and steam or electric tramways, supplement the main lines, and are worked in conjunction with them.





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MANUFACTURING CENTRES

THE activity of Antwerp, of which I have already spoken, is due to the development of the manufacturing centres throughout the country. If Ghent, Liége, and Seraing did not exist, the exports of Antwerp could not have reached their present imposing figures. The prosperity of Belgium is the result of the productive capacity of its citizens, and this is shown in the sphere of manufacture as much as of agriculture. Large portions of Belgium seem to be given up as completely to factories as Flanders is to vegetable fields, and the Borinage to coal mines. The coal and iron of Hainaut are the gifts of nature, but the products of Ghent, Seraing, Verviers, and other places too numerous to name, are due to the ingenuity and toil of man alone.

Of all Belgian cities Ghent has the best associations for English people. As the home of the Arteveldes—who were the most sincere upholders of the alliance with England that Belgium ever produced—and as the birthplace of John of Gaunt, its name has been familiar to them from childhood.



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It is also the capital, as it were, of that Flemish race with which the English are in an ethnological sense more closely connected than with any other Continental people. The history of this once proud city contains much of, if not all, the pathos and tragedy of the Belgian epic. Until that Pacification of 1540 to which reference is made in the Latin lines that are so often quoted by way of distinguishing between the cities, Ghent was a Power in itself. It fell because it did not realise that its pre-eminence among Flemish communes was no proof that it could bear the ruler of a great empire with impunity. It retained the insolence of power long after it had lost the substance, and its fall was both ignominious and irretrievable. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ghent suffered in a special degree from the blight which fell generally upon Flanders. The grass grew in its streets, the canals were unused, and the population steadily declined. From being the rival of potentates and states, Ghent sank into the position of a second-rank provincial town. The city that had once boasted of its quarter of a million inhabitants, and of how with its dependent towns it could put eighty thousand combatants in the field, contained less than forty thousand citizens when the French occupied the country in the Revolutionary period. At that time the principal occupation of the citizens of Ghent, and the main source of such prosperity as they possessed, was horticulture, and Ghent, which had been famous

for its gloves, became better known for its flowers. It has not lost this reputation to-day, and the flowers from the glass-houses of Ghent are in much demand, and sold all over the country; but at the same time it has discovered new and more profitable industries in the last century.

The first and the main cause of the return of prosperity to Belgium was, it must be admitted, the establishment of peace. It ceased in 1795 to be the cockpit of Europe, and even during the Waterloo campaign a hostile force was on Belgian soil for no more than five days, and Charleroi, then a small place of no importance, was the only one of its towns to undergo military occupation. The cessation of strife, waged by foreign armies on its territory, was the first and main cause of the revival of Belgian industry. Men were able to turn their attention to more remunerative work than the cultivation of the fields, with some reasonable prospect of enjoying the fruits of their labour. While a larger area was brought under cultivation, commerce, however timidly, began to appeal to the townspeople. The population, long stationary, commenced to show signs of expansion.

Ghent was the first place to feel the new influence. Admirably situated for purposes of trade by means of its water communication in many different directions, Ghent was able, in the days before railways, to despatch its wares by the cheap and sufficiently expeditious transport pro-

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vided by canal and river barges. It thus found convenient markets in Brussels, which always enjoyed a certain prosperity as the residence of a Court, and in Antwerp, which was largely dependent on the country lying at its back. In the old days the weavers and fullers of Ghent had made its prosperity. It was, therefore, natural that when the revival of the place commenced, the thoughts of its citizens should turn in the same channel. The first factory set up in modern Ghent was one for cloth, during the French occupation, and it was busily employed in turning out a large part of the material used in providing Napoleon's soldiers with their uniform. During the Dutch rule, which extended from 1815 to 1830, the manufacture of cotton goods was introduced; but this did not become at all general until after the year 1839, when the independence of Belgium was rendered more assured by the recognition of the fact by Holland. After that event, cotton and woollen manufactures became a staple industry in Ghent, and the output increased every year, so that it seemed no undue exaggeration to speak of it as the Belgian Manchester. The prosperity of Ghent received a rude interruption in 1861 through the outbreak of the American Civil War, which cut off the supply of cotton, and produced the greatest distress. The suffering was increased by a serious outbreak of cholera, and for a time it seemed as if Ghent had only risen to fall again. After the conclusion of the struggle in the United

States, the enterprise that had been interrupted reasserted itself, and, the cholera having led to many sanitary improvements, the city took on a new lease of life. The lace and embroidery industry, which had been carried on in a modest way in the houses of the working people themselves, was transferred to factories, and was developed with all the appliances of capital and science. An entirely new business was introduced by the opening of works for the construction of engines and agricultural implements. There is, therefore, no doubt as to the activity of the business life of the city. No proof of it, indeed, can be clearer than that its population now exceeds one hundred and sixty thousand. Ghent, besides being an active commercial and manufacturing centre, is also a fine city, and a pleasant place of residence. It contains some very interesting monuments of its mediæval grandeur, and although the bell of mighty Roland is heard no more in the land, there is an effective carillon of forty-four bells in the belfry, from which it used to sound forth "victory," or "the alarm for fire."

In striking contrast to Ghent is Seraing, where the greatest foundry and engine-works of Belgium were established by an Englishman two years after Waterloo. This was Cockerill, who fixed upon Seraing as the best spot for his enterprise, in which he had the cordial support of King William I. of the Netherlands, who subscribed half the capital. The site for the works, which now cover

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two hundred and sixty acres, and employ fifteen thousand working people, was happily chosen at an old *château* with extensive grounds, which had once been the summer residence of the prince-bishops of Liége. The *château* is still used as the house of the resident director, and as a library. Formerly the spot was one of the most picturesque in the environs of Liége. Now both banks of the river are lined with furnaces and factories, for Jemeppe, Ougrée, Sclessin, and Tilleur are imitators of Seraing. The valley is also carboniferous, and there are numerous coal-mines. The Liége collieries rank next to those of Hainaut in importance, and some authorities think that they will be productive for a longer period.

Seraing is situated five miles above Liége on the right bank of the Meuse. There is communication between the two places by river-steamer, tramway, and railway. By the last census its population exceeded thirty-eight thousand, and it may be assumed that every one resident in the town is connected with or dependent on the Cockerill establishment. In 1831, after the separation of the two countries, Cockerill repaid King William his share of the capital, and remained sole proprietor until his death in 1840. The concern was then turned into a company, with the modest capital of half a million sterling. In 1871 the capital was increased, and, the descendants of Cockerill having died out or retired, the business became exclusively Belgian.



Reference has been made to its shipbuilding branch at Hoboken on the Scheldt. The record of the Seraing works is a very remarkable one, especially in the construction of railway and other steam-engines, of which close on sixty thousand have been turned out since the commencement of that branch in 1835. With its present staff it can construct annually one hundred and fifty locomotives, two thousand engines, steam and hand, and three hundred thousand quintals (or fifteen thousand tons) of fount for bridges and other works. The iron casements for the new forts at Namur and Liége itself were cast in the Seraing foundries. Seraing may be compared in some respects to the Armstrong works at Elswick and the Krupp works at Essen, and it is well to remind the Belgians that their country owes this undertaking, now a national one, to the capital and enterprise of an Englishman.

Seraing is, in a certain sense, only an annex of the important city of Liége close by. In many respects Liége is the most remarkable place in Belgium, remarkable for its magnificent position, for the activity of its citizens, and for its history, which has, in a certain sense, been detached from that of the rest of the country. Liége is the natural and typical capital of the Walloon country just as Ghent is of the Flemish. Both cities are now at the height of their prosperity, and contain about the same population. If, however, Seraing and Chenée were included as suburbs of Liége,



which they are in reality, Liège would have a very marked superiority over Ghent. There is probably more wealth in Liège than in Ghent, but there is also more misery. The poor quarters of the town on both banks of the river are very repulsive, and the old dilapidated lofty houses, built up against the side of the mountain on which stands the citadel, are not worse than the new tenements across the river at Longdoz and Bressoux. The staple industry of Liège, upon which its prosperity depends, is the manufacture of arms, and this fact has led to its being called the Birmingham of Belgium. There is one distinctive practice which brings out the marked difference between the two countries and peoples. English gunsmiths work in shops where weapons are turned out by the thousand. In Liège, the individual works in his own abode, and takes each single weapon on completion to the gunshop for sale. It is said that there are forty thousand working gunsmiths in Liège and its suburbs. It would appear a risky means of livelihood, for each piece is carefully inspected and tested before acceptance at the warehouses, and the least defect is said to cause summary rejection. Opinions differ as to the quality of Liège firearms, but there is one point in which they beat all competitors, and that is in the lowness of price. An enormous business is done in single-barrelled guns, that are sold at fifteen shillings apiece. As this class of gun has a rapid and sure sale, the preparation of

first-class weapons has grown less attractive for the workman, who thinks only of earning his living in the easiest and surest way, and who seems to be quite content when he makes a pound or twenty-five shillings a week. With the view of arresting this tendency, and preventing the loss of an important branch of the trade, several factories for the manufacture of rifles have been opened of late years, and there is also a cannon foundry. The last-named and one of the rifle factories belong to the State. It may be added that the former is now busily occupied casting the new guns for the Belgian artillery. At all times the citizens of Liège have been noted for their independent, and it might even be said quarrelsome, spirit. The fact that each man is more or less his own master has greatly contributed to keep alive the sentiment of independence, and the working classes are organised by leagues, societies, and clubs. The Socialists are very powerful, but there is also a genuine Catholic, or, as the English would say, Conservative, party among them.

Among other manufacturing centres which are springing into importance, but which are less widely known than Ghent and Liège, are Gembloux, Ath, Renaix, and Diest. At Gembloux the State railways have established their engine and carriage works, which employ several thousand hands. There is also a factory for excellent cutlery at this place. Ath, on the Dender, is the centre of the important lime manufacture, and be-

ing in direct water communication by river and canal with most parts of Belgium, it is able to deliver this article by the most economical mode of transport. Renaix has developed an important cloth industry, and Diest is the centre of the brewing enterprise of the country, and might be compared to Burton-on-Trent. Malines is still famous for its lace, although Grammont, interesting as the first of the communes to receive a charter, is running it hard in the matter of "point." Tournai produces most of the carpets to which Brussels gives its name. Artistic carpets are also produced at Termonde, where there are extensive oil works. Verviers, a large town east of Liège, flourishes on a considerable manufacture of woollen goods and of glass. Within the last few years the competition of German works at Eupen has been so keen that several of the Belgian glass companies have suspended operations. A new industry is being developed in cement and a composition that serves as an excellent pavement. In no manufacturing district of Belgium are the vicissitudes of trade through external competition greater or more sudden than at Verviers.

The condition of the artisan classes in Belgium is probably better than in France, although it falls a long way below that of English workmen, especially as respects hours of labour. These are unquestionably long to excess, and are really fixed by the will of the employer. The language

of the law on the employment of children is very instructive. No child can be employed in a factory or warehouse until it is twelve, which means that all children of the working classes begin their life of toil at twelve. This explains the stunted appearance of the population of the larger towns and manufacturing districts. The law says, in the second place, that no child under sixteen is to be kept at work for more than twelve hours a day. If the young can work for this length of time, it will be understood that an adult is assumed to be capable of doing more. At the same time, the long hours do not hang as so great a burden on the Belgian working man as they would on the British. The race has always been accustomed to early hours, and as there are no great distractions except on fête days, the Belgian takes his pleasure in his work. Of course he does not work so hard as the British workman used to do and still does on piecework, and a very considerable portion of his time must be deducted for gossip, rest, and sheer idleness. Still, this relief is not possible in all employments, and in the foundries, for instance, the hours of labour are excessive. The Belgian capitalist has benefited thereby, and is fond of representing that when the hours are reduced the trade will depart elsewhere. The thought does not seem to have occurred to him that a man may do more work in fifty hours a week than he will in seventy-two.

From a careful estimate made by a Belgian sta-

tistician the average earnings of the Belgian artisan are thirty-three pounds a year, as against forty-two in England. It is not quite clear how he arrives at the figures so far as England is concerned, but in Belgium he includes child-labour, which explains the lowness of the figure. Personal inquiries showed me that in Liège and Ghent the workmen expect to earn as a minimum four francs a day, or about a pound a week. They seem to be perfectly contented when they can make five francs; but in addition to the earnings of the man must be put those of his wife and children. These sums go nearly twice as far as in England, for three reasons. The Belgian workman is not a great meat-eater, his wife is a far better cook and manageress than the same class of person in England, and thrift is the national virtue and characteristic as contrasted with the waste and bad management generally displayed and gloried in by the British workman's better half. To take one instance of this difference: There is not a woman in Belgium who cannot make an excellent and nourishing soup, which forms the foundation of the national diet, whereas it would scarcely be going too far to say that soup is never seen in the homes of English working men. Soup and bread form the principal part of the food of the Belgian workman; but the bread is full of sustenance, and not like that consumed by English people. Owing to a perversion of the popular taste, skilfully engineered by German bakers, the old household



loaf, which was full of nourishment, has been practically abandoned by English working classes in favour of a semi-fancy loaf, largely composed of German yeast, which has incomparably less sustaining qualities, but a little more of the flavour of cake. As a consequence, the working classes of the towns, and especially of London, where the German baker has practically ousted every other, exhibit such marked indications of physical deterioration as to threaten a national peril, since children are now brought up on bread which has little or no nutritive qualities.

The daily life of the factory operative is not as easily described as that of the miner, who lives under special conditions which differentiate him from the regular community. But the mill-hand, the potter, or the lace-maker will pursue the mode of living agreeable to himself, in complete obliviousness of what his fellow-workers may do, except in regard to points of common trade interest. The bond that links him to his class is that not of his work, but of his commune, which is the chief source of Belgian unity. Hence any attempt to give an account of the daily life of all factory operatives, as something fashioned in the same pattern, would be incorrect and misleading. At the same time, there are some points about the Belgian artisan which may seem of interest. His condition of life and general well-being furnish no inexact index to the national welfare, and, speaking relatively, they may be pronounced quite as



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high as conditions in any country of Europe. The Belgian operative has command of all the necessities of life, and he has also a surplus left for some of its luxuries, or, at least, some of its relaxations. His hours of labour may be many, but they are lightened by some hours of amusement, and a not infrequent holiday or *jour de repos*. If the café does not suffice for his leisure hours, there is always the *cercle*—Catholic, or Liberal, or Socialist; and the *cercle* will have its band of music, its dancers, and other annual or more frequent celebrations. The life of the operative is consequently by no means dull or unvaried. It is no dreary round of labour; there is ample time for pleasure, and the Belgian character, whether Walloon or Flemish, is not prone to take its pleasures sadly.

If the conditions of life among the operatives or artisans are examined more closely, it will be found that their material well-being is better than first impressions would incline one to think. It is quite true that in regard to housing, the Belgian operatives were, until recently, very badly off. In the towns they occupied on the tenement system the older streets which fashion and respectability had long abandoned. Crowded together, under conditions which precluded all considerations of sanitation and even of decency, up side-streets or alleys which the rest of the world carefully avoided, the quarters occupied by them presented all the repellent features of England's

old rookeries. These may still be found in all the great cities, but a movement of reform has been set on foot, and the communal authorities have commenced a campaign for purging them of these plague spots. The execution of these reforms must take a certain time, but already the displacement of the working classes from their restricted quarters to the suburbs, where workmen's cottages have been specially constructed for them, has to a certain extent taken place. In some towns more progress has been made than in others. For instance, Brussels has carried the campaign of expulsion much farther than Liège or Antwerp. This has been rendered possible by the excellent systems of tramways and light railways, which bring the workman to his place of labour rapidly and cheaply. In every other respect than housing, the Belgian operative is well off. His own wages may not be high, but they are supplemented by the earnings of his wife and his children, all of whom commence to be breadwinners at an early age. Taxes do not affect him directly; what he pays is contributed indirectly, and in such a form that he never realises the payment. Food is cheap; drink is cheaper still. There is no lack of amusement, and much of it gratuitous. Professional politicians tell him that he has his grievances, but he does not appear to be conscious of them himself.

In another respect the Belgian working man enjoys an advantage which enables him to get the

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most out of his small wages. He has his political associations and clubs. The "Parti Ouvrier" is organised throughout the kingdom for political agitation and the attainment of universal suffrage. But, in addition, certain co-operative societies have been formed for retailing to their members practically all the articles of which they can have any need. These exist in all the large towns, but the largest two are those known as the Maison du People in Brussels and the Vooruit in Ghent. At these stores everything is sold at the cost of production, plus five per cent. for the administration, from a loaf to the furniture of a house. An excellent loaf weighing nearly two pounds and a half is sold for twopence, and at the Maison du People in Brussels over one hundred and sixty thousand such loaves are sold each week. As there are sixteen thousand members, the average consumption is ten loaves a week, which would exceed that in the family of, at all events, the London working man. Latterly these societies have taken an active part in the struggle with drunkenness by excluding spirits and beer from their lists, and in the refreshment-room attached to their stores coffee and lemonade are the only beverages sold. Although I have mentioned only two societies, there are in Belgium about four hundred of the same nature. Most of them are small in numbers, as the total of the members is under sixty thousand, and the Maison du People and the Vooruit contain over one third of the

number. There are also saving-fund and sick-fund branches attached to most of these societies. The basis on which they are formed is a monthly payment of three francs to the former and one franc to the latter. For these subscriptions a member is guaranteed medical attendance and a franc a day during illness, and his annual savings are practically doubled by the additions made to them under the law by the State and also by the province, while there is a further voluntary grant by the society itself. As the most staid Belgian workman deems that he has the moral right to spend a franc a day on his drink, it does not seem to be asking him to practise much self-denial to put by one franc a week for a rainy day. It is right to mention that there are no grounds for supposing that he grumbles at having to do so. Whether the new State Pension Bill will encourage thrift or not remains to be seen. The measure came into force in 1900, and by it the Government undertakes to pay every working man in need after he is sixty-five an annual pension of sixty-five francs (£2 12s). The amount, which is less than twopence a day, will seem ludicrously small to English ears; and thirty years ago M. Frère-Orban, one of Belgium's greatest public men, suggested that the State should pension all workmen over fifty-five with a hundred and fifty francs (£6), or, as some one said, with half a franc a day barring Sundays and fête days. On this allowance an old man in Belgium, especially in the

provinces, could subsist very fairly, whereas the grant sanctioned will leave him still a candidate for charity. Be that as it may, there have been a great number of applicants for the pension—far more, indeed, than the Government expected, so that it had to revise its estimates. The number of applicants exceeded the anticipated number by thirty thousand, and when the Government sent back the lists for more careful compilation, the local committees were unable to reduce the number to any extent; thereupon they were dismissed. This circumstance among others has led to the imposition of fresh taxes, the chief of which is the increase of the excise. This may be regarded as an ingenious manner of getting the working classes to pay for their own old age pensions out of their earlier habits of self-indulgence, and if it produces the expected increase, the amount of the workman's pension will, no doubt, be increased also. So far the increase has been much less than was anticipated.

Taking a comprehensive view of the position of the working classes in Belgium, it will compare not unfavourably with that of those in any other country. In one particular only is there pressing need of amelioration, and, as we have seen, that is the length of the hours of labour. It is probable that a reform would already have taken place in this matter but for the fact that political questions have become mixed up with social problems. The agitation is not one for eight or nine hours a

day as the regular spell for the working classes in factories, but it is one for universal suffrage, the abolition of the plural vote, and the fettering of capital by the enforcement of Socialist theories of distribution and joint participation. It is unfortunate that these political matters have been connected with labour questions, and that natural concessions have been deferred by the fear of what those to whom they were made might do afterwards.







## CHAPTER IX

### COUNTRY LIFE IN BELGIUM

AS considerably more than half the population of Belgium resides outside the towns, the conditions of country life form quite as important a part of the nation's existence as those of the *bourgeois* classes. There are parts of the little kingdom, such as Luxemburg and Campine, where the population is sufficiently sparse to leave something like the accepted conditions of genuine country life; but in Flanders, Hainaut, and Brabant, the population is so dense that the farms and cottages occupy practically every available spot that can be utilised for a building without diminishing the area of the cultivable ground. Leaving aside the mining districts, the western provinces of Belgium present in the main the appearance of vast market-gardens without a hedge or a wall. The boundaries are marked by nothing more than an insignificant trench. The cultivation of wheat and cereals generally is being increased; but this is due more to the absorption of new land reclaimed from forest or heath than to the abandonment of vegetables. In Flanders, which was

formerly given up exclusively to the cultivation of roots, however, it is not uncommon to see nowadays part of a half-acre plot assigned to a wheat crop, and the rest to cabbages.

If one wishes to study the agricultural system of Belgium, and to see what has been accomplished there, a visit should certainly be paid to the district called Pays de Waes. This district lies west of the Scheldt, and south-west of Antwerp, and extends almost to Ghent. Its chief town is St. Nicholas, and Lokeren, another town of the Waes country, is scarcely less important. In 1839, the whole of the district was a wild uncultivated tract. Now it is an unbroken expanse of gardens and fields, sustaining a resident population of five hundred persons to the square mile. There has been no such transformation scene in any part of Europe, and it would be a good experiment to tempt some Belgian agriculturists to see what they could accomplish in Ireland.

Throughout the two Flanders, which produce more than half the total crops of the country, there are no large landed proprietors, and the soil is parcelled out in small lots among the peasants themselves. The farmer class in these provinces exists only to this extent, that where the commune owns the lands it has chosen to sublet them to a farmer with the means to work several hundred acres instead of dividing the land into allotments. But in Flanders the farmer is the exception, and the small proprietor of anything up to five acres is

the rule, while in Hainaut and Brabant it is different. There the farmer class is in the ascendant. A historical cause lies at the root of this difference. Up to the French occupation in 1795, the soil of Belgium was the property, in the main, of the representatives of the aristocracy, civic as well as feudal, and of the Church. The religious orders were the chief proprietors, owning more than double the cultivated land possessed by the nobles. This was explained by the fact that the Church owned lands to make them revenue-producing, and possessed the capital to do so. The nobles were not rich in capital, and a very large proportion of their territorial possessions consisted of forest and unreclaimed land. As they kept these possessions for the chase, they did not even think of developing them. When the French Republic annexed Belgium, all the lands possessed by churchmen and nobles were at once made forfeit, and the actual occupiers and tillers of the soil came into possession. At that time Flanders was just as much an agricultural country as it is today, and there was a large population actually subsisting upon it. The French law was practically carried out, and the Flemish peasants became the owners of their own ground, and have remained so to this day. But in the other provinces the same conditions did not prevail. Only a small portion of the soil was under cultivation, the population was scanty, and with local exceptions there were no peasants eager to take over the

estates that had fallen vacant and that were at their disposal. Moreover, the land had to be cleared and won over for cultivation, which required capital. For these reasons a race of peasant proprietors was not created in Brabant and Namur as had been done in accordance with easily discoverable natural laws in Flanders. When the heat of the Republicans cooled down, there is no doubt that many of the former proprietors recovered their possessions partly by occupying what no one else claimed, and partly by repurchase from the State or the commune on nominal terms. This tendency became more marked under the Emperor Napoleon, and especially after he made his peace with the Pope. After his overthrow, there was a general recovery of territorial possessions by the aristocracy, subject to the recognition of the rights of occupation that had accumulated in twenty years. But in Flanders nothing of the sort took place. There the new rights entirely displaced the old title-deeds.

The class of great landed proprietors in Belgium is exceedingly small, and there are many of the old *noblesse* without any land at all. Those who are more fortunate possess as a general rule not more than a thousand acres round their country residence, and the only great estates, according to English ideas, are to be found in the Ardennes and Campine, where land possessed little value until a quite recent period. The history of the estate of the Duke of Wellington, as Duke of Waterloo, in

Belgium furnishes an instance of what took place when the representatives of the ancient owners recovered the non-productive portion of their estates. The Duke was granted, as a reward for his great victory in Belgium, a portion of the old forest of Soignies. It was about five thousand acres in extent; but the only income the great Duke ever derived from it was from the timber, which must have been quite insignificant. Upon his death, his son and successor was confirmed in the possession of this estate, after some persons had represented that it was only granted for the life of the first Duke. He then expressed the opinion to some Belgian officials that the estate about which so much stir was being made was really valueless, whereupon Baron Lambermont advised him to place it in the hands of the *régisseur* or manager of the Duc d'Arenberg, who had vastly improved the estates of that nobleman at Enghien and elsewhere. The advice was followed, and in a few years the timber was all cut down and sold, and on his part of the old forest a number of farms were created. The estate then for the first time brought in an income; but the story is told here merely to illustrate the process which went on generally in Belgium outside Flanders after Waterloo, and in a still more marked degree after the establishment of an independent kingdom.

The conditions of life among the agricultural classes of Flanders would be considered intolerably hard by the agricultural labourer in England, and



even the sense of possessing the land on which they toil would not atone for such conditions. The Flemish peasant, or proprietor, labours all day, and his day is the long one from sunrise until well after sunset. Any one who has lived in the Belgian provinces has seen grey figures moving along the roads or across the fields while gleams of light alone showed the dawn of the coming day. They wish to be at their work, discontinued late the night before, as soon as there is sufficient light to enable them to resume it. They are working for themselves, and very likely they would grumble if they were asked to do it for a master. But it is not only the men, but also the women who work thus. There are, of course, household duties and work at home to be performed; but these do not prevent the women and girls from toiling in the fields as well. Market-gardening carried on in the fashion of the Continent, where nothing is wasted, cannot be considered an altogether pleasant or even healthy occupation. It is certainly not calculated to elevate in intelligence those who take part in it, and as a matter of fact the vast body of Flemish labourers in the fields are sunk in a state of extraordinary ignorance for the twentieth century. Their education is practically nothing at all, but they are sound Catholics, and it is not thought to be to the interest of the Church, or of the party that claims that designation, that they should progress in worldly knowledge.



Judging the people of the Flemish plains by a cursory inspection, the conclusion come to would probably be that they must be exceedingly miserable and unhappy, and it requires a far more intimate knowledge than most foreigners are ever likely to take the trouble to acquire to discover that such is not really the case. Their workaday clothes are not of a character to impress the observer with a perception of anything in their favour. They are certainly not picturesque, and they are generally very dirty. All the peasants wear the wooden sabot, yellow in colour and clumsy in form, coarse, grey worsted stockings, short trousers tied with a ribbon above the calf, and a linen smock. The usual headgear of the men is a cap with a peak, and the women have linen bonnets with a kind of hood over the forehead. If their dress is plain, their living is still plainer. Their breakfast consists of no more than coffee and rye bread, their mid-day meal of bread and butter, or grease—*tartine*—with which they sometimes have cheese or a little cold bacon, and their supper of soup and bread. On Sundays and fête days they have hot bacon, and occasionally rabbits or fish. Fresh meat never comes their way, and is practically unknown. On the other hand, they eat great quantities of vegetables, cooked and uncooked, and dandelion salads are the luxury of the Belgian peasant. It is somewhat difficult to get at an idea of the results of their toil; but the average amount of the produce

of the land has been reckoned at five hundred francs, or twenty pounds, the half-acre. On this sum a Flemish family will contrive to live, having no rent to pay, and supplementing the produce of field with a pig and poultry. There are six hundred and fifty thousand men and boys employed in agriculture alone.

In order to correct the depressing effect of the spectacle of these peasant proprietors in their week-day costumes, when they strike the observer as mere drudges bound in misery, it is as well to take a glance at the same people on Sundays, going to mass or returning from it. The whole population goes; there are no non-attendants here, except those persons who are ill or bedridden. And what do we see? All the men wear respectable black suits and boots; the women are well dressed and carry themselves well, and there are bright-coloured parasols to protect from the sun the girls and young women who have been toiling in the fields all the week with no protection save a linen hood. It is difficult to realise that these are the same people; but it is quite clear from their animated conversation and laughter that they are far from unhappy or dissatisfied with their lot.

In the Walloon country the conditions of agricultural life are quite different. The country population is scanty, and the cultivation of the land is in the hands of farmers who have rented it from the landowners or from the communes. The inhabitants show a tendency to gather in little



COSTUME OF A WOMAN OF ANTWERP



A FLEMISH MILKWOMAN



towns, and not to spread over the country in detached cottages close to their work but separated from their fellow-beings. When the outskirts of a townlet or large village are passed, not a house will be found along the road until the next village is reached. Now, in Flanders the cottages are scattered all over the country, and dot the *chaussée*, or high-road. There is another marked difference. In Flanders the country house, with any extent of garden or park land attached, is quite a rarity. There are still a few old manor houses left, but they have only a small piece of ground round them. But in Liège, Limburg, and Luxemburg it is different. There are still a certain number of old *châteaux* and chalets left, and rich manufacturers from the cities have built a good many new country houses. All these have gardens and coverts attached to them. Some of the old houses are singularly picturesque and striking, such as the *château* of Mirwart; and the *château* of Dave, with its forest of many thousand acres, is quite imposing. The majority of the old country houses resemble a manor house or mediæval farm-house in England. They are almost uniformly built of a yellowish-brown stone, which is taken from the Luxemburg quarries. They have generally farm-buildings attached, sometimes in unpleasant proximity to the residence. These old houses harmonise with the landscape, and suggest the existence of a country life which might be compared with that of England. But

none of the members of the *petite noblesse*, to which they mainly belong have much income, and consequently their mode of living is conducted on lines of the strictest economy. They are also very exclusive, not so much perhaps from family pride—for the history of these families is quite provincial, and the majority of their names have never been heard of outside of their little circle—as from the dislike to being eclipsed by the wealthy new-comers from the towns. They keep to themselves and their own set, giving a few dinners in the course of the year to their relatives, and inviting a few of their neighbours whom they regard as equals. These dinners are always held at one o'clock, and the afternoon is passed in testing the quality of the host's Burgundy, the favourite wine of the Belgians, which is nowhere found in greater perfection than in the cellar of an Ardenne connoisseur. All these country gentlemen call themselves sportsmen, but there is very little game on which they can exercise their skill, owing to the absence of any system of preserving. Rabbits alone can be described as plentiful. It is the fashion, however, for a certain number to club together and rent a *chasse* in one or other of the forests owned by the communes. Here a certain amount of game of a miscellaneous sort is to be had, and during the season a subscriber may hope to get as his share some venison and a little less wild-boar. Pheasants are only to be found on the well-stocked preserves of the Count de Limburg



Stirum, and a few other noblemen. Teal and wild-duck still abound, however, on the upper courses of the Ourthe, and woodcock and snipe are also plentiful throughout the Meuse valley. During part of the season everybody is allowed to snare these birds at their pleasure.

In striking contrast with the old houses, representing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the modern villa or chalet, which the manufacturer or shopkeeper, having made a competence, constructs as his *maison de campagne*. This is always built of some brick or stone of glaring colours. White, red, and yellow, are the favourite colours, with green verandahs and window-frames, and grey or blue slate roofs. It is, in fact, the favourite town house, to which covered balconies for the purpose of enjoying the air and the view have been added, transported bodily into the country. Such villas are evidence of the liking that the Belgians have for country life, although they do not add to the beauty of the landscape. There must always be something incongruous in the appearance of a yellow matchbox-like house, rising out of the wooded crest of a hill, that presents in itself a charming and perfect bank of verdure. At the same time it must be allowed that this attraction of wealthy families from the towns to the country is a benefit to the inhabitants of those provinces where there has never been much wealth or any rich class of residents to develop it. Every favoured spot in the region named has its well-to-

do resident from Liège or Brussels, and as soon as one settles down others follow at no long interval. The La Roche valley, for instance, is overlooked by a considerable number of these villas, and many Liège manufacturers permanently reside at their country houses on the banks of the Vesdre and the Amblève. These new-comers, although they evince a partiality for the country by fixing their residence in it, do not take up with the pursuits of the country. They really live a town life in the country. They do not drive much in the sense of traversing distance, and they walk less. They only saunter about their places, if the phrase may be used. Even gardening, in which they take most interest, is done in a languid fashion. They pass a great part of the day in the open air, sitting on their balconies, built specially to command the view, which never loses its charm for them. In fact they have raised the habit of doing nothing in the open air to the level of a science.

Formerly the provinces of Luxemburg, Namur, and Liège contained very little but forest or heath land, and it was the fashion to speak of the soil as too poor to produce anything. In those days the population had little or no means of earning a livelihood, except as foresters or workers in the quarries. But all this is changing. The forests have been much thinned, and in many parts have quite disappeared. Poor as the soil may have been, it now produces crops. The uplands are rich with corn fields in the summer; in the valleys

are meadows and orchards; and it is a curious sight to see the cows being led to eat the grass which is sown in narrow strips between the crops, so that they may not stray on to the ground under cultivation. As the consequence of this change in the character of the country, the existence of the Walloon peasantry is less hard and penurious than it used to be. There is a great deal more life and activity in the country, and consequently there is more money.

The houses of the Walloon peasantry are more substantial and attractive-looking than those of the Flemish peasants. They are generally built of stone, and slates are easily obtainable from the numerous slate quarries; while in Flanders the houses are brick, covered with stucco, which is generally painted, or rather washed, with a yellow mixture. The ground-floor usually consists of one large room that is both sitting-room and kitchen, while at the back there is a wash-house. Two or three bedrooms overhead and a loft under the roof generally complete the accommodation. There is often a cellar, and a pent-house, for the storage of wood: for the collection of undergrowth in the forests is unrestricted, and at the commencement of winter there is a free distribution of firewood by the communes. Poultry and the small vegetable garden supplement the earnings of the householders, and during the summer months at least there is plenty of work going on through the large influx of visitors from other

parts of Belgium and from foreign countries. The Walloon is just as restricted in his diet as his Flemish co-nationalists. He lives on meagre fare, and flourishes on it; but he does not work as hard as the Flemings do. He is more easily contented, and spends a good deal of his day in gossip. The Walloons of Liége are, however, different from those of Luxemburg. They are a bigger and a burlier race, probably because they are meat-eaters, and they are the most impressive type among the Belgian nationalities.

Country life in Belgium is pleasant enough during the fine weather of summer and autumn, but in the winter it requires all the available philosophy of those who have to remain in the provinces. There is practically nothing to be done. Those who have to gain their own living depend during the winter on what they have put by in the summer. If it has been a good season they are comfortable; if visitors have been few, they are pinched, and relieved when the spring brings fresh hope. Those who have not the care of daily existence upon their shoulders pass through the winter months in a state of stagnation, or, overpowered at last by ennui, rush off to Brussels or Liége. As has been said, rural Belgium is merely a repetition of town life; there is no genuine country life at all. A Belgian goes into the provinces to move at his ease, to enjoy the open air when it is fine, and to hurry back to his city as soon as the leaves are off the trees, and the November

mists and snow begin to put in an appearance. The less fortunate country gentleman, who has no town residence, has to put up with things. The only excitement he will be likely to have is when the wild-boars are driven by the cold to leave the forest for the farms in search of food, and then a great battue is organised, in which he will take a leading part.





## CHAPTER X

### THE DEAD CITIES OF FLANDERS

THE contrast between the Ardennes and the tame, flat, scenery of Flanders and northern Belgium generally is not more marked than that between the bustling activity of Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, and Ghent, on the one hand, and the sleepy tranquillity of the once famous cities of Flanders on the other. Great as their names are in mediæval history and romance, Bruges, Courtrai, and Ypres, have long been classed as dead cities, while their neighbours and former rivals or dependencies, Comines, Poperinghe, and Audenarde, have been almost forgotten. Even if they remained quite as dead as they have been alleged to be, they must, however, always possess a profound interest for the student of history, the archæologist, and even for the dreamer who, out of their old world charm, is able to evoke the memories of their storied past.

Of all these places Bruges has best preserved its ancient grandeur. A portion of the old walls still remains, the gates which were closed behind Maximilian are to-day in use, the house of the



Franc, or the free district, which was classed with Bruges as one of the States, looks down on the canal, dead and stagnant as itself, and the Cathedral that witnessed the installation of the Knights of the Golden Fleece, and the funeral of Charles the Bold, is still frequented by the religious element of the old city, and visitors from all quarters of the world. But in the other cities of Flanders little is left to call up the memory of perished greatness. They preserve some monument of the past—a church, a town hall, or a belfry—which, in spite of not always judicious renovation, represents with sufficient fidelity the period of the great communes, and that is all.

It is somewhat remarkable that Bruges has not shared in the marked industrial revival which has taken place at Ghent in the last fifty years. When Belgium became an independent kingdom, there was no great disparity in their respective populations, although it used even then to be said that a large number of the citizens of Bruges were beggars. To-day Ghent has nearly four times the population of Bruges, the result of the energy which revived its prosperity, while Bruges, the old sister city, has remained sunk in indigence, through the inertia of its own citizens. This different result might appear the more remarkable since of the two places Bruges seems to possess the greater natural advantages. It is, for instance, nearer the sea, with which it has long possessed communication by two canals, one to

Terneuzen and the other to Ostend, both of which were navigable by ships of a certain tonnage. But they were used to only a moderate extent, and it is probable, when the work to which I am about to refer has been completed, that they will be abandoned.

Ten years ago a project was set on foot to connect Bruges with the North Sea by a new canal sufficiently deep for large ocean-going steamers. In the days of her greatness, ships used to proceed direct from England and the Mediterranean to Bruges, or rather to Damme, which lies just outside one of the city gates. There was then a navigable river or inlet from the sea, called the Zwyn, but this was gradually filled with sand, and ceased to be available for ships in the year 1489. From that date the prosperity of Bruges steadily declined, and it has long been a thing of the past. The existing canals are not suitable for enlargement, and one has the defect of debouching in Holland. The Manchester Ship Canal suggested the idea of constructing an entirely new channel to the sea, that would make Bruges, as its promoters somewhat grandiloquently said, a seaport. Work on this ship-canal was begun in 1897, and is still in progress. As the distance is only ten miles, the rate of construction has not been rapid; but slow and sure is a Belgian characteristic. The line of the canal is traced in an almost due northerly direction from Bruges through Dudzeele to a point on the coast a little west of Heyst. The

name of Zeebrugge has been given to the new outlet, and in the hope of making the pier-head a place of call for ocean steamers passing from other ports to the Atlantic, an iron pier, ending in a stone breakwater and jetty, has been carried out over a mile into the sea to reach the navigable channel from and to the Scheldt. To effect this object a further prolongation of the pier has become necessary. It is thus hoped to make Bruges, which would be close to the sea, and a port preferable to Antwerp for traffic with Belgium, once more the great emporium and distributing centre of Flanders, and when persons interested in the supremacy of Antwerp expressed apprehension lest Bruges thus restored might injure their city, the assurance was given that it was intended to develop the large province of West Flanders, where apart from agricultural prosperity affairs had for many generations been stagnant. The main idea of the canal, then, is to restore life and activity to the long dead cities of Flanders. Up to the present time there is not much evidence of any such change. The Bruges of the Early Flemish exhibition in 1902 was the same quiet and lifeless town, apart from the foreign tourist, that it has been at any time during the last century. There were a great many more tourists, and the hotels were uncomfortably crowded, but that was the only difference. Still, no one can say what may happen when ocean liners are berthed in the new Bassin de Commerce, and the old ramparts

are as frequented by foreign sailors as the quays at Antwerp. Modern activity and mediæval peace cannot long subsist side by side, and the erection of factories and warehouses must prove too much for the prolonged existence of such Old World, stone-flagged streets as those of Vieux Bourg and Notre Dame, in which the grass may sometimes be seen springing up between the flags.

The monuments of Bruges—the Halles with their world-known Belfry, and the Hotel de Ville, representing in part or in whole the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the still older Chapelle du Saint Sang, the fine Cathedral of St. Sauveur, and the finer Church of Notre Dame, the Hospital of St. Jean, with its priceless Memlings, and the Gothic Church of St. Jacques—these will all remain; but whereas they now form part of a town whose appearance harmonises with them, they will become, under the effect of modern improvements, curiosities of a past that will have finally disappeared and left them alone as its representatives. It is the inevitable march of civilisation and prosperity. There will be fewer beggars; but, on the other hand, Bruges will no longer be the place for families that wish to economise. For many years Bruges was the seat of a considerable English colony, which settled down there because living was cheap, and because there were good educational facilities. But for some time this colony has been diminishing from natural causes, among which may be named the increase in the



THE BELFRY AT BRUGES





cost of living and the closing of some of the best schools. It is no longer the fashion, as was once the case, to send young Englishmen to Bruges to learn French. If they go to Belgium at all nowadays, they go to Brussels. The principal residents of Bruges are some of the old Flemish civic families who, having made a sufficient fortune elsewhere, fix upon Bruges for their abode, and lead a retired life behind the walls of some of the old-fashioned stone houses, of which all that the visitor can see are the *porte-cochère* and the windows, carefully screened with lace curtains, and protected by strong wooden shutters, which are fastened by a key on the outside. These people are very proud, notwithstanding their simplicity, and lead a life of strict exclusiveness. Their chief, if not their only, friends are their relations; but despite a good many in-marriages, this system of limiting the acquaintance to blood-connections still allows of a considerable society. In Bruges, it has been kept a little more exclusive through the absence, practically speaking, of the rich manufacturer and tradesmen. These have gone elsewhere, or remain where they made their fortunes, and no fortunes have been made in Bruges for centuries past. It has all the respectability of an English provincial town, with a quaintness and sadness that while they last are all its own.

Courtrai, by reason of the great part it played among the Flemish communes, has a fair claim to rank next to Bruges in importance and interest.

In the past each of them had a population exceeding two hundred thousand. To-day, Bruges has a little more than forty thousand and Courtrai about thirty thousand inhabitants. But the contrast between them could not be greater than it is. Bruges preserves much of its ancient appearance, and possesses monuments that will always make it one of the most original cities of Europe; but Courtrai possesses nothing in its aspect, position, or monuments at all calculated to recall the days of its prosperity and fame. The Church of Notre Dame, which was commenced by the ninth Baldwin in 1199 and completed in 1211, has been several times restored, and even the Counts' Chapel, which is two centuries later, has suffered much, and the figures of the counts and countesses have been restored within the last few years, which gives them a brand-new appearance. The finest thing in the church is comparatively quite modern, Vandyke's painting of the *Erection of the Cross*, one of his masterpieces. But of the Courtrai that fought and won the Battle of the Spurs, and that paid heavy contributions to Maximilian and to Charles the Fifth, virtually nothing is left. The town is uninteresting even in its modern aspect, and the activity of the present-day builder in erecting factories for the linen industry, and residences for their owners and workpeople, which is visible in all directions, is not of a nature to embellish the town or to make it more picturesque.

There is one thing, however, that Courtrai is,



PONT DE BROEL AT COURTRAI

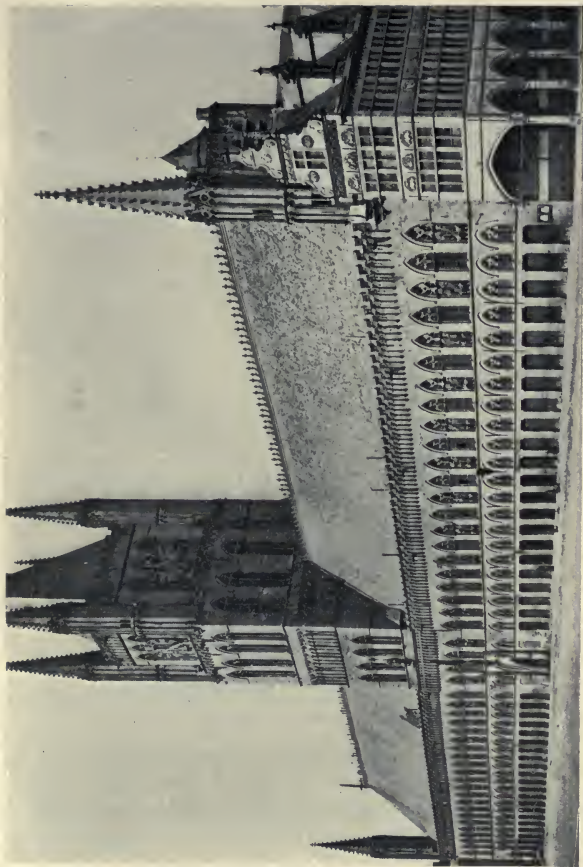


and always has been, proud of, the memory of the Battle of the Spurs, fought underneath its walls in July of the year 1302. This battle not only established the reputation of the Flemish footmen, who there inflicted the first great defeat that the chivalry of France had ever suffered, but it practically saved Flanders from falling to the House of Anjou. The occasion of its six hundredth anniversary in 1902 was seized for a great local celebration. The fêtes went on for a good fortnight, and on the site of the marsh of Guinegate, in which the French horsemen were overwhelmed, a monument was erected. The city walls that looked down on the marsh, and from which the women and children watched the progress of the struggle, have long since disappeared, and the centre of the battle-field is now a grass-grown avenue. The seven hundred pairs of gold spurs hung up in the Church of Notre Dame gave their name to the battle, but it is uncertain how long they remained there. All that is shown at the present time are a few wooden copies gilded over to resemble the originals. Yet the good people of Courtrai are not so dull of mood as not to think that in the brave days of old their ancestors did a fine thing for liberty on that summer morning so long ago. For that reason the citizen of Courtrai squares his shoulders and thinks himself a fine fellow in a way that would seem presumptuous if attempted by a man of Bruges. At the same time the commercial activity of Courtrai is some proof

that Flanders contains the germs of a new life. Courtrai has become the Larné of Belgium. Its linen manufactures are well known in foreign countries, and its table necessaries are almost famous. The population has doubled in a little less than thirty years. If that fact does not conclusively prove vigorous life and strenuous activity, then the conclusions generally drawn from statistics must all be erroneous.

Ypres, the third of the Flemish cities, has not felt the touch of revival that has fallen on Courtrai, though on the other hand, it has finer monuments of the past. The intense trade rivalry of the Flemish cities was their bane and weakness. We shall see how Ypres treated Poperinghe; but Ypres itself suffered heavily at the hands of Ghent in 1383, when many of the weavers took refuge in England. From that year its decline was rapid, and Ypres ceased to play a prominent part in the councils of Flanders. Its two great memorials of that olden time are the Clothmarket Hall and the Cathedral of St. Martin, both dating from the thirteenth century. The Hall is the oldest specimen of its kind in Belgium, and it is practically untouched. The façade is about four hundred and sixty feet long and is simple and severe, presenting a double row of ogival windows, small turrets at each end, and a lofty belfry in the centre. The belfry is about two hundred and thirty feet in height, and is flanked by small towers. The only additions to the building in





THE CLOTH MARKET AT YPRES

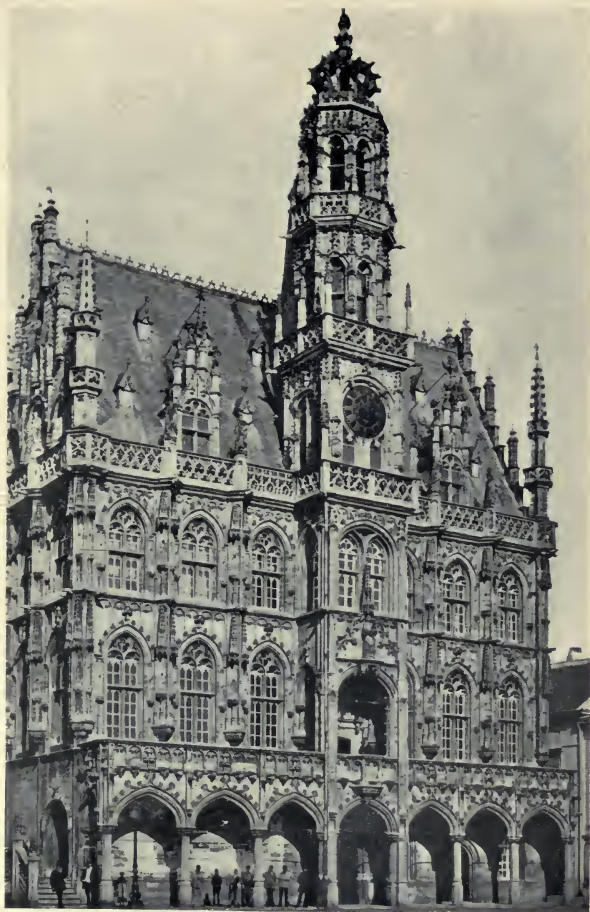


modern times are the statues placed in niches on the façade of thirty-one counts of Flanders and thirteen countesses. In its way there is not a finer or more typical monument to be seen in Belgium. The Cathedral of St. Martin is well entitled to be placed in close proximity to it. It also dates from the thirteenth century, although the tower was not added until the fifteenth. The whole is a very fine specimen of late Gothic, and the interior contains some very fine oak carving and a richly decorated organ-loft. Bishop Jansenius, the founder of the Jansenist sect, is buried in a Gothic cloister which formed part of the older church that occupied the same site. The Hotel de Ville is also an interesting monument of the sixteenth century, but the old-time effect is rather diminished by the presence of a large number of modern pictures somewhat garish in colour. The present prosperity of Ypres, such as it is, is derived from a modest lace industry, supplemented by the fact that a considerable amount of activity and life is brought to the place through its being the spot where the riding-school for officers of the Belgian cavalry has been established.

Audenarde, or Oudenaerde, is another Flemish city of old repute. Lying sixteen miles east of Courtrai, on the banks of the Scheldt, its fortunes were generally linked with those of Ghent. Its chief attraction is its Hotel de Ville, which competes with that of Louvain as the most ornate in Belgium. It was built in the reign of Charles V.,

and underwent a process of restoration some years ago that has done less mischief than such processes generally accomplish. There is an extremely fine oak chimney-piece in the council chamber, but otherwise the interior is disappointing. Audenarde, famous as the birthplace of Margaret of Parma, and for Marlborough's victory over the French in 1708, supports some local industries which make it resemble Ghent rather than the cities of West Flanders, which lie out of the beaten track.

Comines, lying at the apex of a triangle, of which the base would be formed by a line drawn from Ypres to Courtrai, is showing some symptoms of revival, but it has no other claim to notice than that of being the birthplace of Philip de Comines, the chronicler of the reign of Louis XI. Poperinghe, west of Comines, once threatened the supremacy of Ypres, but the citizens of that town came down upon it in overwhelming force and put an end to its pretensions by fire and sword. This was in 1313, and when Ypres itself was served in similar fashion by Ghent in 1383, the retribution seemed only just. Of its former greatness Poperinghe preserves only the fine church of St. Bertin, which dates from the thirteenth century. Furnes is the last of these old Flemish towns that need be named. It is now a placid place, chiefly because it is the centre of the butter-producing district and as the station for La Panne, a fashionable bathing resort on the sea-coast. In the Middle Ages it



TOWN HALL AT OUDENARDE





stood high in the second rank among Flemish cities; now it has only five thousand inhabitants. Its chief memorials of the past are two unfinished churches, both of which were commenced in the fourteenth century on the large scale that the importance of Furnes at that time seemed to justify, but which owing to its rapid decline no one has since had the courage to complete.

For those who wish to make a visit to these Flemish towns south of Bruges, Ypres is the best stopping point as well as the most important from the character of its monuments. There is convenient railway communication between all the places named, and a few hours in each will satisfy the curiosity of the most inquisitive visitor. Audenarde is within easy distance of Ghent. The impression made on the visitor to West Flanders at the present time is that there is an immense agricultural activity, and that the towns are, to some extent, waking up. Courtrai in particular shows symptoms of marked progress, and the banks of the Lys are covered with factories and warehouses. What will happen at Bruges is still uncertain. The ship-canal may turn it into a noisy port and place of trade. On the other hand, the port and landing-stage on the coast may be frequented by passing steamers and used as a regular place of call; but the canal behind it may not have much traffic, in which case Bruges will continue to be very much what it is. There is even a possibility that the opinions of the critics

who took a pessimistic view of this ship-canal at the commencement will be confirmed, and that the inroads of the sea and the heavy deposit of sand carried with it will, before many years, close the entrance to the new canal—at least for large steamers. The breakwater has been so constructed as to throw a protecting arm in front of the entrance to the canal, and a very large expenditure in addition to the original estimate of £1,100,000 has already been incurred. Apart from this enterprise and its influence, at present unascertainable, on the fortunes and aspect of Bruges, there is nothing likely to hasten greatly the development of the old cities of Flanders. They are benefiting in their turn from the growing prosperity of the rest of the country, but West Flanders, with its sand-bound coast, must always lie outside the main stream of commercial activity in Belgium. Its population is not likely to find any more profitable pursuit than that, so long carried on, of agriculture.





## CHAPTER XI

### EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

CONSIDERING the illiteracy of the larger half of the population of Belgium, it may be surprising to learn that a primary school exists in every commune over 6500 in number, and that the law of the land is free education for those who cannot pay for it. The course in these schools should produce better results than are obtained by it, for it embraces a good deal more than the three R's. While history and geography are compulsory, drawing and singing are optional. The girls are taught to sew, and in the provinces the boys are instructed in the rudiments of agriculture, and in the towns in a trade. If the prescribed course were carried out with good superintendence it should produce adequate results.

The true explanation of the inadequate results ensuing from a system of what might be called compulsory education is to be found in the fact that all primary schools are managed by the communes, and not by the Government. Any private school, which means for the great majority one

attached to a religious order, may be selected as the communal school, and so far as female education goes this is the rule. Its directors have to conform to the law and to rest content with the meagre grant of Government and the contribution, fixed by the commune, from parents who are assumed to be able to pay something for the education of their children. This contribution is fixed by reference to the taxes paid, and persons who pay less than ten francs annually to the State are free everywhere, while in the largest towns, where a higher scale is in force, the limit is thirty francs.

In the primary schools education, except for those who contemplate entering some department of the administration which entails passing through the *écoles moyennes*, practically ceases at twelve, when the age of labour is reached, although the law assumes that education continues until the child is fourteen. What is learned before twelve under far more favourable circumstances than prevail in Belgium is soon forgotten, and the illiteracy of the country is to be explained by the inevitable relapse following the premature interruption and discontinuance even of primary education. It is probable also that the poor results attained are traceable to the deficiencies of the teaching staff, which is recruited from the pupils of the schools themselves. Those who pass from the primary school to the *école moyenne*, and take a certificate at the latter, are eligible for a

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mastership, and the appointment is made solely by the communal authorities. State supervision only comes in to the extent of stipulating that the teacher shall possess this certificate, and that he shall not receive a lower salary than one thousand francs, or £40 a year. Considering that the prizes of the profession are headmasterships, for which the pay ranges from £48 in small to £96 in large towns, it will be evident that even in Belgium, where all regular salaries run in low figures, no very high order of intellectual attainment is expected. The only additions that are possible to those salaries are an allowance for house rent, ranging from £8 to £32 a year, according to the size of the town, and an annual increase of £1 a year up to £24 a year. The maximum salary after twenty-four years' service is, in a small commune, £80 a year, and in a town of over one hundred thousand inhabitants, of which there are only four in Belgium, £152 a year.

The State comes in to the extent of providing District Inspectors, who are required to visit their schools once a year, and to hold quarterly meetings of the teachers in their districts. These District Inspectors are in turn subordinate to Chief Inspectors, of whom there is one for each province, or nine in all. They are supposed to visit the schools once in two years, and they report direct to the Minister of Education. The maximum salary of a District Inspector is £180 a year, and of a Chief Inspector £300 a year. These salaries



are only reached after many years' service. The most careful inspection cannot, however, remove the defects of the system, which arise from the fact that education is discontinued at too early an age to leave any durable impression. This is especially the case in Flanders and Hainaut, where there is a general demand for child labour. No marked improvement can be expected under communal control, which is lax in the sense of being easily satisfied and devoid of any high ideal. If things are kept in the old groove all is considered well; the thought of progress is not seriously entertained.

The influence of the Church is exercised in the same direction. By the law the teaching of religion, which forms part of the subjects in primary schools, is not compulsory, and children need not attend the class while instruction is being given in that subject. The law also enjoins respect for other creeds than the Roman Catholic faith; but as there are no other creeds except ten thousand (mostly foreign) Protestants and four thousand Jews, this stipulation does not impose much restraint on the harmony of the playground. Practically speaking, the influence of the Church is supreme, and where the intervention of the Socialist element causes absence from the prayer hours, it may be shrewdly suspected that a practical revenge is taken by not paying great attention to the progress of the defaulting pupils. Moreover, it is an established maxim of



the Church of Rome that education, far from being an aid, may be an obstruction to salvation, the only matter in its creed of essential importance.

The *écoles moyennes*, to which only a comparatively small minority from the primary schools pass, give better results, and the education of the middle classes is acquired in them, or in the somewhat superior schools called *Athénées Royaux*. The real cause of the superiority of these institutions is that they are not wholly dependent on the commune, but are controlled to some extent by the Minister of Education, whose department makes all appointments to the teaching staff, and, where it provides the funds, prescribes the books that are to be used. The law left the right to the provinces and communes to establish these middle schools, and to retain the control of them subject to the two conditions named. This was due to the desire of the Catholic party to prevent education from becoming a strictly State affair, as desired and recommended by the Liberals. One of the leaders of the Clericals on that occasion laid down the following principles in the Chamber: "Instruction is not a public obligation, it is the duty of the parent and not of the State. The State may, under certain circumstances, come to the father's aid by opening for his children teaching establishments, but it has not the right to force these establishments on any one." Views such as these explain the backwardness of

education in Belgium, for they reflect the principles held by the most powerful political party in the country.

The *Athénées* are the highest form of scholastic institution in the country. They are entirely independent of the commune, and, in a certain sense, they are under the direct supervision of the King, hence the use of the term "royal." Classics and mathematics are taught in them, and some arrangements are made for the reception of boarders by the assistant-masters. There are only twenty *Athénées* throughout the country, and some of these, such as the one at Bouillon, have very few pupils. The Jesuits have a first-class school in Brussels, and the best education is obtainable there of any institution in the country.

There are four universities in Belgium, two subject to the State, and two what are called "free." The former are at Liège and Ghent, the latter at Brussels and Louvain. "Free" means not under the State; those of Brussels and Louvain represent the opposing parties in the State. Brussels is Liberal, and Louvain is Clerical and Catholic. There is nothing remarkable in the the course beyond its comprehensiveness, and at State Universities there is a branch for technical instruction, which is of the greatest possible value for those who intend to become architects, engineers, mining-engineers, and land-surveyors. There is probably not a better teaching college in Europe for all departments of engineering than the

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technical school at Liége University. The duration of the academic year is nine months and a half, divided into two equal periods, so that the studies are only twice interrupted, for two months in August and September, and for a fortnight at Easter. The system has another merit in its remarkable cheapness. The annual fee for any of the courses varies from eight to ten pounds, and after the first year's payment the student has the right to attend all subsequent lectures in the same subject without further payment. A considerable reduction is offered to those who wish to attend only a limited course of lectures.

Besides the technical branches of the Liége and Ghent Universities, there are some special schools for practical training that enjoy almost as high a reputation as they do, and that have the power of granting diplomas, which are highly prized. Among these may be named the School of Mines at Mons and the Institute of Commerce at Antwerp. The period of instruction in the Mons school covers four years, and the only fee is an entrance one of less than five pounds. The Commercial Institute, controlled by the Antwerp Corporation, is an admirable training-college for clerks, correspondents, and business managers. The most promising pupils are given a special grant to spend twelve months in England, France, Germany, or America, to study the commercial methods of those countries. It is not exaggerating to say that Belgian merchants have thus a

supply of trained clerks at their disposal, while those of England have had to take their *employés* untrained, and do the best they can with them after engagement. There are minor technical schools on most branches of industry scattered throughout the country, but those of the greatest importance have been mentioned.

With the view of retaining some hold on those who enter the workshop, the Catholics have organised schools for apprentices, called St. Luke's Schools, in many of the towns, and especially in Flanders. No fees are required in these schools, which are very popular. Female education is not so advanced, but the courses of medicine and law have been thrown open to women. The school of technical instruction for women in Brussels has done excellent work during the last thirty years. It undertakes to instruct a woman in any trade, from lace-making to cooking and the management of the house. Several similar schools have been established throughout Belgium; but the Brussels school is acknowledged to take the lead. In the province of Hainaut there are special schools of household management, which originated in a private experiment by the Prince de Chimay.

Taking a broad and comprehensive view of the state of education in Belgium, the following general conclusions seem safe. With regard to the masses, more especially in agricultural Flanders and in the mining district of Hainaut, primary education produces few and fleeting results. Little

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is learned, and that little is soon forgotten. There is a general illiteracy that provides statistics which seem to condemn the educational system of Belgium *in toto*. If we pursue our investigations a little further, this condemnation will be qualified by the discovery that the middle schools are doing good work, and that if they were completely taken out of the hands of the communal authorities they would probably do better. Then we come to the *Athénées Royaux*, where a classical education is obtainable on very easy terms; but they are languishing institutions, because nobody in Belgium seems to want a classical education except persons in the wealthier classes, who send their sons to a special school like the Jesuits' College at Brussels already referred to. Even there classical instruction is confined to the chosen few, and can be combined with what is called the modern course. Finally, there are the technical schools and colleges which equip a large section of the community for the battle of life. These are admirable in design and efficient in organisation. Until comparatively recently England had nothing like them, and even now it is doubtful if her corresponding institutions produce as good results. Clearly it will not do to say off-hand, as some do, that education is backward in Belgium, and that illiteracy and drink go together. There is a large section of the nation that may be termed neglected and backward. But another section enjoys very fair opportunities of becoming educated, while the



technical schools are not to be equalled out of Germany, and some of them are not to be surpassed there. The following figures will give the reader some means of making a comparison for himself. In 1902, there were 205,000 children under six at infants' schools, 786,000 at primary schools, and only 23,000 altogether at colleges, *Athénées*, and *écoles moyennes*.

An account of education in Belgium would be incomplete without some reference to the numerous scholastic establishments where non-Belgians, mostly English, are received as pupils. The proportion between English and Belgian scholars varies, in some the majority are of one country, in others the numbers will be about equal. But the schools in which the English system and model are aimed at are confined to Brussels and Bruges, and this observation applies exclusively to those for young ladies. There have always been a few resident English tutors who take a limited number of pupils, but these exceptions apart, English boys if they go to school in Belgium must go to a Belgian school like any native subject. It is different in the case of girls. There are at least ten excellent young ladies' schools in Brussels in which the foreign element is quite as important as the Belgian, and there is certainly one which is exclusively English and American. On the whole, the instruction imparted in these schools is as good as can be obtained in England, and for those willing to learn there are great



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facilities for improving their French—especially in the mixed schools. At some of the strictly Belgian schools day boarders are received, and with genuine catholicity difference of creed is overlooked. The fees in these instances are very reasonable, and the cost of the quasi-English establishment is about the same as in England.

The subject of religion is intimately associated with that of education in Belgium. All religions are allowed, but the State religion is that of the Church of Rome, and it is stipulated in the constitution that the Sovereign must belong to it. This clause had to be waived in the case of Leopold I., who, while he married a Roman Catholic, and allowed his children to be brought up in that faith, stoutly declined to change his own. There are resident in the country about ten thousand Protestants, chiefly English and members of the Reformed French Church. The Belgians are Catholics, and where they are not fervent believers it is simply because they are generally sceptical, and not because they lean towards any other creed. The field-preachers, who produced a great impression in Flanders in the sixteenth century, would fare badly if they reappeared on the same scene to-day. The head of the Church is the Archbishop of Malines, who happens at the present time to be a cardinal as well. This prelate is Cardinal Goossens, whose influence and power throughout Flanders are exceedingly great. He is described by those who know him as a man

of great talent and resolution. He does not obtrude himself on public notice, but works behind the scenes. There is a popular saying to the effect that "the King is powerful, but Dr. Goossens is more powerful." His admirers have thought that he might be Pope one day or other; but the Roman Curia loves not the determined and tenacious Fleming. Under the Archbishop are the five Bishops of Liége, Ghent, Bruges, Tournai, and Namur. There is a salary from the State to each of these Church functionaries, that of the Archbishop being over £800 a year, and of the bishops over £600 a year apiece. Each bishopric is divided into communes, to each of which a *curé* is appointed. He receives not more than £82 a year and a house. The *curé* may be considered the rector of the parish, and in any commune of importance he is allowed the assistance of one or two *vicaires*, who fill the position analogous to a curate. The *vicaire* rarely receives a higher salary than £30 a year, but he has rooms in the *curé's* house, to which a good vegetable garden is generally attached. A certain portion of the Church offerings is set apart for the maintenance of the priests. Each bishop maintains a considerable staff in his seminary, and the members are qualified in some form or other to receive a State salary, which is passed into a common fund. There is another functionary who deserves to be mentioned, although he is nominally an outsider. This is the Papal Nuncio,

who, although really an ambassador, cannot sometimes forget that he is a cleric and interferes with the Belgian bishops. In this he generally comes off second-best, as these bishops will not permit any outside interference with themselves or their flock.

The power of the clergy is very great in Belgium, and in some parts they are omnipotent. This influence is largely increased by the knowledge that if the *curés* have but small salaries the Church is rich. Religious orders have always flourished in Belgium. In the eighteenth century they held two thirds of the cleared land, and although they suffered during the French Revolution, they suffered less than might have been expected. The establishment of the modern kingdom of Belgium restored their chances, and they took the fullest advantage of them. In 1846, there were 779 religious houses with only 11,989 inmates, but in 1866 the totals had risen to 1314 houses and 18,162 members. In 1890, the latest year for which statistics are available, the numbers were 1643 houses and 30,000 inmates. Some idea of the value of the Church possessions may be gathered from the fact that the movable property of the religious bodies in Liège alone has been valued at one million sterling. It would not be an exaggeration to value the total possessions of the Church in Belgium at fifty millions sterling. These resources needed no supplement from the State to make it the most powerful organisation

and the best equipped for offensive political operations in the country.

It is impossible not to admire the skill and persistency with which the Roman Church has fought and won a stubborn fight in Belgium. At one time it seemed as if its influence had become a thing of the past. Thirty years ago, or even less, it was consigned to a back seat in politics, and in the control of education its wish counted for little. The Liberals were in power and had long been in power. They gave, or intended to give, the control of primary education to the State; and, once the Church lost its hold on the infant mind, anything and everything became possible. Then the Clericals stirred themselves to action. They recovered the control of education by having it vested in the commune. They appealed to the religious fervour and devotion of the unlettered Flemings; and the Clerical party was returned to power in 1884, with an overwhelming majority that has kept it there ever since. By systematic organisation, the Church has retained its hold on the popular mind in a remarkable manner, considering the extent to which Socialism and scepticism prevail among the industrial classes. The main principle upon which it has acted has been to acquire a dominant influence over the youthful mind, and to retain it by keeping up a direct interest in and practical control over the individual during his worldly career. There are in Brussels five thousand waiters and messengers who are on

the list of the Catholic League, and there are nearly as many girls in domestic service and shops included in the same League.

Many Roman Catholics in Belgium think it a misfortune and a direct injury to their religion, that the names Catholic and Clerical have been given to what is strictly the Conservative party in the State. The Church thus incurs odium in matters about which it feels very little concern. This way of looking at the matter is not quite as true as it appears. The policy of Rome sees far, and knows well the danger of eliminating any matter of human interest from its programme, as not being of a nature to effect its position at some future time. Thus, for instance, it would seem at first sight that the Catholics as a religious body could have no possible motive for opposing the introduction of a bill abolishing the privilege of pre-emption in the Army. Yet they are opposed to it because they believe that the compulsory and uniform enforcement of conscription will weaken their influence and increase the amount of irreligion. It cannot be denied, however, that the Church of Rome has, by descending into the political arena, incurred much odium which, if it had kept to its own sphere, would have been avoided. On the other hand, the undoubted good work performed by the parish priests, and by many of the religious institutions, must not be overlooked or disparaged. The advice of *Monsieur le Curé* is generally sought for in every



difficulty throughout the communes of Belgium, and, as a rule, it is given disinterestedly. Now and then there is a scandal in which some young *vicaire* is concerned; but considering the enforced celibacy of the clergy, these cases are remarkably rare. The monks and nuns of the various orders give themselves up to some special task. Much of the hospital work in the country is done by the latter. And they not merely do the nursing work in the hospitals, but they have hospitals of their own for imbeciles and for the deaf and dumb. Just as the Jesuits have a high-class school in Brussels for youths, so have the Ursulines one for young ladies at St. Hubert. The Trappists make beer and cheese, and are also excellent farmers. The Carmelites may provide nothing of practical utility, but their music and singing are superb, and add much to the enjoyment of their congregations. Apart from politics, the representatives of the Roman Church are doing in all parts of Belgium good work which has earned the gratitude of those who benefit by it, or come under its influence.







## CHAPTER XII

### LAW AND JUSTICE

AT the same time that the Provisional Government was drawing up a Constitution for the country in 1830-31, it was also charged with the task of preparing a code of laws and justice. This was to be based on the old laws of the nine provinces, adapted to modern requirements and leavened by the Code Napoleon. The *Codes Belges*, which took several years to compile, fill a large volume, and the Belgians believe that they possess in them a model collection of laws. They are not, perhaps, so well satisfied with the manner of dispensing them, and especially with the extent to which litigation may be protracted. The law, they say, is slow and costly, especially in commercial matters and questions of inheritance, which furnish the bulk of the cases carried to the Court of Appeal. This objection is heard in other countries besides Belgium, and does not reflect on the justice of the laws in any special degree.

As the decisions in all cases have to be in conformity with the statute law, they are examined by a revising court called the *Cour de Cassation*.

This court works automatically, as it were, for no action on the part of either plaintiff or defendant is needed to set it in operation. It examines every judgment, and when it finds that it is not in harmony with the written law, it simply annuls it. The *Cour de Cassation* never tries cases itself, except when a Minister of State is the accused. The *Cour de Cassation* is the highest court of the realm, and has only one judge. He is assisted by a considerable staff of revisers, but he gives his decisions alone. These are only heard of when a judgment or sentence is reversed, as in the majority of cases ratification follows as a matter of course.

Next to the *Cour de Cassation* come the Courts of Appeal, of which there are three. One sits at Brussels, another at Ghent, and a third at Liège. Each of these courts has several judges, and at Brussels there are four separate chambers, or tribunals, for the Court of Appeal. The judges are appointed by the King for life; but a list of eligible persons, who, of course, are barristers or *avocats*, is first prepared by the Senate and the members of the courts in which a vacancy has occurred. There is no regular retiring scale or rule, but if a judge is incapacitated by age from discharging his duties, he is allowed to retire and still receive his full salary, which ranges from £800 to £1200 a year. There is one characteristic that the whole of the judicial and official classes in Belgium have in common. They re-

main at their posts until they actually break down. There are more octogenarians in the Belgian public service than in any other country of Europe. In Belgium, a judge is appointed for life, and in theory he cannot be removed from his post; at least the King who appoints him cannot remove him, though if he does anything discreditable, his brother judges can pass a vote, which must be unanimous, to the effect that he is no longer worthy to sit among them, and he is then removed.

Below the Courts of Appeal are the Courts of First Instance, in which all civil processes have to commence. There are twenty-six of these courts, which may be found in all the principal towns. They are supplemented by tribunals of commerce, before which commercial disputes are first argued; but these exist only in Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, and a few other places where such cases are likely to be numerous. The lowest court of all is that of the *Juge de Paix*, which combines the functions of English County and also Police Courts. All local disputes are brought before the *Juge de Paix*, whose sentence in the majority of offences against the law takes the form of a small fine. Where the offence is deemed grave, the prisoner is committed to the Assizes. There are two hundred and twenty-two *Juge de Paix* Courts in the country.

Criminal cases are supposed to be tried before the Courts of Assizes, and these vary in number

with the amount of crime in the calendar. In 1898, there were eighty-nine Assize Courts, before which as many as 42,732 persons were arraigned. The bulk of these cases could not have been very serious, as throughout the year there were never at any time more than four thousand prisoners in the gaols. All criminal cases, including those of treason and offences under the Press laws, have to be tried before a jury, which, as in England, is composed of twelve citizens. The jury system represents one of the oldest of Belgian privileges, having been ceded to the people as long ago as the Grammont Constitution in the year 1068.

The punishments imposed by the criminal courts are far lighter than in England, and although capital punishment remains on the penal code, it is never inflicted. The condemned prisoner is sentenced in form to death, and he is removed to the solitary cells in the prison of Louvain, where he passes the remainder of his days in silence. Those who have had experience in Belgium of the perpetual silence system describe the punishment as being far more severe and terrible in its consequences than death. The advocates of the retention of capital punishment lay stress on its deterrent influence, but it has none in Belgium, for although it remains on the statute book, everyone knows that it is never inflicted.

The excessive leniency shown to all accused persons in the courts of the *Fuge de Paix* is the great defect in the administration of justice in Bel-

gium. The dominant idea in these courts which sit in the Hotel de Ville is to preserve harmony in the commune, and not to create bad blood. A stabs B because he is found courting A's young woman. The wound is not very serious, and has disappeared by the time the case comes on. The *Juge de Paix* reads the culprit a sermon, and fines him five francs. In the meantime the friends and neighbours have made peace between the combatants, and if all is well, the whole party proceed to spend the five francs and more in their favourite drink-shop. But sometimes it is not so happily adjusted. The assailant may be a ruffian, and hastens to signalise his escape by perpetrating a worse outrage on his rival or on the girl whose preference is the ostensible cause of the affair. A worthy Brussels citizen once described a little affair to me which aptly illustrates the defects, or rather the complete helplessness, of the petty law in his country. His servant was washing the *trottoir* in front of the house. A youth, of the kind we would call nowadays a Hooligan, came along and upset her pail out of sheer mischief. The servant remonstrated with him on his conduct, whereupon he struck her with a heavy stick across her right arm. The arm was severely injured, and incapacitated the servant for work during several weeks. On my asking what punishment the fellow got, I received the answer, "Nothing; but what would you have? I could have brought the culprit before the *Juge de Paix*,



who would have fined him twenty francs, and all his relations and friends would have set themselves to work to do me an injury for inflicting that loss on them. Truly, our police have not enough power." This was the complaint of a prosperous inhabitant of Brussels.

As a general observation, it may be said that the Belgian police devote all their time to watching the criminal classes, the men and women who have undergone a term of imprisonment, and that it does not come within their conception of duty to attempt to regulate the affairs of ordinary citizens. For this reason a good deal of latitude is left to the citizen in respect of self-defence, as, for instance, against housebreakers. It is perfectly legitimate for a householder to fire upon and kill any one breaking into his house, although he may be in the full security of an upper story, and the burglar be only testing the door-latch. With the exception of such extreme cases as this, the law of Belgium for petty offences is based on the theory that lenience is the wisest course, and provides the best way of preventing recruits from joining the criminal classes.

Any English family contemplating taking up its residence in Belgium for a time should carefully study the law of tenancy before committing itself for a definite term, for the law is very strict on the point that if the tenant has a grievance against the landlord he must discharge his liability under the contract—that is, pay for the whole



term—before he can get a hearing. In the case of a foreign tenant, too, who has no immovable property in the country, the landlord has very extensive powers of summary seizure for the purpose of securing himself against possible loss. It has been said that an English plaintiff has no chance of redress in a Belgian court. I have no reason to think this statement to be true, but it is certain that ignorance of the law in Belgium very often disqualifies a plaintiff without even a hearing.

Belgian lawyers boast that the distinctive merit of their courts is that the sentences given forth in them cannot differ from the intention and provision of the law. If they do differ they are reversed, and the penalties fall to the ground. There is no inequality of sentence, because everything is done according to prescription, and the greatest pains are taken by dispassionate persons in controlling the record. The *Cour de Cassation* is swayed neither by the rhetoric of the advocate nor by sympathy with the accused. That is one side of the picture, but there is another. By the law of Belgium a man is tried for what he is accused of, and this is carried out with rigid consistency. If he is found not guilty of that particular and precise crime he is acquitted. In many cases the issue is simple and direct; the accused has done a thing or he has not done it. But there are many matters in which the deed cannot be disputed, but there is an opening for difference of

opinion as to the degree of culpability. For instance, a man is killed, but the killer may commit murder, or manslaughter, or merely homicide. In Belgium, it is necessary to be very specific in the counts of a charge, or an undoubtedly guilty person will escape scot free.

Stronger evidence could not be advanced in proof of this than information candidly placed at my disposal by a very clever Belgian lawyer and publicist with reference to the notorious Stokes case. Stokes was the merchant-missionary shot or hung by the Capitaine-Commandant Lothaire in Congoland. This officer was brought by the representations of the British Legation at Brussels to trial, and the indictment quite simply laid to his charge the crime of murder *alone*. The Legation no doubt took counsel with some Belgian advisers in the framing of the indictment; but intentionally or otherwise it was faulty, for all minor counts were omitted. As my Belgian informant—I believe he was one of the counsel on the English side—told me with a pleasant smile, “Of course the court had no difficulty in acquitting Lothaire, for whatever his offense it was *not* murder.” The result of the Sipido case was due to a somewhat similar miscarriage on a technical point.

The Belgian bar is recruited from the students of law at the different universities. They attend the lectures of the legal course, and having received their diplomas as doctors in law are qualified on the payment of moderate fees to practise in

the courts. They do not appear in the cases before the *Juge de Paix*. I believe there is no reason why they should not, but it almost seems as if they thought it beneath their dignity to do so. Nor do they appear often in the Assize Courts, unless it is a *cause célèbre*. In these cases there is very rarely much, if any, money thrown away on the defence. The accused knows fairly well what to expect, and accepts it with a certain philosophy. The presence of a becaped *avocat* from Brussels will not materially reduce the sentence, but it will the savings of the culprit's family.

The Belgian lawyers work almost exclusively in the Courts of Appeal, the Tribunals of Commerce, and in private litigation. The fees paid them are on a moderate scale, but occasionally, in an important case, a leader in the Appeal Court will receive a daily fee of a hundred pounds. A successful barrister regards his service as an *avocat* either as the probationary period for a judgeship, or as the source from which he derives the income that enables him to be a politician. For instance, M. Beernaert, who has been Prime Minister and also President of the Chamber, is still a practising barrister in the Brussels Court of Appeal, and perhaps it is not going too far to call him the leading lawyer as well as politician of his country. Solicitors do not fill the same position of importance that they do in England. One of the explanations is that a considerable portion of their

duties is performed by the *notaire*, an important personage in Belgian life, of whom something must be said presently. The solicitor, or *avoué*, has studied law like the *avocat* in the University, and taken his diploma. But his work consists in giving a legal form to documents, preparing wills, etc. He does not instruct the *avocats* in the same way that English solicitors draw up the case for barristers, and it is permissible for the client to treat direct with his counsel. His principal work lies in the conduct of litigation outside the courts, and in instructing the *huissiers* (sheriff's officers) in the collection of debts. The *avoués* are not a numerous body, and they are also to be found only in the principal towns. Throughout Belgium there are probably not altogether a hundred practising *avoués*.

The *notaire*, or notary, has no legal training or position, but he discharges all the business side of a solicitor's profession in England. All sales and transfer of house property and land have to be executed before him in order to possess validity. He is a commissioner of oaths, and in the provinces, at least, he is the custodian of family papers and documents. He is also consulted in all matters of business, and no Belgian would think of purchasing a property before he had taken the advice of his notary. A good deal of banking business passes through his hands, for he often takes charge of the money of his clients, and makes them advances as required. In country towns he

is the most important man in the place, for not only does he know everybody, but he holds in his hands the information which enables him to judge of the financial position of every one in the town and the surrounding district. Far more than the parish-priest is he the keeper of the public conscience. As notaries are paid a definite fee or a commission on the amount of money that passes through their hands on the sale or purchase of property, they generally are able to save a considerable sum of money during their lifetime. They have also opportunities of purchasing land or houses on favourable terms. Their daughters are thus often the possessors of a tempting *dot*, which enables them to marry an officer in the army or a member of the *petite noblesse*. As a body the *notaires* are an honourable class, and this explains the great confidence reposed in them. But of course there are exceptions, and since speculation on the Bourse has increased of late years, paragraphs in the newspapers are sometimes seen announcing the failure and flight of a *notaire*. The principal interest from the general point of view of such an incident is that there is then revealed the magnitude of the sums entrusted to the custody of the *notaires*. Some years ago there was a rather notorious case in one of the southern towns, when a *notaire* made away with over a million francs of his clients' money.

All criminal prosecutions are undertaken by the *Procureur du Roi*. He differs from the English



Public Prosecutor in this respect, that he conducts the prosecution himself in court. A certain number of barristers are salaried by the State for this purpose, but when many cases are in progress any barrister may be retained to act as *Procureur du Roi*.

There are *maisons d'arrêt* in all the small towns or Assize districts, and in the large towns there is a *maison de sûreté*. Prisoners are kept in these pending trial. At Brussels there are three of the latter—one for women, formerly in the Rue Petits Carmes, occupying the site of the Hotel Culembourg, but now in the Ancien Hôpital Militaire, in the Rue des Minimes, and two for men. Of the latter, one is an old building in the Rue des Minimes on the side of the hill on the top of which Brussels stands, and the other is a new and extensive building at St. Gilles flanking the Chaussée de Charleroi. A new prison to take the place of the one in the Minimes is being built at Forest. The two chief prisons of Belgium for prisoners after sentence is passed are situated at Louvain and Ghent. At Ghent, there is also a reformatory for youths. It was here that Sipido was incarcerated after he was brought back from France. Belgian prisons are under the control of the Minister of Justice, who selects suitable candidates for the posts of the Governors and Deputy-Governors, who are appointed by the King. They have the reputation of being well managed, and, although released prisoners have not yet contracted the bad



habit of publishing the record of their infamy and its punishment, the general impression is that Belgian prisoners do not suffer great hardships in prison.

The complaint made by the Brussels householder as to their not being a sufficient number of police is not surprising, considering that the total police force of Brussels does not exceed five hundred men, and many of these are employed in the administration and are never seen in the streets at all. In accordance with the population, this force, as compared with that in London, is only one-third of what it ought to be. Some increase has been made of late, including a body of bicyclists, but the total is still inadequate for a great city covering so large an extent of ground as Brussels. The police are armed with a short sabre, and since the Socialist disturbances of 1899 they have carried a revolver. There is a dangerous criminal class in Brussels which congregates chiefly in the Rue Haute, a sort of Seven Dials, and the suburb of Schaerbeek. The greater portion of the offences in which violence plays a part are committed by professional criminals. The bulk of the citizens are extremely well behaved and give no trouble to the police. One explanation of the ease with which the population is managed lies in the system of compulsory registration at the police-office, thus the authorities can put their hands at once on any member of the community, or at least ascertain that he or she

has quitted the fixed address. Servants are compelled to notify their changes of situation, all of which are recorded in a little book which they submit to the examination and control of the police. The inspection of the *livret* of any servant is sufficient to reveal her personal history.

It is the fashion in England to sneer at the Brussels policeman, and he is generally represented as a very puny fellow, devoid of physical strength and courage. He used to be a favourite butt of *Punch*. As is often the case, the facts are not as they are popularly represented to be, although it may be admitted that during the last ten years considerable attention has been paid to the reorganisation of the force and to the physique of the men composing it. It is consequently improved from what it was. Taking the corps as a body, they are a set of self-respecting men, who are held in respect by the community. As a force they are popular, which shows that they do not abuse their authority. Some of the misconception that has arisen in the British mind about them is due to the fact that it is not part of the duty of a Brussels *agent de police* to give information to the tourist and traveller, and consequently when accosted in a matter-of-course sort of a way, as if he was a mere official intended to wait on strangers, he used no doubt to give very often a brusque answer, or no answer at all. On the other hand, if approached in a proper manner, with the customary slight elevation of one's hat, he will salute in

return and give all the information at his disposal as cheerfully as do the excellent English constables. The newspapers contain every day one or more instances of exceptional courage and devotion to duty on the part of *agents de police*.





## CHAPTER XIII

### IN TRUE WALLONIA

**A**LTHOUGH the original home and birthplace of the Walloon race cannot be found and specified with the same precision as in the case of the Flemings, there is no question that Liége may be called its central point. On the south it may be considered to be bordered by the Hautes Fagnes; westwards it extends to the borders of Brabant, its eastern limit is Aix-la-Chapelle, which is historically a Walloon city, and on the north it touches the modern province and old Duchy of Limburg. Except the portion which has been German for centuries, and which has in Montjoie the most typical of all Walloon towns, the province of Liége represents the true home of the Walloons. The origin of the name Walloon appears to be the German word *welch*, cultured or civilised. We may take it that this title was given to the settlers in the productive and attractive Meuse valley by the other tribes of Austrasia long before Liége had come into existence, and at a time when Tongres, Herstal, Landen, and Aix-la-Chapelle were the important towns of the Wal-

loon country. Herstal sprang into fame because the Merovingian kings established there a hunting residence. These places became more famous as the cradle of the succeeding dynasty of the Carolingians, or Carolovingians. Landen was the birthplace of the first Pepin who is distinguished by its name, Herstal gave birth to the second, and the third Pepin or the Short was born at Jupille, on the opposite bank of the Meuse to Herstal, and supposed to have been another villa for the chase in the forest that covered the greater part of this region. Many places dispute the honour of having given birth to his son and successor, Charlemagne, but the claims of Herstal or Jupille are probably better than those of any of the others. At the same time it may be noted that volumes have been filled with learned theories on the subject without any absolutely certain result, for none is possible. The citizen of Herstal is just as proud and confident of the fact as his neighbour of Jupille across the river, and both are now small places, mere suburbs of Liége. On the other hand, Aix-la-Chapelle, which claimed the honour of being the birthplace of the greatest historical figure between Cæsar and Napoleon, was undoubtedly his favourite residence and holds his tomb.

The character of this region differs considerably from the other provinces of Belgium. It is more rugged than any part of the Ardennes, stands on a higher elevation, and although the growth

of population has been followed by the general clearing of the woods, a visit to the Hautes Fagnes or the forest of Hertogenwald, will convey some idea of what it must have been like in the days of the famous Mayors of the Palace. The valley of the Vesdre, despite the presence of numerous factories and villa residences, presents a savage aspect that is not to be found in any other part of the country. The little stream forces its way between dark and overhanging rocks, and the railway from Liége into Prussia passes through twenty-five tunnels in as many miles. Throughout this region the oak used to abound, and in the beautiful woods on the summit of the range behind Chaudfontaine the king of trees can still be found in great numbers. There is also an extensive oak forest round the château of Argenteau near Herstal.

The château of Argenteau, beautifully situated, is the seat of the Counts Mercy-Argenteau, the most famous of whom was the Ambassador sent by the Empress Maria Theresa to Paris in the time of Queen Marie Antoinette, and whose memoirs throw so much light on the period. Not far from it commence the limits of the hitherto neutral district of Moresnet, which, owing to the inability of Prussia and the Netherlands to come to an agreement about the frontier in 1815, was left autonomous. Moresnet consists chiefly of a mountain that contains large and valuable zinc deposits. It is about three miles in length, and a



mile and a half broad. A little time ago some stir was made by a rumour that a project had been formed for opening there the gambling-tables that the Belgian Parliament had caused to be closed at Spa and Ostend, and now it is stated that Moresnet is about to lose its distinctive character, Prussia and Belgium having come to an agreement to divide it between them.

The Hautes Fagnes, called in German Hohe Venn, extend from the Amblève to the Prussian frontier and across it. The popular watering-place, Spa, is situated within their limits, and also the Baraque Michel, which is the highest mountain in Belgium, *viz.*, 2080 feet. The exact origin of the word Fagnes has not been ascertained, but it signifies an uncultivated elevated plateau, covered with heath and forest. The name without the adjective is applied to a district between the Sambre and Meuse near Chimay, but the Fagnes generally known as such is the plateau lying south-east of Liége. It forms the highest altitude between the basins of the Rhine, Moselle, and Meuse. This region is the home of legend and folk-lore. The people are intensely superstitious, and believe in "the little men" who rule in the woods during the night time, and who sometimes come into the villages and do the villagers' work for them. These genii are called *sottais*. There are numerous customs which show a remote origin. One is that of sending the children on the first Sunday in Lent to collect wood and brushwood

at all the houses for the purpose of lighting bonfires on the hills. Those who refuse become very unpopular, and are supposed to make themselves liable to attack the next day by the children who employ the burnt sticks for the purpose of blackening their faces. In the Vesdre valley it is the accepted popular opinion that the souls of the departed live in the trees, and on All-Souls-Day children are strictly forbidden to cut wood for fear of disturbing them. At Verviers itself the children go about swinging pots of live coals, and begging for centimes for the poor souls. The Walloon country is certainly the home of folk-lore, and volumes have been written on the subject.

In character, the pure Walloon is the finest and most distinctive type in Belgium. Leaving aside the degenerates of town life, he is a man of good height and fine physique. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see men of immense burliness, built like an ox, as the saying is, who seem a survival of the turbulent age of Charles the Bold, Louis XI., and the Wild Boar of the Ardennes, so admirably portrayed in Scott's *Quentin Durward*. The type is generally dark in both sexes, but it is entirely free from the swarthy element, due to the Spanish connexion, which is specially marked in Brabant and Luxemburg. It will be remembered by students of history that Liège quite escaped the troubles of the second half of the sixteenth century, and remained passive, but independent,

under its Prince - Bishops. Consequently, the Spaniards never had anything to do with Liége or its dependent districts. The Walloon is a man of very considerable energy, throws himself into whatever interests him with equal determination and animation, and although somewhat prejudiced against any outside interference or innovation, he has built up, by hard work and steady perseverance, a great local prosperity. Guicciardini, the Italian envoy, much of whose description of the Belgian races is true to-day, although he wrote in the sixteenth century, said of the people of Liége : "The citizens of Liége are industrious people, very ingenious, of much spirit, ready to undertake anything. The Walloons are undaunted by any kind of work, their ardour communicates itself also to their women, who share with them the rudest toil."

In old days the Walloons were noted for their turbulence and spirit of independence. In the Middle Ages, the Flemish weavers of Ghent were considered stiffnecked and quarrelsome, but the good people of Liége were always deemed able to go a little further in the way of combativeness than any other Belgians. It was Charles the Bold who first tamed their haughty spirit, or rather made them suffer for it. Perhaps in doing this he reduced his own power and resources, and paved the way for his own discomfiture at the hands of the Swiss. It is unnecessary to tell the story of his capture and punishment of the city, but his

subsequent expedition against Franchimont is less known, and will bear repeating. Franchimont is in the Hautes Fagnes, and lies a few miles north of Spa, on the road to Pepinster, the castle of Pepin as the local authorities say, but with doubtful truth. It possessed a strong castle, held by a marquis, who took his title from the place and who controlled the foresters and mountaineers of this region. When Charles the Bold and his hostage Louis XI. sat down before Liège, a summons for aid was sent to all the dependent towns, and among others to Franchimont. In its case the summons was readily responded to. The chief marched with his retainers and the foresters of the Hautes Fagnes to the rescue. The night surprise which so nearly succeeded, as told in the chronicle of Comines and in the pages of *Quentin Durward*, was the deed of the men of Franchimont. After the capture of Liège, Charles marched to Franchimont, destroyed the castle, and, having killed many of its inhabitants, returned with a considerable number of prisoners of both sexes, whom he summarily got rid of by throwing them off the Liège bridge into the Meuse.

Such was the end of Franchimont in history, but it lives in legend. Scott's lines, in *Marmion*, perpetuate the story:

Did'st e'er, dear Heber, pass along  
Beneath the towers of Franchémont,

Which like an eagle's nest in air  
Hang o'er the stream and hamlet fair?  
Deep in their vaults, the peasants say,  
A mighty treasure buried lay,  
Amass'd through rapine and through wrong  
By the last Lord of Franchémont.

The story goes that the devil in the guise of a huntsman keeps watch and ward over an iron chest buried below the castle. As excavations have been made and nothing found, the tradition has no longer even local value. The eminence on which the castle stood is of only slight elevation, standing above the streamlet called the Hoegne, which flows into the Vesdre, and of the ruins scarcely anything remains. The hundred years since Heber visited the place have wrought a great change, and the materials of the old castle have been freely used in the construction of the modern village of Theux.

The turbulence of the Walloons was well established, quite apart from the local history of Liége. The great district of Hesbaye—called in mediæval documents Hesbagne—separates the principality from Brabant. It was an early seat of Walloon colonisation, and Tongres was their capital before Liége came into existence. The Walloon chiefs, who had erected strongholds in this country, resented any intrusion into their territory, killing and plundering all travellers. Hence the saying became common: "Whoever enters the Hesbaye is fought on the morrow."

Travellers soon gave this district a wide berth, and having no one else to fight the Walloon chiefs began to fight with one another. In the thirteenth century the first of these wars between Walloon Capulets and Montagus broke out between the Awans and Waroux, and when that feud ceased to supply excitement through the deaths of all the principals, a fresh quarrel and cause of strife were provided by the Grignoux and the Chiroux. They were a brave, reckless people, whose legends would make a long story.

Perhaps the following incident gives as good a proof of their fearlessness as any other. The devil figures in most of their legends, and in this he took on himself the form of a pretty woman, whom one of the Hesbaye chiefs found weeping by a fountain. He took her home to his castle to supper. In the morning the devil revealed himself in his true form. The undaunted Walloon merely remarked "When you get back to hell tell them that you were never better entertained." The characteristics of the mediæval Walloons were preserved by their descendants in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, during which the Walloons fought well in the service of their foreign masters. It was at St. Quentin in 1557 that the Walloons first obtained the recognition of Europe as first-class fighters, and the reputation of their infantry as the most efficient and formidable force on the Continent remained undisputed for nearly a century. Condé's



victory at Rocroi in 1643 was the first defeat they had suffered, and, so far as courage went, they had rarely fought better. It is of this period that Schiller speaks in his *Wallenstein*, when he says of one of his characters, "Respect him, for he is a Walloon." But it is quite a mistake to assume, as some do, that the martial records of the Walloon race end with Rocroi. The Walloon contingent of the Imperial Army, after the Austrian rule was established in the Spanish Netherlands, was a *corps d'élite*. Belgian officers, and especially Walloons, rose to high command in the Imperial Army, from the time of Merode, in the war of the Spanish succession, to that of Clairfayt and Beaulieu, in the wars with the French Republic. When France succeeded Austria as the dominant power in the South Netherlands, the Walloon contingent was transferred to the former by one of the clauses of the Treaty of Luneville. The Belgians did not preserve all their distinctive regiments in the French service, but at least the La-tour Dragoons continued an old and honourable name. In the army of the Empire, Belgian troops had a good reputation, and General Thié-baut considered them better than French troops. After the fall of Napoleon in 1814, over two thousand Belgians who had received the Legion of Honour returned to their homes. In an earlier chapter the opinion has been expressed that the success of the Belgian rising in 1830 was mainly due to the courage and dash of the Liége

volunteers under Charles Rogier, in other words, to the co-operation of the Walloons. This active participation explains the selection of Liège as the scene of the great exhibition to be held in 1905, in honour of the seventy-fifty anniversary of the declaration of Belgian independence. Certainly so far as site is concerned no selection could have been better, and the broad and swift-flowing Meuse, as it sweeps round Mount Ste. Walburga, presents a panorama to which there are few equals in Europe. Great efforts are being made in order that the exhibition shall prove a success and worthy of the occasion, and thus with a mixture of pride and business capacity a national celebration will be made to serve a practical purpose in giving the already well-known productions of Liège factories a still wider reputation. Both the King of the Belgians and Prince Albert are taking a lively interest in the preparation of the exhibition.

If any one wants to get a favourable impression of the Belgian nation, it is to Liège that he should go as a place of residence, and from that city visit the towns and villages famous in the history of the Walloons. The facilities of intercommunication are great, the hotels are better, taken as a whole, than in any part of Belgium, the air is bracing and invigorating, the villages are clean, with a complete absence of the *fumières* that detract from the pleasantness of the Ardennes, and they contain a healthy and hospitable population.

The English tourist knows Liége and Spa, but beyond those places he is never seen in the true country of the Walloons.

Liége, the city founded by the Bishops of Tongres, who transferred their seat there in the tenth century, and of whom the most famous was Bishop Notger,—it was said of him that God made Notger, but Notger made Liége,—has already been treated of as a manufacturing centre. But, like Antwerp, it has another and quite a different rôle. Liége is a fortified position of the greatest importance, because it stands in the path of any army advancing from Germany. Until the year 1890 its defences were obsolete. They consisted merely of the Fort of La Chartreuse, on the right bank of the Meuse, and the citadel on the left crowning the lofty and imposing Mount Ste. Walburga. As a protection for the city of Liége, these forts were valueless, even before the great increase in the range of artillery. It was in 1888 that after long discussion the Belgian Chamber passed the necessary votes for the fortifications of the Meuse valley. These consisted of the defences of Namur and Liége by a circle of detached forts, so that not merely the towns themselves should be rendered safe against bombardment, but that the passage of the Meuse should be rendered impossible. Both systems are the same, and were carried out on the plans and under the personal direction of General Brialmont. The forts are *forts à coupole*, with guns that are raised and

lowered automatically. The cannon in them carry their shell for over ten miles. To each fort is attached a barrack, and the forts, where possible, are connected by a military road, and even in some instances by a tram-line. I say where possible, because the forts are on different sides of the river, and at Namur the Sambre intervenes in the system as well as the Meuse. Of the two positions Liège is infinitely the more important, although the theory upon which they were constructed was that Namur would close the Brussels road to the French, and Liège that from the German frontier. As Namur does not in any way command the Charleroi and Mons roads to Brussels, it follows that it does not fulfil the rôle assigned to it. It is merely the *tête de pont* at the important junction of the Sambre and Meuse. On the other hand, Liège does fulfil the rôle imagined for it, because it commands all the roads from Germany into Belgium. The successful defence of Liège would therefore keep Germany off Belgian territory in the event of war. Liège, as a strategical position, is indeed of the first importance, not merely for the defence of Belgium, but on the map of Western Europe having regard to its present political conformation. In fact it may be doubted if there is a more important fortified position in the part of Europe with which England might become concerned than Liège.

Under these circumstances a brief description of the system of defence at Liège will not be out of

place. The outlying forts are twelve in number, and stand upon a circumference measuring thirty-one miles, and the average distance between them is two and one-half miles. The intervening country is therefore fully commanded by rifle-fire from the adjacent forts. Six of the forts are on the right bank of the Meuse, and six are on the left. The former are the more important, or at least they would be exposed to the first attack. They are in their order from north to south—Barchon, Evegnée, Fléron, Chaudfontaine, Embourg, and Bonnelles. Of these the forts at Fléron and Chaudfontaine are the most exposed to attack, and would be the immediate object of any *coup de main* from the side of Germany, as they protect the main line of railway from Cologne. Their possession would open the door into Belgium, for the defence of the other forts of Liége would be then practically impossible. Remembering that future wars are likely to be of sudden commencement, and that the main object with the opposing commanders will be to snatch some material advantage within the first few hours after the signal is given, it becomes clear that only the inclusion of Belgium within the field of warlike operations is necessary to make the possession of Liége a vital point, on which the result of the first campaign might depend. The forts on the left bank of the river are, taking them in the same order as those named, but on the western curve—Pontisse, Liers, Lantin, Loncin, Hollogne, and Flemalle.



The last named is on the Meuse, some distance above Seraing. They complete the defences of Liége, but they would only be called into action in the event of a regular investment of the place. The value of all forts depends on the adequacy of the force defending them, and there is no doubt that the regular garrison of Liége is very small. At one time these new forts, which cost altogether, including armament (Namur and Liége), four millions of English money, were only tenanted by a sergeant and a corporal's guard. Of late years this has been increased to a company, but by an extraordinary oversight there was no officers' accommodation, and every evening the officers on guard went back to the regimental mess in Liége, slept in the town, and only returned the following morning. For the longer part of the twenty-four hours these forts then were left without an officer. In 1902, a new arrangement came into force by which one officer has to pass the night in each of the forts or casemates, as they are officially termed. It is curious that after sinking so much money in these defences the most elementary precautions are neglected in providing for their security.

Enough has been said to show the important part that Liége plays in the national defence of Belgium. It stands for the Walloon half of the country in precisely the same manner that Antwerp does for the Flemish, as the bulwark of its security and independence. It is liable to far the



greater danger of the two, because it is the sentinel on an exposed frontier. Moreover, Antwerp is a strictly defensive position, whereas the possessor of Liége will have in his hands the best possible base for offensive measures either eastwards or westwards.





## CHAPTER XIV

### AMUSEMENTS AND LEGENDS

SOME one has said that the Belgians work fifty-two weeks a year, including Sundays. An exception must be made, however, for fête days, when all work is discontinued. There is no compulsory religion by the Constitution, but the fête days are those of the Church—Easter with its Carnival, *Pentecôte* or Whitsuntide, and the Assumption in mid-August. Besides these there are the *Fêtes Nationales*, held by order of authority on the four days from 23rd to 26th July, and the King's fête has been incorporated with them. Whitsuntide and the Assumption are really holidays of one day each, and as they occur during the summer they are observed by all who can afford the expense by making excursions to some favoured spot on the Meuse, in the Ardennes, or elsewhere. As travelling is cheap, and as clubs are formed to share the expenses in common, a clerk or an artisan from Antwerp or Liège can visit the Han grottoes, La Roche, or the Castle of Bouillon for a comparatively small number of francs. Special trains commence running at an

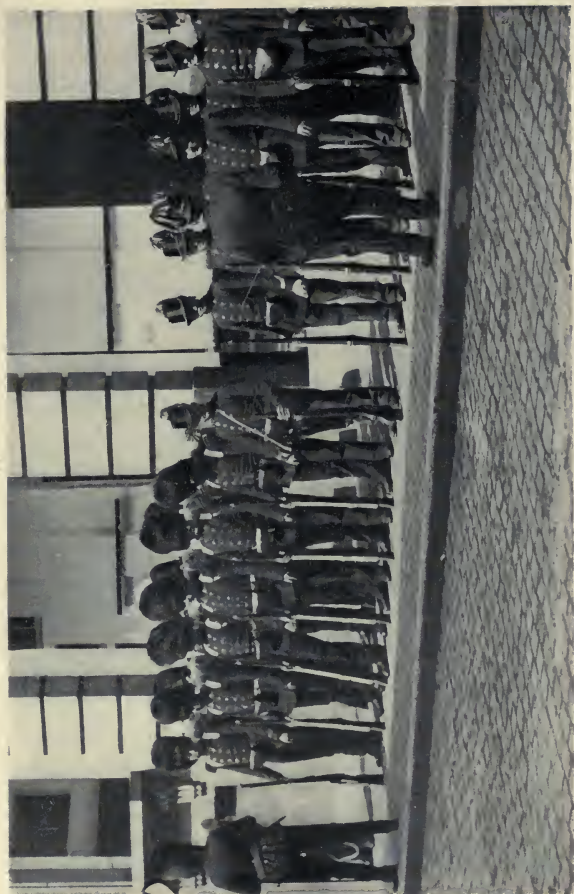
early hour in the morning, and continue bearing their human freights to and fro across the little kingdom until long past nightfall. The trains are packed to repletion, and the holiday-makers are exceedingly boisterous. It is an occasion on which timid persons and foreign visitors should stay at home.

The other holidays are more especially fête days, in the sense that they are celebrated locally, and each city and even commune has its own special and typical display. Those of Lent, distributed at intervals of a fortnight between the Little Carnival, Mi-Carême, and Grand Carnival, are very much of the same character throughout the country. In Brussels the Carnival enjoys a special vogue, on account of its being the capital and a pleasure-loving city. Dances are given in every petty casino or dancing-hall, while at the Opera House a grand masked ball is provided for those who can purchase the ten-franc tickets. The upper boulevards are crowded with domino-wearers, the pleasant avenues are covered with a shower of pink and green confetti, but it is in the lower town that the battle of the Carnival is waged with the greatest animation and vigour. A procession of carriages following a prescribed route is held during the day, passing through the Place de la Monnaie, which is supposed to be the place of inspection. Those who take part in it are masked for their own protection against the fusillade of confetti encountered along the route, and

especially at the points of blockage which frequently occur. In the evening the rougher element gains the ascendant, especially in the covered galleries, and it is not always harmless confetti alone that is thrown. The police have introduced some regulations with the object of controlling the disorder and of preventing the crushes, in which people have lost their lives or met with serious injury, but they have not been very successful.

The Carnival is, of course, general throughout Belgium, but perhaps it is more animated in the Walloon provinces than in Flanders. The prettiest celebration of all used to take place at Spa in the lifetime of the late Queen of the Belgians, and a small section of Belgian society endeavoured to emulate there the gaiety of the Riviera. The "battle of the flowers" round the Pouhon used to be an extremely pretty sight, but now that the patronage of the late Queen exists no longer, it is to be feared that at least the Carnival attractions of Spa will become a thing of the past.

The *Fêtes Nationales* are made the occasion of much jubilation. They signalise the stirring events of September, 1830, when the people of Brussels rose against the Dutch. One of the most touching scenes is the procession to the Place des Martyrs of the few survivors of the Belgian Volunteers, who took part in the rising, where they lay wreaths on the monument to their gallant comrades. The Burgomaster appears in state with the sheriffs, and the Veterans, as they are



GRENADIERS





rightly termed, are entertained at a *déjeuner*. Another of the days is marked by a military review or march of the garrison past the Royal Palace. It is a fair occasion to inspect Belgian troops, and if allowance be made for the nature of the road, a paved *chaussée*, with many inequalities, which would throw any troops out of line, the inspection will not give rise to unfavourable comment. The horses of the Guides are excellent for light cavalry, although they may seem a little pampered, and not hard enough in condition for real active work. The Grenadiers are big fellows, but the little Carabiniers, who in stature might be compared to the Goorkhas, march best of all the infantry. The fêtes are generally brought to a conclusion by a *marche des flambeaux* round the Boulevards at night, and sometimes there are fireworks on the island called Robinson Crusoe, in the Bois.

During the summer the principal communes, which make up the city of Brussels and its suburbs, hold their *kermesses*. The *kermesse* in Brussels is now little more than a country fair is in England. There are merry-go-rounds, shooting-galleries, swings, a small menagerie, perhaps, and a theatrical troupe. The music is generally supplied by the band of the commune, but the most noise comes from the mechanical barrel organs, which are almost incessantly at work. The old allegorical representations, however, which used to form the main feature of the *kermesse* are now

rare or wholly absent. During the *kermesse* of Brussels itself, the effigies of the Mannekin, and of some of the heroes of Brabant history, are carried through the main streets of the lower town. Everard T'serclaes, who recaptured Brussels from the Flemings in the fourteenth century, is perhaps the popular hero in these processions, and his representative comes in for a big ovation. The *kermesse* itself is held in the Boulevard de Jamar, close to the southern station. Of the other *kermesses* held in the suburbs nothing in particular need be said. Each town has its own particular fête, and no useful purpose would be served by attempting to give a catalogue of them. It is better to select a few which will convey an idea of the survival of mediæval traditions in a country that seems in many respects given up to the material concerns of modern life. At Mons the annual fête occurs on Trinity Sunday, and is called the parade of Lumeçon, which is the Walloon for *limaçon*, a snail. The allegory represented is none other than the legend preserved in so many varying forms throughout Christendom of St. George and the Dragon. At Mons the hero is called Gilles de Chin, and the dragon is represented as some indescribable monster, which kept a princess a prisoner in the forest near the town. The dragon is duly killed on the pretty Grand' Place below the old citadel. The great curiosity formerly displayed on this occasion, but now shown only in a wooden facsimile, was the Mons

cannon, which is alleged to have been used at Crécy, where a contingent from Mons fought on the side of the English—the Queen of Edward III. being Philippa, Countess of Hainaut. At Hasselt, the capital of Limburg, situated at the opposite extremity of Belgium to Mons, the local fête is held on the day of the Assumption, August 15th. This is the celebration of Virga Jesse, the patron of Hasselt. Hasselt, situated in the midst of a forest of nut trees in olden days, derives its name from hazelbosch, *i.e.*, hazel-wood. Several routes met at Hasselt, and many travellers passed by it. An image of the Virgin Mary was attached to a large tree near the present town, and travellers deposited offerings there to secure good luck on their journey. In course of time a town grew up round the shrine, and the inhabitants handed down the legend of Virga Jesse. In the fourteenth century it became a place of pilgrimage, and a chapel having been built for the purpose, the statue was deposited therein, and on Assumption Day it was carried in procession through the street. In the eighteenth century the ceremony was altered from an annual affair to one of every seven years. The statue is supposed to be very old, and shows the blackness of age. A handsome crown, with stones presented by one of the Popes, and estimated to have cost £300, is placed on the Virgin's head for the procession; and among the possessions of the shrine is a fine velvet mantle, also covered with jewels, and thrown over the statue for the procession.

Not all the ceremonies of the *fête* partake of a religious character. There are reminiscences of the time when the people of the Hazel Wood were heathens, and the distinctive feature of the *fête* is not the bedecked statue, but the streets and lanes bordered with fir trees, which temporarily convert Hasselt into its original forest. For weeks and even months before, all the women and children of the place are engaged in collecting the required wood from the forest, so that the smallest house may have its fir tree planted in front of it. Triumphal arches are erected at fixed points, and at each of these a halt is made by the procession, so that a scene in the legendary history of Hasselt may be enacted. Hendrich, the first inhabitant of the place, is represented living his primitive life in his hut, with his wife, his goats, and his pigs. His representative is allowed to smoke his pipe, as the good people of Hasselt cannot imagine a state of happiness without one.

Another scene is that of the knight who loses his way in the forest, to whom the Virgin makes a miraculous appearance, and leads him to the hut of Hendrich. There are many other scenes, but none rouses the same excitement as the effigy of the giant, who once held the whole forest in terror. He is represented as an enormous figure covered with armour and seated on the trunk of a tree, the whole drawn through the streets on a triumphal car. He is called the "Lounge Man," or the Big Man, and when he comes out in the

procession the excitement is even greater than on the appearance of the statue with the supposed miraculous properties. By a curious arrangement, the statue contains a reservoir of thick pea-soup, which is distributed gratuitously to all comers. At the last celebration, in 1898, there were thirty thousand visitors, many coming from Holland and Germany to see it, and there is no reason to believe that the next septennary will show any decline in popularity.

Many of the popular processions partake of the character of pilgrimages, such as the anniversary at Notre Dame de Montaigu. This shrine was founded by the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabella at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it was under the patronage of the late Queen of the Belgians, who used to drive herself from Laeken in order to be present on the occasion. The procession from Rochefort to Foy Notre Dame, not far from Dinant, possesses a great attraction for the people of the locality, and every seven years there is a regular march of a large part of the population, in addition to the annual pilgrimage. The story goes that Foy Notre Dame got its reputation, during a severe outbreak of plague in the sixteenth century, for the remarkable cures effected in the cases of those who paid it a pilgrimage. The interest to-day lies in the revival of the procession which a Count of Rochefort organised during a time of great trouble from the prevalence of the plague. The men who take



part in it are drilled for weeks beforehand by an ex-soldier, and all the farmers combine to form a cavalcade, in which the chief figure is the Count of Rochefort. The old and the children follow in carts and vehicles of all kinds. A start is made at daybreak on Whit-Monday, and it is late in the evening when they get back. On entering the town they are received with a salute from an old cannon borrowed for the occasion. The last procession was in 1899, and the next will be in 1906. The pilgrimage to St. Hubert is more of a religious undertaking than the semi-popular, semi-religious festivities which have been described. In the first place, a considerable number of the participants are the sick and suffering, and the special disease for which a visit to the shrine of St. Hubert is supposed to be efficacious is the terrible one of hydrophobia. Under such circumstances the ideas of amusement and jocularities that are so natural to the Belgian mind in other revivals become repugnant and impossible. The legend of St. Hubert, the patron saint of hunters, is one of the best known. The place where the disbelieving officer of the Emperor Charlemagne met the stag with the shining cross between its antlers, is marked by a chapel in the forest still called *La Converserie*, or the place of conversion. He gave his name to the forest as well as to the town, and his tomb is still shown in the crypt of the church, which has been rebuilt several times over it. The existing church was purchased



for £1500 by the Bishop of Namur, during the French Revolution, and thus saved from destruction when the lands dependent on the Abbey were sold by auction, and fetched £80,000. It is said that as many as thirty thousand pilgrims proceed every year to St. Hubert on the Saint's anniversary.

Among popular legends none has been better preserved than the story of the Four Sons of Aymon, and their wonderful horse Bayard. The legend relates to the time of Charlemagne, the great Emperor of Western Europe, who had much difficulty in keeping his turbulent vassals in order. Among these the most troublesome were Duke Aymon and his four sons, Renault, Allard, Guichard, and Richard, all men of enormous stature and strength, Renault, the biggest, being not less than sixteen feet in height, according to the story. Aymon had also a brother named Buves, of Aigremont. Aigremont lies not far from Huy, and still boasts of a fine castle belonging to Count d' Oultremont, and it was once the seat of power of the Wild Boar of the Ardennes. Buves refused to take part in Charlemagne's expedition against the Saracens, and when the Emperor sent one of his sons to remonstrate with him, Buves murdered him. The Emperor came with a large force to punish him, and Buves was killed in battle. Then the four sons of Aymon swore vengeance and fled to the Ardennes, where they built the castle of Montfort stronger than

Aigremont had been, and the ruins of which may still be seen on the Ourthe. They surrounded it with three walls, and defied the Emperor. Renault fought on horseback, and his cousin Mangis, son of Buves, gave him the magic horse Bayard, which could run as fast as the wind, and never grow tired. For seven years the sons of Aymon held their own, but at last the Emperor came with a mighty force, and captured the castle by force or fraud. Among his retinue was Duke Aymon himself, whom he obliged to follow him, and may have employed to deceive his sons. Be that as it may, the Castle of Montfort was taken and destroyed, and the four sons of Aymon barely made their escape by mounting all together on the horse Bayard. They are next heard of in Gascony, where they drove out the Saracens. The King of Gascony, named Yon, was not grateful, and gave them up to Charlemagne, but they fought their way through his forces. Their end is shrouded in mystery. Of Renault it is said that he became a monk at Cologne, and also that while directing some masons in their work he was ignominiously thrown by them into the Rhine and drowned. He was subsequently canonised, and there is a fine monument to him at Dortmund, in Westphalia.

There are more details in the chronicles as to the fate of the horse Bayard. It was at last captured by some of the men of Charlemagne, and brought before the Emperor, who addressed it as

follows: "You have often upset my plans, and now you are in my power you shall upset them no more." He then gave orders to tie a heavy stone round the horse's neck, and to throw it into the Meuse, which was done. But Bayard shook off the stone and swam to the other bank of the river, and, giving three neighs of triumph, disappeared into the forest. The legend goes on to declare that the horse was really immortal, and that he may still be coursing through the Ardennes, although he carefully avoids the sight of man. The legend of the sons of Aymon and the horse Bayard is to Belgian children what that of King Arthur is to English children, but it is only at Termonde that there is a representation annually on the Grand' Place of some of the incidents in their career.

In Hainaut there is a curious survival of the Middle Ages in the number of archery clubs that exist, and in the popularity of the exercise. The archers take the pursuit quite seriously. They may be seen in considerable numbers on Sundays at all the stations between Tournai and Mons, proceeding to the butts of their special society. The bow used is really a long-bow such as was used at Crécy, and is carefully kept in an oil-skin or leather case to prevent the string from getting damp. A quiver containing the arrows is carried at the side or over the back. For festive or ceremonious occasions there is a showy uniform, of green or other coloured jerkin, a bonnet of the

same colour, with a feather, and leather trousers, tight fitting below the knee, with buskins. The archers of Hainaut enjoy the patronage of the authorities, and possess privileges that have a very remote origin. The services they used to render in return are no longer of any practical value, and they represent a mere tradition.

Of late years a considerable change has been passing over the school-life of Belgium, at least among the well-to-do classes. More attention is paid to outdoor games and sports than formerly. Cricket has not become as popular as football and hockey, for the reason that the cricket-field attached to the school does not exist, while football has to be played on the asphalt or stone yard. Some of the football teams from Ghent, Brussels, and Antwerp are quite efficient. There are rowing clubs at Brussels, Ghent, and Antwerp, and a Ghent crew has figured twice at Henley, and its admirers hope yet that it will carry off the honours. Golf has been taken up by the smart set, and the wild heaths of the Campine and the dunes behind Ostend are admirably adapted for links. To the public mind in Belgium, however, golf is still an exclusively English amusement, and a few years ago nobody would have assumed that a Belgian could play it, at least in Belgium. The following little adventure happened to a party of Belgian gentlemen who had formed a golf club not far from Antwerp. It was in the year 1900, when the anti-English feeling on account of the

Boer War was at its height, that these gentlemen, attired in the regulation costume of knickerbockers, etc., were returning from their game, when some Flemish boys began shouting, *À bas les Anglais*, or rather its equivalent in Flemish. The boys were joined by others and soon there was a small crowd. Finding the matter going too far to be pleasant, the Belgian golf enthusiasts turned round and delivered their pursuers an edifying lecture in the best Flemish dialect. Whether anything was said reproving them for their outbreak against the English I know not, but at least they were informed in unmistakable terms that some of their fellow-countrymen wore knickerbockers and played golf.

The games of the people are few and simple. In a considerable number of the *estaminets* a notice appears that there is a billiard table. This will be found to be a miniature concern, and, of course, without pockets, for the French game. Still more frequently the notice will have the attractive word *Quilles*, and a skittle-alley will be found in the back garden, or more generally in a passage at the side of the house. If there is a really national game in Belgium it is skittles. What skittles is for indoors, the *jeu de bal* is for out-of-doors. This is played in all the towns in the open squares, and even in the streets. It consists in hitting a tennis-ball from one player to the other with the hand, or more often with a wooden instrument, half bat half glove, that fits on the hand. This



bat is called *gant*, or glove. The communes institute competitions on fête days, and give prizes to the most skilful player. In the cafés the men play dominoes, more rarely backgammon or bac, and still more rarely chess. Greater pleasure is probably derived from gossip, while they sit at their ease in the cafés sipping their *pecqué* or gin. On a fête day a very large number of the holiday-makers will spend the whole day passing from one cabaret to another, restricting their visits to those kept by their friends and perhaps by their relations. It would be difficult to compute how many glasses they imbibe on these occasions, especially as in some parts of the country there is a half measure of *pecqué* retailed for a halfpenny.

Music perhaps affords the greatest amount of pleasure to the Belgian mind, and the bands of comparatively small places attain a very considerable degree of proficiency. During the summer they perform several evenings a week; but perhaps they are heard to the greatest advantage when they turn out to attend the funeral of some respected resident in the commune. A funeral is the spectacle that gives the foreigner the most favourable impression of the Belgian people. As the procession moves to the church the band leads the way, giving forth probably Chopin's *Marche Funèbre*. When the music stops, the priest, who follows, escorted by at least two acolytes bearing the holy ensign, intones the prayers for the dead, then come the family mourners, the females veiled



so as to be invisible, and finally the crowd of friends, acquaintances, and even personal strangers, practically the whole male population of the commune or townlet which can possibly be present. When the funeral is that of a young female, girls and children, probably her playmates, attend as an escort to the coffin, which is always borne to the church on men's shoulders. It is a very affecting sight, and reveals true kindness of heart and sense of fellow-feeling. The Belgian's respect towards the dead is one of his most cherished traditions. Let not the tourist refrain from paying his tribute, too, by uncovering as the coffin and chief mourners go by.





## CHAPTER XV

### LITERATURE AND SCIENCE

IN the chapter relating to the development of Flemish political influence, it was shown how the movement was preceded by an epoch of remarkable literary activity. The names of Conscience and Ledeganck are the greatest in the Belgian literature of the nineteenth century; but towards the dawn of the twentieth there appeared two new literary leaders, Maeterlinck and Verhaeren, whose intellect belongs rather to the new century than to the old. It is not a little curious that it should have been reserved for Flemish writers to show that there existed in the French language a rugged force and a capacity for expressing popular emotions in popular language that had not previously been discovered. The *Douze Chansons* of the former and the *Jan Snuil* of the latter writer were revelations of linguistic power and originality. To these names must be added that of Camille Lemonnier, who stands for the Walloon world as the two others do for the Flemish. His remarkable work, *Le Mâle*, has recently been crowned as a *chef d'œuvre* by French

Societies not over lavish in distributing their laurels abroad.

It is as well for the reputation of modern Belgium that there has been this manifestation of literary genius by some of its citizens, for otherwise it might be declared that the whole nation was absorbed in the pursuit of material prosperity, and had lost the secret of intellectual vigour and the desire for it. To tell the truth, literature in Belgium has few rewards. It brings neither great fortune nor great fame unless the individual's reputation spreads beyond the narrow limits of the kingdom and becomes European. The Flemings, as a race, are proud of their writers, but now that they have taken to writing French, which is only understood by one-tenth of the race, their popularity can never equal that of the author of the *Leuw van Vlaanderen*. At the same time there has never been any lack of literary activity in Belgium. The number of painstaking searchers into the voluminous and intricate historical records of the country has been beyond easy computation. Their names are to be found, not merely on the title-pages of separate works, but as contributors to the long series of volumes issued by historical and literary societies, many of which enjoyed only a brief and obscure existence. The researches of Gachard, Kervyn van Lettenhove, and others have produced results which have led to a reconstruction of history. One instance may be referred to. Every English reader knows

Motley's picturesque and belief-compelling portrait of Cardinal Granvelle. Yet new facts and documents have been discovered which in skilful hands might provide the material for showing that after all he was only a reasonable and moderate statesman.

The Flemish records at Ghent have not been more carefully compiled and annotated than those of Liège, and the only difference between them is that whereas the former dovetail into, and to a great degree actually constitute, the national history, the latter possess a purely local importance, and seem to lie outside the main course of Belgian history. To the generation of record-hunters and record-preservers succeeded another of historians, who utilised the materials garnered by their industry. Even when the cares of office were on him, M. Nothomb was still more distinguished as a man of letters than as a statesman. In diligence and industry it would be difficult to surpass M. Théodore Juste, who produced a score of volumes upon passages in the history of his country, as well as one solid work treating it as a whole from the time of Cæsar. In popularity M. Namèche has displaced M. Juste, and his *General History* has been adopted for the schools. Within the last few years M. Pirenne has been engaged upon a history that is full of promise, but up to the present he has only reached the Burgundian period. Among philosophical works the maxims of the late M. Émile Banning, a public servant of ap-

proved merit, would take a high place in any literature, while General Brialmont, his friend and fellow-worker, who died recently, has enriched military bibliography with many works, of which a life of Wellington is perhaps the most remarkable.

There has, therefore, been no lack of writers in Belgium since it became independent, and a list of Belgian authors and their works would fill a good-sized volume. But none the less literature does not take the high place in the social life and public estimation of the country to which it is entitled. If this is true of serious literature, it is still more true of journalism, although journalists in Belgium cannot complain, as serious writers do, that they lack an audience. The Belgians do not read much, but they read newspapers, and as the journals are of limited size they read several of them in a day. The main defect of journalism in Belgium is that it writes to please the passions rather than to increase the intelligence and educate the opinions of its readers. It fixes upon some subject that happens to be prominent—recent instances are the Dreyfus case and the Boer War—and all its comments are subordinated to the attempt to foment the passions and prejudices of its readers. Every bit of news, true or false, is turned to the purpose of demonstrating that the people or cause which has had the misfortune to incur the displeasure of Belgian journalism is wholly in the wrong or completely unworthy.

During the South African War many instances of this character occurred. One may be given. A London telegram was published stating that the Argentina revenue showed a deficit, but the sub-editor altered it by accident or design to an English deficit, and the worthy editor, full of mistaken zeal, at once dashed off a leader full of confident assertion that proud Albion stood on the verge of ruin. The incident is typical of the manner in which writers in the Belgian Press are carried away by their preconceptions until they persuade themselves that the only Temple of Truth in Europe is to be found in the Rue des Sables, the Brussels Fleet Street.

There are many political writers who produce from time to time pamphlets or treatises dealing with the questions of the hour, and this form of literature is by no means unpopular or unremunerative. While English publishers look askance at pamphlets, their colleagues in Belgium are favourably disposed to them. In the first place, the Belgian reader does not care for too solid fare. If it is to appeal to him it must be light, compact, and, above all things, cheap. In the second place, the amount risked by the publisher or the author is proportionally small, and this pleases his caution. The number of readers who will pay a franc for a small treatise is large even in Belgium, and the probable sale may be safely estimated by a knowledge of how far the views contained in the work are in accord with the



wishes and prejudices of one or other of the two political parties.

Brussels has always been a favourite home of the pamphleteer. In the time of the Austrian rule there was quite a deluge of pamphlets as the precursor of the Walloon revolt, and Count Kaunitz, the Austrian statesman, endeavoured, but in vain, to crush the movement by summary measures. The period of 1814-15, before the formation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, was also one of great activity in pamphleteering, and at that time the cry was even raised for a republic, under the style of the United States of Belgium. The rising of 1830 was preceded by a campaign of ephemeral literature now completely forgotten, but which gave the keynote to the movement. So at the present time pamphlets frequently appear on the question of universal suffrage, the condition of national defence, including the privilege of pre-emption, and the Congo colony.

Besides the pamphleteer there is an instructor of the public called a *conférencier*, of whom the English do not possess an exact counterpart, for the title of lecturer does not convey the same idea. English men of science and letters give lectures, but that is only done as a mode of drawing attention to what they have discovered or intend to describe in a book. On the other hand, the lecturer, as known in the United States, where lecturing has enjoyed a great vogue, does not give a fair idea of the Belgian *conférencier*, who is always a man

of exceptional academic and literary distinction. Perhaps the most correct description of this personage is to say that he resembles a University lecturer, who, in place of confining himself to his class or his college, will come into the drawing-room and address a select audience on some serious and talked-of question which he has carefully studied and considered from different points of view. The great merit of a *conférencier* is to be brief. He has to enunciate all the principles underlying the subject in a succession of apothegms, and, above all, he must not exceed twenty minutes in discharging his task. The most successful *conférencier* of his day was M. Nys, whose lecture on "The Neutrality of Belgium" is quite a *tour de force*, and whose talent has been rewarded with a Judgeship in the Court of Appeal.

Enough has been said, perhaps, to show that there is no inconsiderable amount of literary life in Belgium, notwithstanding that the public is engrossed in material pursuits, and that the opinion in general is in favour of earning money instead of fame. Up to the present, however, the display of true literary genius has been restricted to the Flemish race; but the old exclusive partiality for their own tongue is not retained by the writers of to-day, who are employing French as the means perhaps of achieving a wider distinction. Thus it almost naturally happens that the distinguished writers Maeterlinck and Verhaeren have taken up their residence in Paris. In the

sphere of politics the pen is mightier than the sword, and the combats of parties in the Chamber of Deputies are preceded and accompanied by the appearance of *brochures*, which place the issues before the country as they are regarded by Catholics, Liberals, or Socialists.

The literary club does not exist as the English understand it. There is a *Cercle Artistique et Littéraire*, very exclusive, in which the literary man is conspicuous by his absence. There is a circle of journalists, which is a society rather than a club, and which is at the other end of the social ladder. Halfway between the two is the *Cercle Africain*, a club primarily devoted, as its name implies, to those interested in the Congo, but which is, to a great extent, a literary institution. It occupies a picturesque old building known as the Hotel Ravenstein, which stands on the brow of the hill formerly crowned by the palace of the Caudenberg. The gentlemen who contribute to the *Congo Belge*, and the *Congo Illustré*, as well as to the better known *Mouvement Géographique*, make it their headquarters, and lectures are periodically given there by officers returned from Central Africa.

The artistic world of Brussels and Antwerp is somewhat more prominent than that of letters. The people have a genuine passion for music, and consequently those who excel in it have the assurance that they have only to possess some merit to achieve a certain popularity. There is a further

inducement to take up the study of music because the course at the Brussels *Conservatoire* is free to all Belgians, and there are prizes of different kinds for those who display exceptional merit in either composition or execution. Moreover, the *Conservatoire* is the recruiting-ground for the bands and orchestras of the country, so that the humblest student may imagine that he is qualifying for a career in life. The *Conservatoire* has undoubtedly produced some remarkable musicians, of whom at the present day M. Ysaye is the best known.

The arts of painting and sculpture are recovering something of their lost pre-eminence and popularity in the Netherlands. The historical school, founded by Gallait and Wauters with the dawn of independence, still flourishes. The young school of Belgian painters are brilliant colourists, but when they achieve any distinction they flit to Paris, and their reputation becomes French. The most brilliant of all Belgian painters is Alma Tadema, for, although Dutch by birth, he was educated and trained in the Antwerp school; and Sir Laurence, like his great predecessor Sir Antonio Van Dyke, has done his best work in England. The prizes of supreme success and merit are too few to detain the greater class of artist at home. Belgium has also produced a long array of meritorious sculptors. The equestrian statue of Godfrey of Bouillon, in the centre of the Place Royale, is one of the grandest works of its kind, and will perpetuate the name of

Eugène Simonis. The statues of Rubens and Van Dyke at Antwerp are scarcely less worthy of praise and reflect credit on the brothers Geefs. Antwerp is specially rich in statues produced by the modern school, and William Geefs, the better known of the two brothers, is represented in Brussels by the figure of the first Leopold that crowns the Column of the Congress. Much of the talent of the sculptor has been devoted to the embellishment and restoration of the old churches and town halls of the country. Many of these possessed niches which were supposed to or did hold statues, and many modern sculptors have been engaged in restoring or completing them during the last thirty or forty years. The Counts' Chapel at Courtrai is a striking instance in point, and similar work has been done outside the Town Hall of Ghent. There is one sculptor of great promise whose name may be mentioned, because he is half English, the Count James de Lalaing, a member of the famous family of Hainaut.

Among Belgian architects of the last century, Guimard, who built the Palais de la Nation, and Poelaert, the designer and constructor of the grandiose Palais de Justice at Brussels, are the best known and need alone be mentioned. The Palais de Justice, which covers more ground than St. Peter's at Rome, occupies a site on the southern extremity of the hill on which stands the upper town. The site has been happily chosen,



for it dominates the valley that separates the two lines of hills, and the massive pile is seen to the fullest advantage. Poelaert sought his inspiration in the Eastern World. The Hall of Karnak and the palaces of the Assyrian kings served him as a model, but the dome is that of St. Peter's. Nearly twenty years were occupied in erecting the building, and about £1,200,000 was spent on it, at which some Belgians occasionally make a wry face to-day as so much money wasted. On the other hand, the Belgians should feel some satisfaction in knowing that if it had been constructed by any of their neighbours it would have cost twice as much. There is no lack of patriotism in wishing that the London Law Courts and the Brussels Palais de Justice could change places.

The profession of architecture is one of the most successful and best remunerated in the country. This arises from two causes, the necessity of providing new residential quarters for the increasing population, growing visibly in wealth as in numbers, and the embellishment of the principal towns, either by the restoration of old monuments, or by the construction of new buildings adapted to the requirements of modern days. King Leopold II. is taking the lead in inaugurating a regular plan for the improvement of Brussels in an æsthetic and architectural sense, which will make it worthy of its picturesque site. Not merely are new palaces and stations in course of construction, but the streets and squares in the



new quarters are being laid out on a definite plan, and in a style that has been previously approved of by the authorities. Architects are thus having a busy and profitable time of it. Among their greater undertakings of lasting importance may be mentioned the buildings in connection with the new docks and quays destined to make Brussels a seaport.

In science, especially in engineering, Belgians have taken a high place. The courses at several of their Universities are specially framed to give every one a chance of pursuing that career with credit and success if he chooses. As mineralogists, surveyors, and geologists, they have every opportunity of doing good and useful work in a country whose prosperity depends on the development of its resources on the surface of the earth and beneath it. Belgium is so thickly populated, and the population continues to increase at such a rapid rate, that the greatest anxiety is felt by thoughtful Belgians lest the plethora of inhabitants should suddenly produce a decline in the national wealth and prosperity because shared by too many persons. Science, represented by engineering in the first place, is one of the chief agencies to which the authorities look for averting a national peril that might entail a national collapse. Hence the public rejoicing when it became known that the Campine, which was, practically speaking, unproductive, contained in its bosom coal deposits that may rival and must materially

supplement those of Hainaut. A careful examination of this extensive coalfield, on which fifty shafts have already been sunk, some to a depth of two thousand feet, has shown that the anticipations as to its wealth have been in no way exaggerated. The deposits reveal good steam coal as well as anthracite. Belgian engineers are especially good in the construction of railways. They display marked ingenuity in turning or evading great natural difficulties, and they work with a closer eye to economy than many of their competitors. This is especially true of light railways, which are made on a narrow margin of profit at which English plutocratic contractors would scoff.

Finally, medical science has been highly developed in Brussels. The courses at the two great hospitals, St. Jean at one end of the town and St. Pierre at the other, are largely attended by those who have taken the necessary diplomas in the Universities, as well as by foreigners. The medical degree of Brussels used to be much coveted. Any foreigner who wishes to practise in the country must possess it, but it is usually conferred honorarily on any medical man who possesses equivalent degrees in another country. Belgian doctors have the reputation of being specially clever in cases of fever and cholera. The terrible epidemic of the latter in 1866-67 gave them many opportunities of studying the disease that did not fall to the medical practitioner in England. That epidemic was also the cause of a generally im-

proved system of sanitation in the chief cities. Ghent was in a special degree purified, from the hygienic point of view. Brussels, at least the upper town, has been carefully drained. There is not a more sanitary city in Europe, and the supply of water, now that the waters of the Bocq, a tributary of the Meuse, have been added to those of the old springs in the forest of Soignies, is excellent and abundant. Science in Belgium is well represented by these improvements, for it takes a practical utilitarian form, which thoroughly appeals to the genius of the nation.

Enough has been said to show that the intellectual life of the country is not dead. In the arts and the sciences the activity is by no means inconsiderable, and this is the more remarkable because the remuneration is small and the prizes are few. It is true that most people in Belgium work for small salaries which to Englishmen of the same grade seem a mere pittance, but the recompenses of any intellectual pursuit are in a still more striking degree inadequate. I have reason to say that there is not an artist, musician, or author who by his earnings in Belgium and from Belgians makes £500 a year, and that the successful journalist is very fortunate if he can make as much as £300. These earnings seem very small, but they are not out of proportion with those of Ministers of State at £800, and Judges at a trifle more. There is, however, another hardship that literary men have to endure, and that is the want

of social recognition and status. I have heard rich merchants scoff when the name of some clever writer among their own fellow-countrymen was named. It is well for a literary man in Belgium to have some definite place in society on his own account, or by reason of his family, or, failing these, to be at least a functionary. Otherwise he will fare badly. The artist, whether musician or painter, has a better chance. For him there is always an entrance to Bohemia, and, if he cannot discover that country in Brussels, Paris is not far off, and there are over a million of his countrymen resident in the French Republic.





## CHAPTER XVI

### IN LEAFY ARDEN

THE greater part of Belgium might be fitly compared to a factory district in one half, or a market-garden in the other. The smoke-laden country of Charleroi and the Borinage, of Liége and Seraing, presents as little that may be termed attractive as the flat and heavily manured vegetable fields of Flanders. But there is one splendid exception in the region commonly called the Ardennes, which includes the province of Luxemburg and portions of the provinces of Namur and Liége. Here Belgium possesses a playground and a health resort which in its way will bear comparison with anything in Europe. The light railways have made the greater part of the Ardennes easily accessible; but there are still bits left here and there of the virgin forest, which may have given shelter to the Belgian tribes in the time of Cæsar. For the Belgians, outside of this recognised holiday resort, business, and not pleasure, is the order of the day; but here, amid the pure charms of the country, they seek and find the change and recreation that enable them

to endure the atmosphere of the cities or manufacturing districts during the greater part of the year. With the Belgians, a change to the mountain air of the Ardennes at some period of the year is almost as much a matter of course as the seaside trip in July, August, and September, and on fête days, even in the winter, thousands of members of clubs and societies from all the large towns swarm into this region to visit some of the local curiosities, such as the Han grottoes, or merely to breathe "the grand air of the country" (*le grand air de la campagne*).

The region is bounded on two sides—the north and the west—by the river Meuse. On the east it is flanked by that part of Rhenish Prussia which is known as the Volcanic Eifel, and on the south there is France for the chief part, and the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg for a shorter distance. As the part of France touched is also a portion of the ancient Ardennes, the scenery remains unchanged for a certain distance from the frontier, and this is especially the case in the woods extending north of Sedan to Bouillon on one side, and Florenville on the other. Here a few yards into the brushwood, flanking the Belgian road, takes one on to French territory. The elevation varies between four hundred feet and two thousand feet at the Baraque de Fraiture, which is the second highest point in the country. Two principal lines of railway pass through it from north to south. First there is the main line



from Brussels to Switzerland, passing by Namur, Jemelle, Libramont, and Arlon, which are all convenient halting-places, or junctions, for different parts of the Ardennes. Farther east there is the main line from Pepinster for Verviers to the Grand Duchy. Between the two are connecting lines from Liége to Huy and Ciney, from Liége to Jemelle, and from Gouvy to Libramont. On the western side, Jemelle and Rochefort are connected by an excellent light railway with Dinant on the Meuse, which is itself in communication with Namur by a line of railway that connects farther south with the French system at Givet. In the summer there is also an excellent steamboat service on the Meuse between Namur and Dinant. The best bits of Meuse scenery occur in this strip and for a short distance above Dinant, the steamers proceeding as high up as Hastière. Another light railway branches off in a southerly direction at Houyet, and forms a loop round the southern frontier, which it does not approach nearer than from five miles at Florenville to twenty at Bertrix. A steam-tram connects Paliseul, one of the stations on this line, with Bouillon, and another is in course of construction from Bertrix to Herbeumont, which may be continued into France, linking on with the French system near Messempré. These lines will render more accessible the beautiful Semois valley, to which reference will be made hereafter.

In the centre of the picture stands La Roche,

connected on one side by a tramway with the station of Melreux, but on every other separated by over twenty miles of road from a railroad. Between it and St. Hubert exist some of the finest parts of the ancient forest, and the valley of the Upper Ourthe adds many romantic features to its sylvan glories. St. Hubert itself, although famous for its shrine in honour of the Hunter Saint, and for the annual pilgrimage which is as numerously attended as that to Lourdes, presents no attractive features to the traveller beyond the fact that it provides an excellent stopping-place for those who wish to drive, cycle, or walk through the best portions of the old forest. The best way to accomplish this object is to divide the available time equally between La Roche and St. Hubert. By this arrangement, the whole of the valley of the Upper Ourthe can be explored, including the picturesque townlet of Houffalize, which is exceedingly popular with the Belgians, because it stands high, and enjoys a great reputation for salubrity.

For the purpose of description, the Ardennes may be divided into four groups, the valleys of the Lesse, the Semois, the Ourthe, and the Amblève. Of these the Lesse is the best known by English travellers, but, with the exception of a very small portion of this stream between Anseremme and Houyet, the Semois is by far the most beautiful river, and passes through the most picturesque scenery in Belgium. The Lesse rises



THE CATHEDRAL AT ANVERS



a little west of Libramont, and joins the Meuse at Anseremme, two miles above Dinant. One of its remarkable features is that it passes underground at Han, and flows through the celebrated grottoes at that place. A little below Han it sweeps round the royal château of Ciergnon, dominating a picturesquely wooded hillside. Although in the springtime much of the landscape is rendered brilliant by the bright and luxuriant gorse, which turns the surrounding heights into mountains of seeming gold, the striking portion of the river commences only at Houyet, and is limited to the twelve miles of its meandering course down to the Meuse. At first the river flows in a broad channel, which in flood time spreads over the adjacent meadows, between great hills not less than five hundred feet above the valley, and covered from base to summit with trees of various kinds, but chiefly beeches and pines, which in October present a glorious mass of autumn tints. The cliffs are fully concealed with vegetation, and there is little that is savage or sombre. The crest of the hills on the right bank is occupied by the Château d'Ardenne, once a royal residence, but some years ago converted into a hotel. During the life of Leopold I. it was used as a shooting-box, and the sport over the sixteen thousand acres attached to it used to be very good; but as his son and successor had no tastes in the direction of sport, the place fell into neglect, until five years ago it was converted into a fashionable hotel. In the first

King's time he resided in a tower which commanded the best view of the Lesse, and this was said to be his favourite retreat. This Tower of the Rock (*Tour du Rocher*), as it is called, forms a conspicuous object in the landscape, and is the only part of the château which can be seen from below. The château itself stands at a distance of two or three hundred yards from this tower.

Below this point the river takes a more savage form. The meadows have contracted, the surrounding cliffs are less covered with trees, and the river cuts its way through a narrow channel flanked by the walls of nature. The light railway passes through a succession of tunnels, the river-path, no longer close to the stream, often leaves it, and mounts, falls, and remounts with the exigencies of the locality. After six miles of increasing grandeur, the wildest and most characteristic feature of the Lesse is reached in the rocky heights of Furfooz, with their prehistoric caves. The path has crossed to the left bank of the river at Hulsonniaux, so that a full view is obtainable of this magnificent cliff, which presents an impassable barrier to the river, and turns it round its base. The cliff side is battered and breached by the storms of countless centuries, and its grey and reddish side, with many a clough, looks like the wall of a fortress that has withstood a long siege. The caves of the reindeer age are exceedingly interesting, although all the human bones and utensils found in them have been long re-





VIEW OF DINANT AND THE VALLEY OF THE MEUSE



moved to the Museum at Brussels. One cave is in the side of the cliff at only a slight elevation above the river, and it is commonly believed that this cave was used as a place of burial.

A little below Furfooz is a further collection of caves at Chaleux. In one of these was found a human jawbone of a very early period. The panorama which commences at Furfooz is completed at Walzin. Here the river takes another bold sweep beneath a massive cliff, which extends from the ruined tower of Caverenne to the restored Château of Walzin, and forms an imposing amphitheatre above the river. The Château of Walzin was built in the thirteenth century, and was once the stronghold of the Comtes d'Ardenne, and the De la Marcks. It stands sheer with the cliff, and the skill with which it has been restored by its modern proprietors reflects much credit on their good taste. From Walzin the final stretch of the river to Anseremme is short, and calls for no particular notice. Formerly the junction of the Meuse and the Lesse was considered one of the pretty views on the former river; but the useful has overcome the picturesque. The fine stone bridge that has been thrown across the Meuse of recent years at this point, and which serves for the railway as well as for ordinary traffic, has quite destroyed the view favoured of old by artists. The excellent hotel accommodation obtainable at Dinant near one end of the Lesse valley, and at Rochefort at the other end, has made the whole

of this district better known to English travellers than any other portion of the Ardennes, while the curious grottoes at Han and Rochefort, as well as the prehistoric caves round Furfooz, provide objects of interest that attract the merely inquisitive as well as the learned.

The valley of the Ourthe is much less known, and while it presents none of the striking features of the Lower Lesse, it passes through much pretty scenery. The name of the main stream is given indifferently to two of its upper courses, one, the longer, rising near Libramont, and the other, which is much shorter, on the eastern frontier near Prussian territory. The two branches join about twenty miles above La Roche. The Ourthe flows into the Meuse at Liége. The two most picturesque places on its banks are Durbuy and La Roche. Durbuy is situated in a striking position on the river, concealed by hills, which overlap each other; and on approaching it from Barvaux, a turn of the road suddenly reveals its ruined castle and ancient bridge. There are few better subjects left in Belgium for the artist, and it has not become hackneyed. Durbuy is quite a small place; it has been called a little gem.

La Roche is a place of far greater importance. It lies in a sort of basin, surrounded on all sides by lofty hills. The only approaches are those made by the Ourthe, which casts a loop round it. The road from Melreux, now flanked by the steam-tram, follows the course of the river, and



THE CHÂTEAU OF WALZIN AT DINANT





so does one road to Houffalize. There are other roads which have been cut down the hillsides, one from Viel Salm, and the Baraque de Fraiture, another from Champlon, where the roads to St. Hubert and Nassogne bifurcate. In the centre of the town, crowning the summit of a small rock, which gave the place its name, are the ruins of the old castle, familiarly known as that of the Counts. The woods surrounding La Roche are exceptionally fine, and present its great attraction. Among the local sights is the famous Château du Diable, a castle of nature's formation on the model of a robber or baronial stronghold. A good portion of the forest of St. Hubert is within driving distance.

The Amblève is a tributary of the Ourthe, flowing into that stream near Rivage, a little before it reaches the Meuse itself. The Amblève rises in Prussia, and flowing past Stavelot, presents its choicest bits of scenery at Coo and Aywaille. The Cascade of Coo is known by probably every visitor to Spa, but a visit to the whole of the valley from Rivage to Stavelot would repay the trouble. There is a light railway for the whole distance, with stations at convenient stopping-places, and excellent hotels.

The fourth and last valley is that of the Semois, which is, beyond doubt, the most beautiful and attractive portion of the Ardennes. The picturesque bit of the Lesse does not exceed ten miles, whereas the Semois is beautiful throughout the

greater part of its course, or from Chiny to its junction with the Meuse at Monthermé in France. In another respect the Semois surpasses the Lesse, and probably any other stream in Europe, and that is in its sinuous course. It meanders along by a succession of loops, great and little, which are reckoned at a hundred in a course of as many miles. As the Semois lies in the extreme south of Belgium, it was long outside the track of any ordinary traveller; and the means of getting there, until a few years ago, were confined to the diligence. In those days the Semois was frequented by a few anglers who had discovered the excellence of its trout, and the comfortable character of some of the hotels on its banks. The construction of the southern railway already referred to simplified the question of getting there, but even now a long drive has to be accomplished before reaching some of the most attractive spots on the river. Herbeumont, for instance, is a twelve-mile drive from Bertrix, and Alle is about the same distance from Paliseul or Graide. The steam-tram from Paliseul to Bouillon was the first direct communication by rail established with the river, just as that now in course of construction between Bertrix and Herbeumont will be the second. The southern line from Bertrix to Virton also crosses the river at Florenville, but that is so high up as to be of little use. One of the chief charms of the Semois valley was its inaccessibility, and, in old days, to follow its course on foot

upwards from Monthermé seemed quite an adventure in an unknown land. It is now easy enough to reach; the French have laid down a light railway from Monthermé to Hautes-Rivières, their border town, and are now urging the Belgians to continue it on their side up to Bouillon. The advent of the railway, however, will destroy the old charm of such places as Vresse and Alle—dear to the angler and the artist.

Bouillon is the true central point of the district, because it is the only place with any pretensions to be called a town. Famous for the castle of Godfrey of Bouillon, which preserves better than any other that can be called to mind the aspect of the early mediæval fortress, it must attract the archæologist, while its position on the only main-road from France into the Ardennes makes it strategically important. But it does not present the advantages for residence that may be found at many other places along the valley. Bouillon is confined on every side, so that no fresh air reaches it, and as the town is of ancient date the houses are old, and the question of its sanitary condition is more than dubious. A local authority has computed that the graveyard has contained over one hundred thousand bodies. Bouillon will fully repay a visit for the inspection of its castle; but the well-instructed visitor will pass on quickly either to Alle in one direction or to Herbeumont in the other.

Among the most popular excursions along the

whole of the southern frontier is a visit to the battle-field of Sedan, which can be made with almost equal convenience from any of the places in the Semois valley. The old post-road is from Bouillon to Sedan, and of late years this has been much improved by the construction of a new road on a different alignment. At Bouillon, too, is the Hotel de la Poste, at which Napoleon III. slept the night after the capitulation at Sedan. The room he occupied is shown, and, little heeding the memories of that unfortunate disaster and its victim, the modern tourist may occupy the same four-poster as the fallen Emperor. Bouillon has other memories of the Franco-Prussian War. The place which Turenne called the key of the Ardennes was the headquarters of the Belgian Army protecting the neutrality of the Belgian frontier during that struggle. It was the chief hospital for the wounded Frenchmen who crossed the frontier. Many of them repose in the churchyard high up the hillside, reached by the Avenue of Sighs. Another excursion of a different kind is to the beautifully situated ruins of the once famous Abbey of Orval, about six miles from Florenville, and close to the French frontier.

The finest bits of scenery on the river are, below Bouillon, the view from Corbion of the high cliff of Rochehaut or the view from Rochehaut itself of the river sweeping beneath in a wide semicircle round Frahan, and, above Bouillon, the savage channel from Chiny to La Cuisine.

Here herons and martin-fishers find a congenial haunt in the rock-strewn passage, and the navigation of the channel on fragile punts is not free from excitement and a sense of danger. The traveller who wishes to make comparisons between the Semois and the Lesse must see these two totally different panoramas on the former river before he can be in a position to decide. But apart from these special spots, the whole of the Semois valley is picturesque, which cannot be said of the Lesse. Its picturesqueness is also entirely due to nature. There are no ruined or modern castles to suggest comparisons with the Rhine and the Moselle. Bouillon is the one exception, for the ruins at Herbeumont are hardly perceptible until one has got close to the knoll on which the once famous castle stood.

The great attractions of the Ardennes, as a whole, are the invigorating quality of the air over the whole of this plateau, well raised above the plains of Northern and Western Belgium, and the tranquillity of the life of the people, which forms a refreshing contrast to the bustle of the towns. Here, if anywhere, perfect rest can be found. The hotels, taken all through the country, are good, clean, and comfortable, with excellent food and cooking. In the month of August, when foreign tourists come to largely swell the number of Belgian residents who are taking their holiday in the country, the hotels are crowded, and accommodation is difficult to obtain. But if there



are no rooms in the hotel, the proprietor will always succeed in finding accommodation for his guest at some house in the town or village. The accommodation, however primitive, may always be relied upon as being scrupulously clean; and when it is remembered that the regular price for a bedroom is only one franc a night, this is very remarkable. I shall never forget reaching Bouillon once about midnight, and finding all the hotels full, and then being taken all over the town with the fireman from the tramcar engine, carrying his lamp, and acting as my guide until a vacant bedroom was found. It was long past midnight, when this was accomplished, and the woman of the house took an infinity of trouble to make me comfortable, although an arrival of this kind must have put her to great inconvenience with the prospect of very little recompense, for they will accept nothing more than the regular price, unless it is put as a gift for the children.

Life in the Ardennes is moulded in a different fashion from that of the rest of the country. It is more primitive and simple. The dinner is in the middle of the day, and at a place like Rochefort, which has two excellent hotels, it consists of five or six courses, and the regular price is two and a half francs, or two shillings, for the meal. The evening meal is called a supper, but there is always one hot dish, and sometimes two. The average rate of the pension is five francs, which at the height of the season is slightly increased.



For five shillings a day the tourist can always depend on a good clean bedroom and excellent food. The quality of the cooking varies, but at some of the hotels, such as the Hoffmann at Alle, the Étoile at Rochefort, and the Bellevue at Viel Salm, it is really excellent. Now that the Ardennes are being steadily brought under cultivation, the character of the province is undergoing considerable change. Many of the woods which formerly covered the provinces of Namur and Luxemburg have disappeared, and in their places are ploughed fields and great bare downs, on which flocks of sheep browse. Owing to the ruthless manner in which the country was being stripped bare, a law was passed ordering that when trees were cut down saplings should be planted. In consequence fir and pine woods are being created in all directions. There is also a tendency to plant fruit trees, and pears and apples are doing so well that some sanguine people are predicting that when the Ardennes cease to be a forest they will become an orchard. It is becoming the fashion of the wealthy merchants to have a country house in the Ardennes, and their villas of every scale of pretentiousness are to be found all over the province; but, as a rule, round some town with good railway facilities, like Rochefort. The representatives of the old feudal chiefs are practically extinct. Of those whose home is in the Ardennes, the Count de Limburg Stirum is perhaps the only representative left. But there are

numerous representatives of the country gentry class still surviving. They lead a quiet and retired life of their own, keeping strictly to their own set, giving occasional dinners to their neighbours, enjoying such sport as can be found where preservation is not attempted outside a very few large estates, and only getting any great excitement in the winter, when the cold sometimes drives the wild-boar to maraud on the farms. For the resident, as for the casual visitor, the Ardennes are a very tranquil and economical place of abode.





## CHAPTER XVII

### SOME POPULAR TYPES—MEN

I AM perfectly aware that most English visitors to Belgium give a very unflattering description of Belgian character, and fix upon some national traits or habits to make them subjects of ridicule. This was not the impression I formed of the people during the several years I resided in the country, mixing with all classes of society and visiting parts rarely if ever visited by other Englishmen. There are, of course, disagreeable persons in Belgium as in every other country, but I brought away the most agreeable opinion of the good qualities of the people as a whole, and in saying this I make no distinction between Walloons and Flemings. Both have their attractive side, although the latter are perhaps, on the whole, the more agreeable people to deal with. Leaving for others the unpleasant task of criticism, I wish only to dwell here on some of the popular types as they struck me in a favourable manner. Comparisons are notoriously odious, but in my opinion some of the types would compare favourably with the corresponding class in

England, although this is more especially the case with regard to the women, of whom I must treat in a separate chapter.

If I were asked what class of men, taken as a whole, impressed me most favourably in Belgium, I should have to reply, the postmen. Perhaps my appreciation of the intelligence, amiability, and cheerfulness of the Belgian *facteur* was enhanced by a sense of the deterioration that has taken place in London, of late years, among the carriers. Everybody must have observed the different manner in which the young recruit delivers his letters from that of the older and more serious functionary to whom one was accustomed some years back. Nowadays the London postman has only one object,—to get rid of his packet with the greatest despatch. The letters are of no value in his eyes, he crushes them into letter-boxes that are obviously too small to hold them, he does not study the names, and goes blindly by the number, so that a portion of one's correspondence is always at somebody's else house, and it depends on a good neighbourly feeling whether it is only hours or days before it comes to hand. I would send these indifferent carriers to hear lectures on the value of letters, and to Brussels to get lessons in the art of delivering them.

The Belgian *facteur* has raised the science of delivering letters to the level of a fine art. He works with his head as well as his fingers. He has mastered the first secret of the profession.

The important fact on the envelope is not the address, but the name of the person. His object is to find that person. An error in number does not baffle him. There may be no street on the address. The name is called out to the assembled *facteurs* in the sorting-hall at the *Grandes Postes*, and the man who goes out to St. Gilles or Etterbeck exclaims: "There is a person of that name at such and such an address; give it to me, and I will see if it is for him." If the person cannot be found in this way, the register at the *bureau de police* is searched. If the name is not there, then only is it returned to the dead-letter office. I have had letters delivered to me which bore only the address Brussels, and I was a stranger in the land.

There is another art that the *facteur* has learnt. He is always cheerful of aspect, as if he were the bearer of nothing but good news, and when he brings a registered letter, he quite beams. I have once or twice, however, seen a grave sternness displace the smile, when the dull English man or woman, ignorant of the general custom, omitted to give him the three or four sous that is the usual reward for a *lettre chargée*. It is little omissions of this sort that explain a good deal of English unpopularity on the Continent. The Belgian postman not only delivers the letters, but also the newspapers to subscribers, and I never recollect a paper going astray in the course of three years. Perhaps he is seen at his best on the occasion of the New Year, when it is the custom to send one's

visiting-card to all one's friends and acquaintances. Then he works like a Titan to distribute the three million bits of pasteboard in Brussels alone.

It may be admitted that the Brussels *facteur* would never be able to get through his work, or to do it so well, but for the electric-trams, which carry him from one end of the town to the other. These are used for another purpose in the matter of correspondence. A letter-box is to be found at the end of each car, into which an express letter, bearing an extra twenty-five centimes or  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$  stamp, may be dropped, and it will then be delivered as rapidly as possible, not only in Brussels, but throughout the kingdom. Telegraph-boys are waiting at all the chief stopping-places to open these boxes, examine the letters, and take out those for places near at hand. If for the provinces, the letter is taken out at the station, sent off by the next train, and delivered by telegraph-boy, or if the post-office is closed, by the station-porter. No doubt this system works better because the railways are owned and managed by the State. Express letters are in common use in Belgium, and, as worked on the uniform charge of  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ , no matter what the distance may be, are undoubtedly a great public convenience.

The tram-car employees are also a deserving body. They work very hard during long hours, and yet they always seem fresh and up to the mark. The cars are divided into first and second class, the difference being that in the former there



are cushions. The *receveurs*, or collectors, are often the recipients of a little perquisite. Where the change would be five centimes, or a halfpenny, the fare will often not accept it, whereupon the *receveur* politely raises his cap. These little favours, especially during the summer-time, total up to a considerable addition to the meagre wages paid by the tram companies. I cannot remember seeing a tram-car collector rude or disobliging to any one, and when a passenger rises too late to stop the car at one of the *arrêts facultatifs*, he will generally express his regret at having got too far to make it possible. Accidents are not as numerous as might be expected, but pedestrians have to be on their guard, especially in crossing behind a stationary car on to the opposite line of traffic.

The railway officials are another class who come a good deal under one's observation in travelling about the country. If the best side of them is to be seen, they require a little management, and some consideration must be paid to their dignity as State officials. The English tourist is rather prone to address the red-capped *chef de gare* as if he were a porter appointed for the express purpose of giving bewildered travellers information. That is not included among the duties of a station-master in Belgium. His function is to look after the trains, not the travellers. On the other hand, if the traveller approaches him in the correct manner, which means by raising his hand to his hat, he at once unbends, and will do everything he can

to assist him. The railway guards and ticket-collectors also have nothing whatever to do with luggage, and it is *infra dig.* for them to help take it out of the carriage. The porters are few in number, and their duties in taking luggage out of the van, etc., monopolise their time, so that they, too, are unable to assist travellers. As all these functionaries wear some sort of uniform, it is to them that the English traveller looks for aid which he never receives, and consequently he or she feels aggrieved at the indifference with which the demand for a porter is received.

If, however, the traveller uttered the word *commissionnaire*, there would be no lack of ready hands to carry the baggage, as on every platform a goodly supply of these men stand ready for a job. They can easily be distinguished by their linen shirts or smocks, and they generally have a badge, either on their cap or their arm. These are the railway porters, in the English sense of the term, but they have no authority in the station, and must not do anything else but carry luggage. They are to be found outside the station also, but at Brussels a penny ticket has to be taken for them to secure their admission to the platform, even when carrying travellers' luggage.

Among some national habits that get English travellers into difficulties on the railways, is that of carrying all their belongings in the compartment with them. Now the carriages on all the cross lines, or *chemins de fer vicinaux*, are very

small. There are seats for sixteen persons, and in the tourist season the trains are always crowded. There is really no room in them for any luggage at all, beyond such light articles as can be put in the racks or under the seats. If luggage is carried in the compartment, a certain amount of discomfort must be caused to every other traveller, and unpleasantness follows. A scene of this character once came under my observation, and the offenders in this case were two English ladies. They had found an empty compartment, and under their instructions the *commissionnaire* had piled up their luggage on one of the seats assigned for two persons. There were several small portmanteaus, hold-alls, rugs, bags, and baskets, and, finally, a collection of golf clubs. They not only filled the seats, and the rack above, but overflowed on to the gangway. The ladies went away to get some refreshment, as the train was not to start for half an hour, in the happy belief that they had secured a whole compartment for themselves and their luggage. As the time of departure drew near, passengers began to arrive and take their seats. Soon fourteen of the seats were occupied, and on the arrival of the ladies, with a *commissionnaire* bearing more bags, not a place was vacant. The ladies looked round, and began to complain to the *commissionnaire* that there was no seat for them, but that person, raising his cap, muttered *Ce n'est pas mon affaire*, and beat a discreet retreat. The ladies, or rather the

one who could speak a little French, continued complaining, "Where are we to sit?" and seemed to expect other passengers to stand up so that their baggage might remain undisturbed. Finding that they understood French, a gentleman explained that the seats were for travellers, not for luggage, and removing the bags, etc., on to the floor in the central gangway, said very politely, "There are your seats, ladies." This was meant in the way of civility, but the good ladies seemed to cherish resentment throughout the rest of the journey, exclaiming, when the sliding door revealed the half of the carriage reserved for smokers, "Oh! there was heaps of room in there," and never thinking for a moment that they had acted very unreasonably, and were wholly in the wrong. There is scarcely a doubt that this incident will be cited by them as a proof of the incivility of Belgian fellow-travellers.

The Brussels policeman has often been held up to ridicule, but it is altogether undeserved. The cartoon in *Punch* of the small representative of the law, who has ordered a big Flemish *ouvrier* in vain to get out of a beershop, ending the colloquy by saying, "Then stay where you are," is not more true to life than such skits generally are. In the first place, the Brussels policeman is not so very small, but his loose and comfortable costume does not give him the stiff and imposing appearance of the English "men in blue." He is really a very active individual, and his courage is be-

yond question. It must be remembered that the criminal class with which he has to deal is far more dangerous than the English class, apart from the alien element in London, which is giving the police authorities there a taste of Continental conditions. Brussels criminals always carry revolvers, and know how to use them, and as they generally work in couples, a solitary policeman has to be always on his guard. The newspapers are seldom without an account of an affray in which revolver shots are exchanged, but it is very rarely that a criminal escapes the hands of justice. The Brussels policeman is not, however, assumed to be at the service of every pedestrian in search of information. Still, if asked a question with sufficient politeness, he will reply to the extent of his knowledge with equal civility. But his engrossing duty is to watch the criminal classes, and to prevent them from doing much mischief. This duty he discharges in an efficient manner, considering that the force to which he belongs is numerically weak, and that the criminal class is proportionally large.

Passing to a higher class in society, I wish to say a good word for the Belgian officer. He, not less than the Brussels policeman, is made the object of caricaturists, and very unjustly. I have known or met a great many of them, and I have found them intelligent, earnest, and devoted to their profession, although its prospects are not very seductive, and the chances of earning any



glory in it seem remote. This is the more remarkable because the greater number of Belgian officers come from the body of the people. They represent not a separate class or caste, but just the ordinary citizens of the country, and many of them have risen from the grade of *sous-officiers*. The noble class enters only the Guides, and to a less extent the Grenadiers, Lancers, and Carabiniers. Outside the Guides there is also a complete absence of what is called "side." The Belgian officer is a quiet, inoffensive fellow, rather inclined to take the small affairs of his barrack life a little too seriously, but entitled to special credit for the attention he pays to the wants of his men, and to preserving good relations with them. It is not his fault if so little fighting has fallen to his lot, and if his reputation in real warfare has still to be made.

The official class in Belgium presents what might be considered the most favourable type of the Belgian gentleman. An official is always extremely courteous (I speak of the representatives of the higher administration), and rather a stickler for formality. The pith of his remarks may be small, but he will cover it with a number of polite phrases, expressed in classic French. The staff of each *cabinet*, or the inner private office of a Secretary of State, or director of a department, is carefully recruited from the most promising candidates, who are selected for their personal appearance and family connexions as well as for their



attainments. They have also to undergo, after appointment, qualifying examinations to prove their fitness to pass into higher grades. In the Foreign Office, or *Ministère des Affaires Etrangères*, the highest level of excellence is maintained under the guiding influence of Baron Lambertmont, Belgian's leading statesman. He stands, at the age of eighty-four, as a living example of the model to which the young officials of his department should attain. There are many stories told of his vigilance and activity, which, by all accounts, remain unabated. It was only the other day that he was invited to arbitrate between England and France on the subject of two disputes in West Africa—not for the first time, as on a previous occasion he received the Grand Cross of the Bath for officiating in a similar capacity. Yet it is fifty years ago since he contributed towards saving in the first place, and developing in the second, the Duke of Wellington's estate in Belgium; forty years since he helped to free the Scheldt, from which event dates the prosperity of Antwerp; and, finally, twenty years have passed since he represented the Congo State with consummate ability and tact at the Berlin Conference. Yet he seems as fresh and vigorous in intellect today as a man half his age. In his youth, Baron Lambertmont was an officer in the Spanish Army, and served with much distinction in the first Carlist War. On one occasion he performed an act which decided the victory, and for this he received

the coveted Order of St. Ferdinand. This decoration is embroidered on the front of the coat. It is reported of a Spanish Grandee, sent to represent his country at Brussels, that at a reception he came across to Baron Lambert and said, "Excuse me, Minister, but it is very extraordinary to me how your Brussels tailors can embroider your coat exactly like our Order of St. Ferdinand." It never entered his head that the peaceful director of the Foreign Department in Belgium, whose fame as a diplomatist had been European for so long a time, could have performed a military achievement which entitled him to wear the most coveted of Spanish orders.

Another high official, whom I may select as a favourable type of the Belgian administrator, is the Baron Van Eetvelde, who was for many years the responsible director of the Congo State Government in Brussels. He has not been directly responsible for the policy pursued since the end of 1898, and in the administration of its affairs, as well as the conduct of its diplomatic relations, he displayed before that time much ability and breadth of view. Some time ago he gave up the onerous office of Secretary of State, and was nominated a Minister of State with less severe duties. He was for some years Belgian Consul-General at Calcutta, and possesses an excellent acquaintance with the English language and with English opinion. More is certain to be heard of this statesman hereafter.

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Perhaps these detached portraits, taken from different classes, will suffice to show that those who denounce everything Belgian must be either grossly prejudiced or possess but a slight knowledge of what they are talking about. Taking the best specimens in every walk of life they are a distinctly pleasing people to have relations with. They are franker and more outspoken than the French, while they are not so overbearing and dictatorial as the Germans. They are, indeed, just what their race makes them, half-way between the two. At the same time they are not the easiest men to debate with, for, after the ordinary conventionalities of society are passed, they become very dogmatic and vigorous in the assertion of their own opinions, arguing from first principles, and insisting on the paramount authority of philosophical axioms in complete indifference to the hard facts of this workaday world. I am quite sure that should the Prussians ever force their way down the Avenue Louise the *Indépendance Belge* of the previous evening would have contained an editorial descanting in sonorous phrases on the inviolable rights of a little nation to be free, not merely in its own institutions, but in its criticism and censure of others. As a parting advice, it is well not to get into any warm discussion with Belgians, but to listen to the expression of their views, and to confine one's own remarks to safe generalities.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOME POPULAR TYPES—WOMEN

NO one can reside any time in Belgium without forming a very high opinion of its women, of their thrift, cleanliness, and capacity for work. Even English visitors, who are always more or less prejudiced against everything foreign, and who have not a word to say on behalf of the men, are impressed in their favour, and make comparisons unflattering to the corresponding class in England. There is, for instance, a complete absence of that tawdriness which is so obtrusive and offensive among British working classes, and the neat and tidy way in which all the women in Belgium, without exception, arrange their hair is a striking contrast to the dishevelled locks or flaunting chignons of their English sisters. A case of a Belgian woman wearing any hair but her own is not to be found. The first impression formed in the country is that the women do all the work, which brings the reflection in its train that the men must have an easy time of it. On the latter point this is corrected by greater knowledge of the subdivision of labour; but the opinion that the female

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half of the community works as hard as the male will not in any way be modified. Women manage all the shops, from the small groceries and green-groceries up to businesses of importance, and it is only in the largest establishments that men take their place. They will be helped in this task by their children or, if there is one, by the grandfather; but it is considered somewhat undignified for an active man to mind a shop. He will often seek and obtain employment outside the business which his wife stops at home to conduct. All the purveyors and carriers of milk are women, and their little carts, drawn by dogs with their bright brass cans, are one of the sights of Brussels, especially when they are all assembled on the Grand' Place for inspection.

This inspection takes place at the early hour of six, and consequently finds but few English spectators throughout the year. It is rather an interesting sight. The inspection is held for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not all the regulations are properly observed. The cans are carefully examined with regard to their cleanliness and state of repair, the milk is also tested, and the arrangement of the girth and straps is looked to, lest they should chafe the dog. Latterly a small piece of carpet for the dog to lie on, and a drinking-bowl have been added as part of the essential equipment of a milk-cart. Of course it goes without saying that the quality of the milk on the day of inspection is always exceptionally



good, but it must not be supposed that the test is applied only on these fixed occasions. A certain number of police inspectors are sent out every morning to stop vendors of milk, and test their milk on the spot. As it is never known when or where this inspection may be made, the watering of milk is not common. The offence is punishable by fine, but if frequently committed entails the withdrawal of the licence to sell, and that means losing a certain livelihood.

As reference has been made to the dogs which draw the milk-carts, or barrows, it will be appropriate to say something on the subject of employing dogs for draught purposes, which is common throughout Belgium. With regard to the milk-cart dogs, they are always a large breed of dog, and frequently there are two dogs to a cart. As the sale of milk is profitable, and means that the person engaged in it earns a good livelihood, these dogs are well fed. They also come in for a certain amount of scraps at the houses at which they call regularly each morning. So far as any suffering by the dog thus employed is in question, I do not believe there is any. He is in good fettle, and as he is a big, powerful, and combative fellow he is generally muzzled. Leaving aside the broad and comprehensive question as to whether dogs were ever intended by nature for draught work which was decided in the negative in England only about fifty years ago, I think it may be safely assumed that the employment of these big dogs in



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the little milk-carts of Belgium, is free from positive cruelty. This remark also applies to the same kind of dog employed by the greater number of the laundresses, and by some of the bakers. But as it is permissible by the law of the land to use dogs for draught—or as they are called *chiens de trait*—it follows that the poor or the lazy use any and all dogs, big or small, well-fed or ill-fed, to drag their cars and carts carrying their goods for sale, and not infrequently themselves. In the strict economy of the Belgian social system dogs have no right to existence except as beasts of burden. The rich may indulge themselves with the luxury of a *chien de maison* or a *chien de chasse*, but for the Belgians who work, from the peasant to the shopkeeper, a dog has no other interest or value than as a fellow-worker and obedient slave. It is the inevitable concomitant of this practice that cases of cruelty must be frequent, and that the wretched condition of many of the dogs so employed leads to a general condemnation of Belgian character as indifferent to animal suffering and as tolerating a system from which a greater or less degree of cruelty is inseparable. It is unnecessary to dilate upon the spectacles of cruelty which are to be witnessed in every part of the kingdom, and which diminish the pleasure of at least many English visitors who come to stay in the country.

Of late a sentiment has been springing up among the rich in Belgium that something should

be done in the matter. The Belgian Government is notoriously timid in the matter of introducing fresh legislation on any subject. This arises from a mixed feeling that a new law may be regarded as a reflection on the Constitution, and that it is perilous to interfere with the customs of the people. For these reasons it has done and will do nothing in the matter of the employment of dogs for drawing purposes, until at least a marked change has occurred in public opinion on the subject, of which there is at present no sign, except among the wealthy. They have founded a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and in some towns one may see its notices on the walls: "*Traitez les animaux avec douceur.*" But it rarely, if ever, brings a case of cruelty into court, and there is good reason to doubt whether it would obtain a single judgment in its favour if it did. A more hopeful sign is the action of the Antwerp Corporation, which has drawn up a set of regulations against dogs being worked under a certain size, and requiring the weight drawn to be in fair proportion to the size and strength of the dog.

To return to our subject after this digression suggested by the Brussels milk-carts. It is impossible for an observer not to be struck by the bright and contented appearance of the women in Belgium. The cares of life weigh lightly upon them, and they find a real pleasure in their occupations. As all the workwomen on ordinary days



A MILKWOMAN OF BRUSSELS



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go about bareheaded, the neatness with which they arrange their hair in the most simple style at once attracts notice. This practice is universal, and in Belgium a woman's hair is her chief glory. In cold or rainy weather they draw a shawl over their heads, and this is the only protection they employ against the weather. Umbrellas are regarded as a luxury that does not come within the purview of the masses. Apart from the care which they bestow on their hair the most striking points in the appearance of these young women are the trimness of their dress, which is always short, not coming below the ankle, and the activity with which they hasten through the streets on their errands, looking neither to the right hand nor the left. In this respect they furnish a marked contrast to the men, who saunter over their outdoor work, and generally include a gossip and a *consommation*, or drink, as a part of the task of delivering a parcel.

In short, the women of Belgium, apart from the domestic duties which fall to their lot everywhere, perform their half of the work of the country, and for some reason or other are more in evidence than the men. They take it quite naturally, and are remarkable for their cheery aspect, and, in fact, a morose or disappointed-looking face is scarcely to be seen among them. A main cause of this is no doubt the bright, invigorating climate, which enables them to get through their work without fatigue. Another is the early hour at which

everybody commences the daily occupation, so that the greater part of the household work and the marketing is done before the ordinary English breakfast hour. Late rising is often attributed to the English as a great fault, and as an explanation of the success of foreign competition. But it is really due to the heaviness of the atmosphere as compared with that in Belgium. I have heard Belgians themselves complain that in London they had as much difficulty in getting up at eight in the morning as they had in Brussels or Liège in rising at six, or even earlier. On the other side of the question it must be noticed that comparatively less work is done on the Continent in the afternoon than in England, so that early rising may not signify all the gain that is attributed to it.

One of the most typical characters in the life of the towns is the *patronne*, the wife of the proprietor, or the proprietress herself, of a restaurant or café. She sits or stands behind a kind of bar, which is prettily decorated, and which provides a commanding post of observation. The waiters carry the orders to her and she passes them on through speaking-tubes to the kitchen or the wine-cellar. Active work in a café or café-restaurant rarely commences before midday, but it continues till long after midnight. The waiters, or *garçons*, have made everything clean and spruce by eleven o'clock, and shortly afterwards the *patronne* will take up her position at the bar in anticipation of the work of the day. From



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twelve to two the place will be crowded, in proportion with its popularity, and in the café the bustle will continue still longer. But at half-past two the proprietor—who has been not less occupied in his own department, supervising the *chef* and looking after the wine orders, than his better half—his wife, their daughters, who, if grown up, are also in the bar, and any other children all sit down to their *déjeuner* at one of the tables in the café. They have deserved their meal, and enjoy it. They criticise their food and the quality of their *chef's* cooking just as freely and impartially as the casual or regular visitor. They have their bottle of wine for the whole family, and also their glass of beer apiece, the younger members mixing water with the wine, and all drinking a tumbler of water at some stage of the repast. At four o'clock the *patronne* and her daughters disappear to make preparations for the evening, and if the restaurant is a well-known resort for diners the preparations will be most elaborate. The *patronne* puts on her jewellery, and the prosperity of the house may be gauged by the size and colour of her diamond earrings. At five o'clock she is back at the post of command, as diners begin to arrive at six o'clock, or even before. More fashionable persons come in at seven, but by eight o'clock all the dinners in the great majority of the restaurants are over. At half-past the family, taking advantage of the lull, which is not broken till after the theatre hour, sit down to their own supper.

They do full justice to the repast, and perhaps they have invited some friend or relative to join them, in which case a special bottle of wine may be brought up from the cellar. But, as a rule, they take very little wine, a bottle between five or six persons, and always the lowest priced on the list. From ten till midnight the place is again crowded, and all is bustle and clatter. At midnight the majority of customers will have gone home, but even as late as two in the morning the *patronne* may be seen at her post ready to see that the belated visitor gets what he asks for. I have used the word "bar," but perhaps counter is a more correct term, as no one drinks at it. On entering and leaving it is the proper thing to raise one's hat to "Madame." The observance of this simple and easily acquired act of courtesy in shops would much increase the popularity of English visitors.

As between Flemish and Walloon women it is difficult for an outsider to draw a just comparison. In appearance the Flemings are shorter and slighter than their half-sisters. They are also a fair-haired race, with bright complexions and pink cheeks. The Walloon is far taller and big in proportion, generally dark, with pale face and very marked features, although tradition declares that she should be fair, and assigns for dark-haired women a Spanish or even a Roman origin, which is going rather far back. It is not at all uncommon to meet a flaxen-haired woman of

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grand physique among the Walloons of Liége and Luxemburg, and this is especially the case among some of the old noble families. But, as a rule, the Walloon woman is dark, just as the Flemish is fair. There is more energy about the Fleming and more dignity about the Walloon. The former works harder and calls the latter lazy; the latter is a better manager, and requires a higher grade of comfort in her domestic life, and is disposed to regard her Flemish sister as being somewhat behind the day and not quite on the same plane of culture as herself. There may be some foundation for this, and if we were to apply the test of cooking, Walloon cooks are pronounced superior in every way to Flemish. It is said that the Flemings, despite their clean and natty appearance in the streets, are not so scrupulously clean in their domestic arrangements as is desirable, and as is undoubtedly the case throughout the Walloon part of the country. Both have a marked partiality for fine clothes and bright colours, and those who have only observed the people in their workaday clothes would not recognise the same persons as they go to mass on Sundays. The Walloons dress in better taste than the Flemings, and as they are considerably taller they carry their clothes more gracefully and with greater effect. The art of dressmaking has been carried to a higher point of perfection among them, and most Walloon girls can cut out their own clothes and make them in the latest fashion. It is quite

remarkable to notice the degree to which the art of dressing well is carried among the Walloon women of all classes, especially as there is no corresponding movement among the men. While the men in their Sunday clothes are just ordinary provincials, their wives and daughters might easily be mistaken for *Parisiennes*.

It is a common assumption that Belgian women are very fond of pleasure, but it is certain that they get very little amusement. They are supposed to find it in their work and their household duties, for it is only on fête days that regular toil is superseded by what may be called the idea of pleasure-seeking. Even the fine clothes, of which they are so proud, are carefully put away and stored up on return from church, or, at the longest, after the afternoon promenade in fine weather. In the towns, visits are paid on rare occasions to the theatre, and, as work begins for every one at such an early hour, it is not surprising that everybody goes to bed early. Even among the middle classes, when the man goes to his café or to his *cercle* to read the newspapers or hear the gossip, his wife remains at home attending to her sewing. It is only on fête days and Sundays during the summer that she expects to accompany her husband and make an excursion to her home, or the theatre, or at the least to an open-air café or beer-garden, and see and hear what is going on. This is, or should be, enough to establish the fact, if any doubted it, that the Belgians are an essentially

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domestic people, who find their pleasure at home in their family work and duties. This domesticity is equally characteristic of the two races, and explains the old Flemish proverb: "East, west, home 's best."

The characteristics which mark the people at large are also found among the leisured and well-to-do classes. The Belgian lady has very much the same views of life as her humbler sister. Money means practically finer clothes, more visits to the theatre, a longer vacation at the seaside or in the country, but the objects that constitute her ideas of a pleasant life are practically the same. Society passes its time with a certain lazy indifference and a complete absence of the exciting whirl of entertainments that constitutes high life in London and Paris. There is a considerable amount of visiting, afternoon teas have become popular, the daily drive to the Bois for those who keep a carriage is *de rigueur*, and there are occasional charity bazaars; but these must all form part of the regular existence anywhere of those who have no obligation to work for their living. The chief feature of Belgian society, as of Belgian life generally, is its domesticity. The family and its affairs form the pivot upon which the whole social system turns. It is very creditable and home-like, if the charge cannot be avoided that the result is a trifle dull. Belgian ladies dress well and Brussels dressmakers are undoubtedly very skilful and not much, if at all, behind the same class



in Paris. The fashions come from Paris, but they reach Brussels before London, and the sight on the boulevards on an early spring morning is very striking. The colours are brighter than are usual with the English, and the warm sun and clear air show them off to the best advantage. Then one is able to judge the truth of the French poet's reference to the *peau lactée*, the milky complexion of the fair ladies of Brussels, or *les belles Bruxelloises*. Notwithstanding their skill and good taste which, although less talked about, is quite equal to that of Paris, the Brussels dressmakers are considerably more reasonable in their charges than those of the French capital, and this is true in a still more marked degree of the milliners.

Every Belgian lady insists on her husband allowing her each year at least two costumes in the latest fashion for the promenade or for making formal visits. She takes the greatest care of them, never wearing them in the house, so that they remain fresh to the end of the six months, when the change of the season and of fashion exacts the purchase of the new costume. A costume to go *en ville*, which is the phrase for going to look at the shops, will cost something between two and three hundred francs; but in every other respect than these two annual dresses the greatest economy will be practised, and the other ordinary house-clothes will all be made at home by the mistress, with the occasional aid of a sempstress. If the wife of an average professional man, or an



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official, gets thirty pounds a year as her dress-money she is perfectly contented, even if there are two or three children to be clothed out of it. In many cases the lady's parents make her an allowance for dress, which is either part of the original *dot* or an addition to it.

Taking a comprehensive view of the position of women in Belgium, the conclusion to which one must come is that they form a scarcely less important moiety of the nation than the men, and that they contribute as workers in a material degree to secure the remarkable prosperity which the country has enjoyed for so many years. From many points of view they possess either specific merit or present such features of interest as to furnish ground for the belief that their good qualities supply the true source of Belgian prosperity. It would be a good thing for Great Britain if some of their thrift, good management in the household, cheery content in their work and in their station in life, could be imported together with the large quantities of the natural produce of the South Netherlands. They throw all their energies into their work, and their chief pride and pleasure lies in doing it well and to the best of their ability. If a young Belgian woman describes herself as a cook, it can be assumed that she has some good reason to call herself one, and that in her degree, of which the salary she asks will be the indication, she is proficient. If she is merely a *fille à tout faire*, she will work her hardest from six in the

morning till nine at night, and only expect one evening in the fortnight to amuse herself by going to the dance at the little meeting-rooms for servants and their young men which are to be found in even the smallest towns of the kingdom. The women of Belgium appreciate the dignity of labour, and their happiness lies in their work and their capacity for doing it.





## CHAPTER XIX

### SEAPORT AND SAILOR LIFE

**A**LTHOUGH Belgium has a first-class seaport in Antwerp, despite the fact that it is situated sixty-five miles up a difficult and tortuous river, and a second port in Ostend of considerable value, there is little or nothing in its history of maritime skill or enterprise. The "sea-beggars" were men of the provinces north of the Scheldt, or Dutch, and after the cleavage of the Netherlands, the one fixed point in the policy of Holland was to keep the Scheldt closed and to prevent Antwerp from ever becoming the rival of Rotterdam or Amsterdam. It is only since the freeing of the Scheldt in 1863 that a marked change has taken place, and if ever Belgium becomes a maritime State, which is not impossible, she will date her growth from that event.

In addition to the political closing of the Scheldt by jealous rivals, the natural condition of the coast of Flanders will explain the absence of naval activity and the practical non-existence of Belgian sailors until a quite recent period. From Nieuport to Heyst the low-lying coast is fringed by the

sand dunes which have been cast up by the sea, and, with the exception of Ostend, there is not a seaport on this treacherous coast, which is rendered especially dangerous for navigation by shallow and difficult channels, and by the dense mists that suddenly arise in the summer as well as the winter. The improvements at Ostend have adapted that place to the requirements of a port for cross-Channel passenger traffic between England and Belgium, and the approaching opening of Zeebrugge as the calling point for ocean-going steamers at the outlet of the Bruges ship-canal will add another port to the coast of Flanders.

But if there is a dearth of sailors in Flanders, there is a hardy fishing population along this coast, and probably not fewer than five thousand men and boys earn their livelihood on the sea. Of these, nearly one-half hail from Ostend, but at Heyst, Middelkerke, Nieuport, and Blankenberghe the bulk of the inhabitants gain their livelihood as fishermen. It is quite a pretty sight to see the fishing-smacks putting out to sea from any of the places named, but more especially from Ostend; but as this generally happens very early in the morning, it is more often their return than their departure that comes under the observation of the foreign visitor. They are good sea-boats, and although their usual fishing-grounds are only about ten miles off the coast, they sometimes extend their trips to a much greater distance. On the sail of each boat its registered number has to



THE BEACH AT OSTEND





be clearly stamped, with the abbreviated name of the port from which it hails. The largest smacks belong to Ostend, and the majority of them are the property of companies or guilds. Elsewhere the fishermen to a large extent own their own boats. The dangers of the coast, especially in the winter, are clearly proved every year by the loss of one or more of these smacks, and collisions with the steamers passing to Ostend and the Scheldt are not infrequent in thick or hazy weather. During the bad weather of the summer of 1903 several such accidents occurred, and on one occasion several boats from Heyst were lost, causing much grief and misery in that place.

In her fishing population along the coast, therefore, Belgium has the available material for manning a small navy with men accustomed to life at sea. The impression they give is that they are a hardy and wiry set of men capable of undergoing a good deal of hardship and privation, and it would be difficult to differentiate them from the Dutch, whose ancient skill and reputation as seamen have not diminished. The Heyst fishermen have a local reputation as making the best seamen, but there is probably no marked difference between the men of one place and those of another. There is certainly nothing in their external appearance to suggest such a difference. The prevalent use of the wooden *sabot* while on shore gives them a clumsy appearance. On their boats, those who retain the use of the *sabot*

generally wear exceedingly thick worsted stockings, which are rolled over the trousers, and dispense with any other foot covering. The use of the jack or long sea-boot is coming in, and is regarded as evidence of prosperity, but it may be suspected that before the boat has got far out to sea the boots are laid aside for the plain stockinged feet.

The commercial marine of Belgium is exceedingly limited. The two Ostend lines of packets, one for passenger traffic to Dover and the other for fruit, vegetables, and parcels, as well as passengers to London, employ a certain number of Flemish sailors. The navigating staff of these packets is Belgian, and the absence of accident is a tribute to their skill. Engineers as well as officers and crew are Belgians, but the stewards and cabin boys are almost without exception German. Flemings are also to be found on the English subsidised steamers (Elder line) from Antwerp to the Congo, and on the Red Star (American line) from the same port to the United States. Besides these ocean lines there are a limited number of Belgian-owned ships trading between Belgium and the British Isles chiefly in timber and coal. The bulk of Belgian commerce is carried in British ships, and the majority of the sailors on the Antwerp quays are Britishers. In the last ten years, however, there has been a considerable increase in the numbers of both Flemish sailors and Flemish vessels.

It is always difficult to fix precisely what may be

the effect produced by a single incident upon a great national evolution, but certainly the Antarctic expedition of 1899-1900, led by M. de Gerlache on the *Belgica*, furnished a considerable incentive to the movement for endowing Belgium with a national navy. If a nation can produce officers and sailors, as well as men of science, ready to pass a winter in the snow and the ice of the polar regions, it follows that it must be considerably advanced on the road to nautical experience and achievement. It is probable that M. de Gerlache will make a still greater reputation among Arctic explorers, as his ambition turns in that direction.

An impetus is likely to be given to the movement by the scheme for establishing a national mercantile marine, the first step towards which has been the order to construct a training-ship and the bringing together of an efficient training staff. An elaborate scheme of instruction has been drawn up, and the total cost for a naval cadet is not to exceed £32 a year. The ship, which is not to exceed two thousand tons, is being constructed at the Cockerill works at Hoboken, above Antwerp, and is to be named the *Count de Smet de Naeyer*, after the Belgian Premier, who is taking a prominent part in directing the arrangements necessary for the organisation of the scheme. It is hoped by this means to form the nucleus of a corps of officers which will make Belgium less dependent on foreign aid in carrying on its trade beyond the seas.

Whether the movement succeed to the full extent that its promoters expect or not, there can be no doubt that it will result in all lines employed in any way on State service, such as the Congo line, becoming national and manned more or less by Belgian officers and seamen. There is one important fact to be noticed. The movement is essentially Flemish, and the Walloons, who know nothing of the sea, from which they have always been cut off, take no part, and probably feel little interest in it. One consequence of the Flemish origin of the movement is that that language will have to be employed on board ship, for the fishermen of the coast know scarcely a word of French.

The extensive works in progress to make Brussels a seaport—the quays and docks under construction are grandiose—are evidence of the zeal and energy with which the Belgians are throwing themselves into a movement that may enable them to get rid of some of their excessive population. A great many years must still elapse before the projected ship-canal to the capital is in working order. The crowded state of the canals and of the smaller rivers, like the Dender and Lys, shows the great need of internal water communication as well as the bustling and restless activity animating commercial and industrial circles in Belgium.

There is one curious fact suggested by Belgian development on the sea that has rarely received notice out of treatises on international law, and not often in them. If there is ever to be any

marked development of Belgian maritime importance, it must commence at and radiate from Antwerp. Now, the position of Antwerp is anomalous, for it is on a river the entrance to which is in the possession of another country. A little below that city Holland owns both banks of the river, and continues to do so until it is lost in the sea. The lower Scheldt is exclusively Dutch, and consequently no State at war with Belgium could send men-of-war up it to attack Antwerp without, by the act, committing hostilities against Holland at the same time. The question will probably never possess any but theoretical interest, but it may be mentioned that Belgians see in this fact an additional guarantee of their neutrality, and a further proof of the identity of their interests with their northern neighbours, the Dutch.

Seaport life in Belgium is not more attractive than it is anywhere else. Antwerp, it must be admitted, has acquired a bad name for rowdyism, especially for the systematic swindling of English sailors, who, on returning from a long cruise, were often relieved of their earnings a very few days after their arrival, and left penniless. It was very difficult to provide a practical remedy for this evil, as the men were themselves to blame as much as any one else, but at last the British Consul solved the difficulty by arranging for the payment of the men's wages by pay-notes, to be recovered on their return to England. In this way the diffi-



culty was overcome, and the troublesome scenes of a few years back have not been renewed.

Nautical life in Belgium, which, practically speaking, means in this matter Antwerp, is not so picturesque as in Holland, where the population of Rotterdam and all the seacoast towns is typically nautical. Along the quays of Antwerp one may occasionally see a red-breeched, burly sailor with his inexpressibles tucked into grey stockings, but if so it will probably be found that he hails from Flushing or Middelburg. The Flemish sailor has little or nothing about him to distinguish him from any other of his craft, and neither in the colour nor in the shape of his clothes, is there anything of the picturesque. The testimony of English captains who have employed Flemings in their crews is, however, favourable to them. They have the virtues of the northern races, Scandinavians, Danes, and Dutch. They are hard workers, easily contented, and able to stand privation. But hitherto the Fleming has sailed under a foreign flag in mixed companies; it remains to be seen whether he will do so well when working exclusively among his own race and under the national ensign.







## CHAPTER XX

### THE ARMY AND MILITARY LIFE

**A**LTHOUGH Belgium is not a military State in the same sense that its powerful neighbours are, the army plays there a considerable rôle, and a very large section of the people are interested from one cause or another in military life. In the first place, the existence of the conscription represents a practical reality to the masses, and in the second a very considerable proportion of the well-to-do select the army as an honourable career for their sons in the capacity of commissioned officers. The important position which Belgium fills in the map of Europe, regarded from the strategical standpoint, the not less vital question of the maintenance of the balance of power, and the never absent probability of an occasion arising when it will be necessary for the Belgians to make a great personal effort to defend not merely their neutrality, but even their independence, are calculated to add to the estimation in which their army is held by Belgian citizens. The abolition of the still existing right of pre-emption, by which a substitute can be procured on payment of £68,

will remove a class grievance in the unequal incidence of "the blood tax" between the rich and the poor, and this abolition is rendered practically inevitable by the admitted failure of the compromise arranged in 1901 by the Army Reform Act for the voluntary recruitment of a body of long-service troops so as to increase the peace effective by twenty per cent. Against the inclination of many Belgians time and destiny are slowly but surely proving that they must become an armed nation.

Although the Walloons gained a high reputation for courage in the service of the foreign occupiers of their country, the distinct military annals of the Belgians commence only with the War of Liberation. That struggle was begun by civilians who did not possess a uniform, and the old prints show that the leaders fought in tall hats. It is not surprising, then, that in the campaign of 1831 these untrained men proved unable to make a prolonged stand against the Dutch regulars, and that on some occasions they were seized with panic. But owing to the exertions of King Leopold a remarkable reorganisation of the national forces was effected in the ensuing year, and at the end of 1832 the Belgian army was composed of one hundred thousand drilled soldiers. King Leopold wished that the task of capturing the citadel of Antwerp should be left to him, and from a Belgian point of view it would have been better to have done this; but the Powers decided

that the Belgian army should remain on the defensive. After the peace King Leopold continued throughout his reign to devote special care and attention to the reorganisation of his army, and its military spirit was sustained and increased by his initiative and example. Among his measures may be mentioned the institution of the mess for each regiment in imitation of the English practice.

The dismantling of the elaborate system of fortresses that had been created after Waterloo, with the exception of Antwerp and Namur, rendered it especially necessary that, however small in numbers, the Belgian army should be excellent in quality, and there is no doubt that before the great war of 1870 it was in many respects quite the equal of its neighbours. Much evidence is obtainable in support of this statement, and the captive Napoleon on his way to Prussia admired the Belgian artillery. But while both the French and Germans have made extraordinary progress in their military organisation during the last thirty years, so that practically every citizen is a trained soldier, the Belgians have remained stationary, and in some matters have even gone back. To give one illustration will suffice; the field artillery is precisely the same as it was in 1870. It is true that a new quick-firing gun is to be introduced, but nothing has yet been done in the way of rearmament, and the experiments for the selection of an approved type are not yet completed.

On a peace footing the Belgian army numbers

47,000 men, and on the outbreak of war the reserves increase it to 147,000 men. The infantry is divided into 1 regiment of Carabiniers of 4 active battalions and 3 of reserve, 1 regiment of Grenadiers, 3 regiments of foot Chasseurs, and 14 of Line, all of 3 active and 2 reserve battalions. The infantry is, therefore, comprised of 19 regiments, or 58 active battalions and 39 reserve battalions, or about 100,000 men on a war footing. The peace establishment does not reach half that total, as the active battalions are kept at only four-fifths their strength. The number of infantry officers on active service is nearly 1800.

The cavalry is composed of 8 regiments of about 400 men each. Two regiments are Guides, 2 horse Chasseurs, and 4 Lancers. There are 320 officers on the establishment. The Guides have a handsome uniform of scarlet trousers, green tunics and busbies, and are always quartered in Brussels, where they serve as a sort of body-guard or household cavalry to the sovereign. They have two fine barracks at Etterbeck, and the officers are men of good birth, and many of them represent the old noble families of the Netherlands. There is a cavalry school at Ypres somewhat after the model of the French establishment of the same kind at Saumur, but it is admitted to stand in need of reorganisation. The whole of the Belgian cavalry is light; but here, again, the armament has not been brought up to the level required by modern warfare. Taken all through it is well

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mounted, many of the horses being purchased in England and Ireland.

The Belgian artillery, which in the time of Leopold I. was noted for its efficiency, is divided into three classes, horse, field, and siege. There are 4 horse, 30 field, and 70 siege batteries on the peace establishment, with 500 officers and 4000 men on the active list. In the engineer corps are 140 officers and about 2000 men. The commissariat or train numbers 30 officers and 600 men. Thus the total combatant strength of the Belgian army on a peace footing numbers less than 50,000 men, and it is computed that on the calling up of the reserves, allowing for the absent, the total would barely reach 140,000 effectives. This force would suffice only to provide adequate garrisons for the fortified positions at Liége and Namur, and for the fortress at Antwerp, thus leaving the capital and the whole of Flanders and Hainaut at the mercy of an invader. Under these circumstances military reformers in Belgium have long been agitating for the abolition of the privilege of pre-emption, the strict enforcement of the law of conscription, the increase of the annual contingent, and the formation of an efficient reserve and territorial army. Up to the present hour no progress has been achieved in any one of the desired directions, although twenty years have elapsed since General Brialmont first drew the attention of his countrymen to the defects of their position. With great difficulty he obtained from the Chamber the



grants necessary to fortify Liège and Namur and thus secure the passages of the Meuse, but all his efforts failed to procure the funds for the completion of the trilateral by the fortification of St. Trond, or for the construction of the forts still missing, as already described, in the circumvallation of Antwerp. It has been said that the Belgian Parliament agreed to provide the bricks required for national defence, but that it has resolutely declined to furnish the men.

It will give the general reader some idea of the defects of the military system if he will make a comparison between the following sketch by a moderate military reformer as to what his country requires, and the particulars already given about the existing Belgian army. He proposes that the peace establishment should be raised to 107,000 men, and that the infantry should consist of 25 regiments of 4 battalions each, with an extra battalion for the *dépôt*. The cavalry, he says, ought to be increased to 10 regiments of 500 men each, always with the colours, and on the declaration of war this total should become not less than 7000. In addition there ought to be territorial cavalry on the model of our Yeomanry of 2000 men. The artillery should be increased to 6 batteries of horse and 60 of field, or 396 guns, and the siege artillery so as to number altogether 40 batteries, half of which would form part of the territorial army. The engineer and special corps, ought to be raised to 4500 men. Behind the active army of 107,000



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men should be the first reserve of 77,000, a territorial army of 88,500, and a territorial reserve of 95,000, or a grand total of 368,000 men. This would mean an effective force for the defence of the country of at least 300,000 men. By this organisation, which was sketched by Colonel Adtz of the Belgian staff, there would be adequate garrisons for all the fortified positions and a field army of over 100,000 men to co-operate with the Power or Powers which upheld Belgian independence. Such an organisation as this would make Belgium practically secure against invasion.

After the grave civil disturbances of 1893, it was decided to strengthen the force at the disposal of the authorities for maintaining law and order. There was no immediate prospect of obtaining the increase of the regular army, and therefore it was decided to organise the bourgeois or householder class in the towns into a *Garde Civique*. The idea, from a social point of view, was excellent, and although the *Garde Civique* has no serious military value it provides a considerable safeguard against the outbreak of any internal disorders. The *Garde Civique* at present numbers 50,000, and although the bulk of them are infantry, there are a few regiments of cavalry, the men providing their own horses. A still more limited number form artillery corps, but by a strange coincidence this section, at least at Antwerp, is the most efficient, and might be brigaded with regular siege artillery. The different corps selected their own

uniforms, which are very effective, and the regiments hold a weekly parade, every Sunday morning. This drill is not very severe, and they are only required to fire twelve cartridges at the rifle butts in each year. The Garde Civique was never intended to supply the military deficiencies of the country, but its creation was certainly favourable to the idea of eventually forming a territorial army. In order to maintain its purely civic character, the members are required to doff their uniform immediately after the Sunday parade.

In addition to the forces enumerated there is a very fine body of men in the *gendarmerie*. This is quite a *corps d'élite*, and would bear comparison with any other military force in Europe. They are in the first place trained soldiers, selected from the ranks of the army for their good physique. They are a combination of mounted policemen and heavy cavalry. In their undress uniform they resemble the former, and in their full dress the latter. They are stationed throughout the provinces, and they patrol the high-roads. Much of their work consists in preventing smuggling across the very extended frontiers of the little State. Their number varies between 2500 and 3000 men, with only sixty officers; the small proportion necessary being a certain indication of their efficiency. It is nowadays kept at its full strength of 3000 men. Until 1899 the *gendarmerie* was a force of which the inhabitants of the towns knew and recked little. On State occasions, such

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as the King's fête day, a few of them appeared in Brussels in their uniform, with bearskins resembling the Horse Grenadiers of the French army, and the headquarters of the *gendarmérie* is an imposing building on the boulevards. But in that year there were very serious riots in Brussels, and a social upheaval seemed possible. It was necessary to have a force at hand on which implicit reliance could be placed. The first division of the *gendarmérie*, quartered in the provinces of Brabant, Hainaut, and Namur, was accordingly summoned to the capital, and in the street disturbances this force distinguished itself by a thoroughness and zeal to which the Brussels mob was quite unaccustomed in the regular champions of the law. It was made abundantly clear that, if the gendarmes had been left to deal with the Socialist bands as they thought proper, the population of the Socialist haunts in Brussels would have been seriously diminished. As a consequence, the promoters of disorder were quite disconcerted. M. Vandervelde then uttered his *mot* that revolvers were useless against mausers, and the gendarmes became the objects of the fear and the hatred of the Brussels mob, who christened them the Pandours.

By the admission of Belgian officers the discipline and training of the infantry soldiers leave much to be desired. Out of deference to public sentiment, which has hitherto not regarded the army with too favourable an eye, no measures

have been taken to perfect the force as a military machine. In order not to make the young conscripts discontented and resentful after they leave the colours, their work is practically confined to learning their drill so that they may march correctly through the streets. In the summer the regiments are sent in rotation for a few weeks each to the camp at Beverloo, in Limburg, where they execute manœuvres and undergo some real training; but this lasts for only a very short time. Beverloo is known officially as the camp for "perfecting the drill of the infantry." With regard to the national danger arising from the defects in the training of the Belgian soldiers at the present time, no plainer warning has ever been uttered than that of the present King: "Our military institutions should, with due regard to proportion, copy those of the powerful nations on our frontiers. Our tactical units ought to be composed, armed, and trained under conditions analogous to those of our neighbours. If the Belgian system of defence were composed of men less well trained in the military service than those of these countries, it would only enter the lists to be *uselessly sacrificed*." Well, it is notorious that the Belgian army is so composed at the present time, and as the King went on to say "all delusions on this point must prove fatal."

The only subjects about which the Belgian public have displayed any interest relate to the development of industry and trade, and to the

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acquisition of wealth. They have not given a serious thought to the security of the national workshop, with which their own prosperity is bound up. Until these views undergo a complete and thorough change no reorganisation of the army is possible. Military enthusiasm remains suppressed, and the routine work is done in a perfunctory manner. The training of the infantry stops with parade instructions, and of the real conditions of modern warfare the men know nothing. The first and essential condition of any army reform in Belgium must be the abolition of the pre-emption privilege, and the conversion of the existing army into a truly national and representative force. The meagre results achieved must be somewhat disappointing to those who know that education for a military career forms a very important part of national education in Belgium as a whole. There are military schools for the sons or grandsons of soldiers at Alost and Namur, who in return for their education engage to serve with the colours until they are twenty-four. A curious feature of these institutions is that the teachers are officers detached from their regiments for the purpose of being schoolmasters. Many of these pupils of the State become non-commissioned officers, or join the Congo State service in Central Africa. At Bouillon there is a more advanced school for the training of non-commissioned officers. The average age at which the period of training begins is sixteen, and by



undergoing this preliminary training young men of respectable parentage escape the drudgery of the conscript private's life, and are drafted as required into regiments as corporals. Reference has been made to the cavalry school at Ypres. There is an artillery school at Brasschaet, not far from Antwerp, as well as a polygon for artillery and big-gun practice and experiments.

A gymnasium and a fencing school have been established at Brussels, and quite recently the regiment of Grenadiers, in which Prince Albert has long been an officer, adopted a course of gymnastics on the model of the Swedish army. The most characteristic feature of military life in Belgium is the officers' mess. This was introduced by the first King, not only because he had seen how well the practice worked in England, but because he wished to maintain the dignity of the uniform by removing the necessity for the young officers dining in cheap and consequently inferior restaurants. The hour for the mess is, however, left to the judgment of the colonel and the convenience of his officers. The Grenadiers dine at their fine officers' quarters or mess on the boulevard at seven in the evening; but other regiments have this regimental meal earlier, generally at 5.30. There is no doubt that the mess greatly increases the *esprit de corps*, although married officers object to it.

The chief, indeed the only, school to pass through, for the grade of officer in the army, is



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the *école militaire* at Ixelles. This institution used to occupy the old Abbey of the Cambre, but a new building has been lately provided for it at the other end of the town, near the Cinquante-naire. Here the course is for two years, and there are two divisions, the first for cavalry and infantry, and the second for artillery and engineers. At the end of two years there is a general examination, and those who pass for the first division are appointed sub-lieutenants in the army and sent to join the regiments selected for them. But the successful candidates in the second division do not leave the school, but enter on a fresh term of two years, and, on passing a further technical examination, at the end of that period are gazetted as full lieutenants to their branch of the service. The education and training are said to be excellent, and the cost is so reasonable that many persons send their sons to be educated there without any real intention of putting them in the army.

Close to the military school at Ixelles is the School of War, which is the Belgian equivalent of the English Staff College. Its system of instruction has a good reputation on the Continent, and many officers from the smaller States, such as Roumania and Denmark, attend its classes. The course covers three years, and is very severe. Only the successful candidates who pass with honours, and who are under thirty-five years of age at the time of passing out, get direct staff appointments. The others who succeed in passing the examination

without honours, or who are over thirty-five, return to their regiments with the additional designation of "*adjoint d'état major.*" They are eligible for special appointments, and in the event of there being vacancies in the General Staff, which would probably happen on mobilisation, these adjuncts become eligible for the posts. As a rule, there are less than fifty officers serving on the staff, and over two hundred qualified serving with their regiments.

In the opinion of competent foreign critics, Belgian officers are very thoroughly trained in the theory of their profession, and their technical knowledge is good. Physically, they give the impression of being rather delicate, and this impression is heightened by their generally wearing an overcoat tightened at the waist by a belt. The neglect under which all military matters in Belgium have languished for over thirty years, until quite recently, has diminished the martial spirit of an army which obtained little or no popular recognition, and which by the international status of the country has had no opportunity of distinguishing itself in real war. And yet there have been and still are, some very earnest and competent officers in the higher ranks of the Belgian army, dating only from 1830. The two generals Van der Smissen and Chazal, among those who have gone over to the majority, would have reached high rank in any army on their merits. Among those of a more recent period, General

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Brialmont stood in his time at the head of the world's military engineers, and General Nicaise, although less widely known, is scarcely less competent in his own sphere as an artilleryist. Of younger men, General Wahis, late Colonel of the Grenadiers, has done admirable organising work since he distinguished himself by his gallantry in Mexico, and Baron Dhanis and Commandant Chaltin have conducted several successful expeditions in Central Africa under great difficulties. In old days the Belgian races, and especially the Walloons, produced many excellent military chiefs in the service of Spain and Austria, and, were the army converted into a truly national force, there can be no doubt that their military spirit would revive. At present there is something unreal about the military resources of Belgium. They have been kept not only suppressed, but concealed. Circumstances are changing, and they will have to be displayed in the light of day. After so long a period of inaction and uselessness, it is not surprising that a good deal of renovation and re-organisation has to be done.

Although the army of a neutral State has necessarily few opportunities of distinction, it has the definite obligation of defending the country to which it belongs, no less than any other national force. When the Franco-Prussian war broke out, the Belgian army was mobilised for the defence of the southern frontier. The northern route, unfortunately selected by supreme authority for

Marshal MacMahon's army in its advance from Chalons to Metz, brought the combatants into close proximity to Belgian territory. The Belgian army, numbering in this quarter about fifty thousand men, under the command of the Count of Flanders and General Chazal, was drawn up along the northern bank of the Semois. After the battle of Sedan, a considerable number of French fugitives, and some of their Prussian pursuers, crossed into Belgium, and were promptly disarmed. No unpleasantness was occasioned between the Belgians and the Prussians, and the discipline of the Belgian army was highly praised. At that period the armament of the Belgians was quite as good as that of the French. It was probably due to the impression then produced that a proposition was made by France, and supported by England, in December, 1876, when the Eastern question was threatening trouble, that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be occupied on a European mandate by six thousand Belgian troops. Apart from the incidents of 1870, the only opportunity Belgian troops have had of distinguishing themselves was in 1866, when a Belgian contingent under General Van der Smissen went to Mexico to support the Emperor Maximilian, and earned a good deal of credit in several actions.

The pay of the Belgian officer is not very high, but he seems able to live upon it. Promotion is slow—on an average it takes twenty years to become a captain—and the prizes of the profession

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are few, and these are allotted in strict order of seniority. Still, Belgian officers give the impression of being fairly well contented with their profession. It is perhaps for this reason that so few of them volunteer for service in the Congo State, the public force of which is mainly officered from the ranks of the non-commissioned officers at home. An officer's life is not very hard. He has a great deal of spare time; his uniform obtains for him a certain amount of popular consideration, and his prospects, if limited and slow, are sure. His relations with his men are generally satisfactory, as it is not the practice in Belgium to work the young conscripts too hard. The order of the day is to deal leniently with them, so that the army may be rendered more popular in the country, and in the hope that those who pass through it may go back to civil life, and report that their stay in the army was not so hard and bad as many political agitators declare. The Belgian discipline is not Prussian. The brutal officer and still more brutal drill-sergeant are unknown in the army of Belgium.







## CHAPTER XXI

### COLONIES AND COLONIAL ASPIRATIONS

THE colonial aspirations of the Belgian people, or at least of their rulers, are much older than the founding of the Congo State in 1884. As long ago as 1843 the first King Leopold declared that it was "necessary to organise regular relations with distant countries" for the benefit of Belgian trade, and he suggested that "a Company on the model of the Ostend Company of the eighteenth century would render the greatest services to the country." At that time Belgian aspirations turned chiefly in the direction of Central America, and an expedition, half military and half commercial, was despatched in the year named to found a Belgian colony in Guatemala. No practical result followed from this attempt, the history of which is contained in a number of military reports that have been quite forgotten.

The subject of colonial expansion was revived in 1860, after the return in 1859 of the present King, then Duke of Brabant, from a tour in the Far East. It is said that he had formed a plan for establishing a Belgian colony in the island of



Formosa, and concentrating the efforts of his countrymen on the development of that beautiful island, which the Japanese are now slowly but surely accomplishing. There were other projects besides, but none took any practical form until the present King's attention was turned to Central Africa by the general desire of all civilised peoples to put an end to the horrors of the slave trade. The Pope took a prominent part in initiating what has been called a modern crusade, and the declamations of the eloquent Cardinal Lavignerie nowhere made a deeper impression than at Brussels. The psychological moment had arrived for giving a definite bent to Belgian aspirations for securing a special outlet of their own in a colonial possession. Time and circumstances were to give the turn to the enterprise, which, encouraged by religious and philanthropic zeal, was destined to endow the Belgian people with one of the finest and largest colonial possessions in the world.

It is not necessary to give in great detail the story of the founding of the Congo State, but a summary of the main facts will be found useful. In 1876, King Leopold summoned a Geographical Conference at Brussels, basing his invitation on the ground that there was a generally prevalent desire throughout Christendom to "abolish slavery in Africa, to pierce the darkness that still envelops that part of the world, and to pour into it the treasures of civilisation." The conference was duly held, and as its result "The International

Association for the Exploration and Civilisation of Central Africa" was formed. Four expeditions were successively equipped for the purpose of commencing operations on the scene, and it will give the reader an idea of how completely the situation has altered since that date to state that the base of these expeditions was on the East Coast, in the territory of the Sultan of Zanzibar. The result of these efforts was the founding of the two stations of Karema and Mpala on the lake Tanganyika; but long before this success was achieved the centre of interest had shifted elsewhere.

Very soon after the Brussels Conference, Mr. (now Sir) H. M. Stanley reached the mouth of the Congo River, after his wonderful journey across Central Africa. His description of the great inland waterway, stretching across three parts of the Continent and only cut off from the Atlantic by a hundred miles of cataracts, electrified the world. He declared that "the Power which makes herself mistress of the Congo must absorb, despite the cataracts, all the commerce of the immense basin which expands itself behind that river." No Power then came forward to claim the prize; when England signed the treaty with Portugal seven years later it was too late. The King of the Belgians had been much struck by Mr. Stanley's statement. He invited him to Brussels, induced him to enter his service, and founded a new association for exploring the Upper Congo. This enterprise was strictly Belgian and

contained the real germ of the Congo State. Finally, Mr. Stanley agreed to lead an expedition for the purpose of establishing stations or block-houses along the Congo River. Great care had to be taken in sparing the susceptibilities of the Portuguese, who held the mouth of the river.

The expedition under Mr. Stanley numbered ten Europeans, of whom five were Belgians, and one hundred and forty blacks, recruited by himself. The first station was founded at Vivi, the highest point to which boats could get below the cataracts. A road was then constructed from Vivi to Isanghila, at which place navigation again became possible as far as Manyanga, where river navigation ceases until Stanley Pool is reached. Having conveyed his river steamers in sections across the district called after the cataracts, Stanley put them together on the lake just named, and proceeded up the river to establish a line of posts. In the course of five years he completed a chain from Leopoldville to Stanley Falls. Extensive explorations had also been carried on by the despatch of steamers up the great tributaries of the Congo. In this manner much of Central Africa had been brought under the influence of the Belgians, but the measures had been carried on in an unofficial manner, and no one could say exactly what was the status of the Association. Portugal still held the coast, and its pretensions over the *hinterland* had never been withdrawn. Yet there could not be a doubt in any one's mind that that

Power had lost for ever the reversion of Central Africa which it had so long cherished.

The Anglo-Portuguese Convention of February 7, 1884, was an attempt to establish Portuguese supremacy, and it had an unfortunate fate. In March of the same year the French Government declared it would not be bound by it, and in April Germany followed suit. In June the two Powers went further, and agreed that the Congo should be placed under international control. Although England was quite in the wrong, and showed gross diplomatic ineptitude, this rebuff was a most unpleasant experience. An Anglo-Portuguese Convention concluded on the morrow of Stanley's return in 1876 would have had some justification and chance of success, but in 1884 it was useless and impracticable. It was also too late.

Before France and Germany came to their agreement in June, the status of the Congo Association had improved. On April 22, 1884, the United States recognised it as a properly constituted State, and France followed the example the next day. For her complaisance France, however, required and obtained some compensation. The Congo Association entered into the following obligation towards France, viz., that "it would never cede its possessions to another Power without a prior understanding with France, and that if it were compelled to alienate any of its territory France should have the right of pre-emption." In November, Germany also recognised the new

State, and immediately afterwards Prince Bismarck issued invitations for a conference at Berlin for the purpose of regulating the African question. It is important to remember that the Congo State had been recognised as a State by three Great Powers before the Berlin Conference. The Conference lasted from November, 1884, to February, 1885, and concluded with an Act proclaiming the neutrality of the Congo territory and freedom of trade and navigation therein. Before that Act was signed the Congo Association had been recognised by all the Powers as a State, and thus became the Free or Independent State of the Congo. Separate treaties with the adjacent States defined the limits of its sovereign authority. The most important of these was the one with Portugal, for it secured the outlet to the sea, together with possession of the ports of Banana and Boma, which was indispensable for the development of the State. Another important treaty was signed with France in 1887, by which the right of pre-emption, already referred to, was waived as against Belgium. By this arrangement the reversion of the Congo State to Belgium became possible, and when in 1890 the King published his will, bequeathing the Central African State to his country after his death, it became clear that one of his chief motives throughout had been to endow Belgium with a colony.

France's right of pre-emption has been mentioned, and as it has been frequently recalled during



the recent discussions on the subject of the administration of the Congo State, it is desirable to record some facts which would have to be taken into account if at any time an attempt were made to give it force. This right of pre-emption was given as the price for the recognition by France of the Congo Association as a State. It was of the nature of a private agreement between two parties. It certainly tied the hands of the Congo State, but internationally its validity could not be binding on Governments which were no party to it. Germany would certainly not recognise it, and neither would England, once the anti-Congolese mania had abated. Indeed, to let France acquire the best part of Africa must appear too absurd to any one who will give the subject five minutes' consideration. But there is another point. The would-be donors of the Congo State to France overlook the meaning of the word pre-emption. Pre-emption implies purchase; it does not warrant spoliation and robbery. The present value of the Congo State at a moderate computation is forty millions sterling. Are the French people willing to pay a milliard for it? If they are, perhaps business might yet be done.

This possession, which for over eighteen years has been governed as a separate monarchy by King Leopold, covers an area of 900,000 square miles, and contains a population which has been variously estimated, but which cannot be less than 20,000,000. The cost of the creation of the State



was defrayed by the King out of his private fortune, and is said to have exceeded a million sterling. It was not until the second Brussels Conference, in 1890, that the State obtained the right to levy taxes and impose customs duties. The revenue in that year was less than £20,000, and the expenditure seven times as great. It was impossible to expect such a state of things to continue. It could only result in a financial catastrophe. The new powers conferred by the Brussels Act raised the annual revenue gradually to about £360,000 in 1897, and since that year it has shown a steady annual increase, until the Budget of 1903 anticipated a revenue of £1,100,000, which has been more than realised. It is only within the last three years, however, that an equilibrium has been established between payments and receipts. After some anxiety and a long struggle the Government of this great Central African dominion can now be described as paying its way.

During the last twelve years the trade of the Congo State has made marked progress, considering that the only railways actually working are the line traversing the cataracts district to Leopoldville and a short railway through the Mayumba district behind Boma. The export trade has risen from half a million sterling in 1895 to nearly two millions in 1902, while the imports have shown equal proportional progress, being now computed at nearly one and a half millions. This total will necessarily increase with the progress of railway

construction in the interior, and it may be mentioned that many schemes have been officially sanctioned, and some are in progress. Rubber is the chief Congo export. The total value of the African rubber sold on the Antwerp market was about £800,000 until 1902, when it nearly doubled, reaching in that year a total of five thousand tons, worth, say, £1,500,000. These figures sufficiently dispose of the absurd story that the present King clears a million a year out of this article, for the rubber is the property of companies, whose shares, largely held by Belgians, are quoted at high premiums. Moreover, the Belgian Foreign Minister has solemnly declared that all receipts from the *domaine privé* and the Crown domain are passed into the public accounts.

Belgium has thus acquired the claim to the possession of a vast colony, which enjoys present prosperity and promises to become more valuable every year. She is thus the Colonial Power that she first aspired to be in 1843. It has been said that the Belgians would be wiser to attend to the home affairs of their little country and not enter into dangerous competitions beyond the seas. But when the little country by its own energy has raised itself into the position of the fourth trading and manufacturing country of Europe, it has reason to think otherwise. It has just as much right to found colonies, if it can do so, as other nations. What has really passed away is the pretension that because it is a little State it

can be allowed privileges that are withheld from great States. By much cleverness and the good fortune without which cleverness may go empty-handed, the Congo State has been founded as, practically speaking, a Belgian colony. It has many enemies and detractors, and not the least of the operating motives is envy that so large a part should have fallen to Belgium in the scramble for Africa. The Belgians will have some day or other to reckon with this sentiment, and the more carefully they discharge the obligations they contracted under the Acts of Berlin and Brussels the better prepared will they be to meet and repel the attack when it comes in a serious form.

There are some persons who scoff at the idea of Belgium requiring or possessing colonies. If they were to read M. Alphonse de Haulleville's exhaustive and remarkable work<sup>1</sup> on the colonising aptitudes of the Belgians they might change their tone. After tracing the colonial efforts of his race from the dawn of history down to the efforts of the Ostend Company in the eighteenth century to obtain its share of the trade with India, the author makes these two declarations—"the Belgians, as proved by their past, know how to colonise," and "their necessities caused by the plethora of a dense population compel them to colonise unless

<sup>1</sup> *Les Aptitudes Colonisatrices des Belges et la Question Coloniale en Belgique*, par A. de Haulleville, 1898. The author is the son of the late well-known publicist in Belgium, Baron Prosper de Haulleville.

they are prepared to perish as a nation, or at least behold their existing prosperity depart." It is not merely the continued remarkable increase in the Belgian population, until it is not far short of seven millions, besides the million or over said to be resident in France; but the appreciation of the fact that Belgian trade with its neighbours in Europe has been stationary for the last seven or eight years that has compelled thoughtful Belgians to turn all their attention to extending the national trade by every means beyond the sea. It is thus necessity as much as ambition that has compelled the Belgians to take up seriously the question of colonies and colonial trade.

There is one serious obstacle in the way of any extensive Belgian colonisation, and that is the popular aversion to emigration. "Home's best" is still the Flemish motto, and there is the greatest difficulty in obtaining volunteers for the Congo, although the Belgians resident in the whole of that vast territory do not reach fifteen hundred. How far the pinch of want when it comes may drive the Belgians to seek a new home in those portions of Central Africa which may hereafter be declared suitable for European residents remains to be seen. No such movement to any part of the world has yet revealed itself in Belgium. But if the Belgians object to emigrating they have no objection to exporting their manufactures, and in that sense they appreciate the Congo State as an outlet for their commercial products. If they have

any pronounced sentiment in the matter, it is only the disappointment that it has not proved a larger and more profitable outlet. One million and a half's worth of exports to a region that is in their actual possession does not seem a large part of a total export trade of 127,000,000. As an outlet for Belgian manufactures the value of the Congo lies more in the future than in the present. But it is different with regard to the exports from Central Africa itself. There a definite source of national wealth has been obtained. Among the advantages to be derived from colonial possessions, M. de Haulleville very rightly lays stress on the importance of their producing the raw material which the possessing State knows how to convert into the manufactured article needed by the European market.

This result has already been produced in the case of caoutchouc, or the rubber plant of the Congo region. In 1886 the export of caoutchouc was valued at only £6000; in 1902 it exceeded £750,000, and in 1903 it reached £1,500,000. It is impossible to state what is the ultimate sale value of the manufactured articles produced from this supply of raw material. Formerly Brazil was the chief if not the only source of supply, but to-day the price of Congo rubber on the Antwerp market helps to regulate the value of this article on the Continent. It has been declared that the rubber bearing lianas (*Landolphia florida*) will soon be exhausted, but there does not seem to be



any justification for this statement. In the early stages of the exploitation wasteful methods were in practice, but these have long been suppressed, and the greatest care is taken to preserve the lianas.

The possession of the Congo territory, unduly large as many of its critics pronounce it to be for a small State like Belgium, does not satisfy Belgian aspirations. In Siam and Persia considerable activity has been shown and Belgian subjects are placed in good positions to promote the commercial and political objects of their country. But it is not probable that in these States Belgian activity includes any scheme for founding a colony. Morocco is another country with a stormy present and an uncertain future upon which Belgian attention has been fixed for a good many years.

It is, however, China that has attracted the largest measure of notice, and that appeals most to the aspirations of the colonial school in Belgium. The acquisition of the contract for the trunk line from Peking to Hankow in 1898 was a marked success, although achieved with the joint participation of France, and with the alleged cooperation or connivance of the Russian Government acting under the cloak of the Russo-Chinese Bank. It has naturally whetted the appetite for further successes of the same kind, and a strenuous effort was long made to obtain a share of the so-called Anglo-American concession for the Canton-Hankow line, which is the southern section of the line now in course of construction from Pek-



ing. The effort has met with success, and quite recently it has been stated that the northern section of this line has passed into Belgian hands. It is also declared that the Belgians possess altogether not less than fifty concessions in China. These contracts mean large orders for Belgian manufacturers of rails, engines, and other railway material, and they probably represent a greater immediate profit than a year's export trade to the Congo. As Belgian interests in China have assumed such importance, and promise to acquire still more, it is not surprising to learn that the Belgian Government thinks that there should be a Belgian concession in one, or more than one, Chinese trading port. Some time ago Belgian concessions were marked out both at Tientsin and at Hankow, but for some unspecified reason possession has not yet been taken of these sites. A diplomatic difficulty appears to have supervened as to the exact status of Belgium internationally as "a neutral State." The Congo State is just as much pledged to neutrality in Africa as Belgium herself is in Europe, but the exact status of Belgian territorial possessions in China has been deemed obscure. It is now declared that all difficulties with regard to the Belgian concession at Tientsin have been overcome. Leaving this and other cognate matters to be solved by time, it is sufficient to note that the colonising idea has taken deep root in the minds of intelligent Belgians who think, with M. de Hauville, that

“colonisation is the only safety of the communities upon whom their very prosperity inflicts plethora.” It is quite true that there is another class of Belgians who shrink from the effort required by emigration and who shudder at the very name of the Congo because they believe going there to be synonymous with death. But these timid persons have not prevented the more robust part of the nation from accomplishing what has been accomplished, and no doubt the movement will become a more marked feature than before in the external development of Belgium. There is no reason why this tendency should excite any adverse criticism or meet with any opposition in England, so long as it remains perfectly clear that the Belgians are carrying out their own legitimate business and are not making themselves the tools of other countries whose main object is to injure England. This is a pitfall that the Belgians will have to avoid carefully, and there will be the less excuse for them if they fail to do so, as they are perfectly aware of the suspicions already entertained about their being too subservient to Russia in both China and Persia. These suspicions may be quite baseless, and if so they will soon pass away, but should they be confirmed, Belgian colonial aspirations would unquestionably suffer.





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