EDWARD NEVILLE VOSE

THE SPELL OF FLANDERS

Edward Vose

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Vose E.

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Содержание

Edward Neville Vose
The Spell of Flanders / An Outline of the History, Legends and Art of Belgium's Famous Northern Provinces

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Lord Beaconsfield once said: "Flanders has been trodden by the feet and watered by the blood of countless generations of British soldiers." This famous passage—which has received a new confirmation to-day—is typical of many references among English writers and statesmen to Flanders as a general term covering all of what is now known as Belgium. Among the citizens of that brave little Kingdom, however, and among most Continental writers, Flanders is recognised as being the name of only the northern part of Belgium. Small as that country is, it has for centuries been bi-lingual, the northern portion speaking Flemish, the southern French; and for centuries the history of the Flemish provinces was as distinct from that of the Walloon province to the southward as the early history of California or Texas was from that of New England.

Although eventually united under one Government with the Walloons and with what is now Holland, it was during the long period of their semi-independence that the Flemings achieved many of the artistic and architectural monuments that have made Flanders for all time one of the most interesting regions in the world.

While this book, therefore, does not attempt to describe the whole of Belgium, it does present a pen picture of the northern part of the country as it existed almost at the moment when the devastating scourge of the Great War swept across it.

FOREWORD

This book is the record of a vacation tour in the beautiful old Flemish towns of Northern Belgium beginning in May and ending in July of the Summer of 1914. The assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo took place while our little party was viewing the mediæval houses and churches of Ghent and Audenaerde, but in the many discussions of that event to which we listened there was no whisper of the awful fate which the march of events was so soon to bring upon one of the most charming, peaceful and happy countries in the world.

Many of the descriptions in the following pages were written in or near the towns described, and within a day or so after the visit narrated. Then each old Flemish "monument" was in as perfect a state of preservation as the reverent pride and care of the Belgian populace and the learned and skilful restorations of the Belgian government could together accomplish. The fact that since these accounts were written many of these very towns have been swept by shot and shell, have been taken and retaken by hostile armies, have formed the stage upon which some of the direst tragedies of the world's greatest and most terrible war have been enacted, will—it is hoped—give them a permanent interest and value. As a painting of some famous city as it appeared many years or centuries ago is of the utmost historical interest, even though by an inferior artist, so these halting word pictures of towns that have since been wholly or partially destroyed may help the reader to recall the glories that have passed away.

In accordance with the plan described in the first chapter, the tour of Flanders followed a decidedly zigzag itinerary, frequently visiting some town more than once. The purpose of this was to follow, in a fairly chronological sequence, as far as possible, the development of Flemish history, architecture and art. The outline of the intensely fascinating history of the old Flemish communes that has been thus presented may prove of interest to many readers who have been thrilled by the superb bravery of the little Belgian army in its defence of Flanders against overwhelming odds. As these glimpses into the past clearly show, the men of Belgium have engaged in a battle against foreign domination from the earliest ages. That it was at times a losing struggle never for a moment diminished the ardour of their resistance, or the depth of their devotion to liberty and the right to rule themselves. And when we consider how, during these centuries of conflict, and in defiance of obstacles that would have daunted a less strong-hearted people, the men of Flanders found the inspiration, the patience and the skill to erect some of the noblest examples of mediæval architecture, to create a school of painting that ranks as one of the most priceless heritages of the ages, and to excel in a half a score of other lines of artistic endeavour, we surely must all agree that here is a people we would not willingly see perish from the earth.

If to be neutral is to stand by and silently acquiesce in the destruction of Belgium as an independent nation, then the author of this book is not neutral. In every fibre of his being he protests against such a course as a crime against liberty, against humanity. Happily, from every corner of the United States come unmistakable evidences that the American people as a whole are not, at heart, neutral on this subject. The embattled farmers who stood on the bridge at Concord and fired "the shot heard round the world" have thrilled the imagination and stimulated the patriotism of every American schoolboy, but no less heroic is the spectacle of the little Belgian army under the personal leadership of its noble King standing like a rock on the last tiny strip of Belgian soil and stopping the onrush of the most powerful fighting organisation in the world. At Nieuport and Dixmude and along the bloodstained Yser Canal, the men of Belgium fought for the same cause of liberty for which our forefathers fought at Bunker Hill. Whatever our sympathies may be with respect to the larger aspects of the great world war—and as to these we may most properly remain neutral—our national history and traditions, the very principles of government to which we owe "all that we have and are," cannot but confirm us in the profound conviction that no conclusion to this war can be just and right,

or permanent, that does not once more restore the Belgian nation and guarantee that it shall remain completely and forever free.

On the other hand, while news of the damage done to some famous Flemish church or Hotel de Ville causes the author sensations akin to those that he would experience on learning of the wounding of a friend, this book will contain no complaint regarding German destruction of these monuments of architecture. At Ypres and Malines, where the havoc wrought cannot fail to have been fearful, the damage was done in the course of battles in which the most powerful engines of destruction ever invented by man were used on both sides. Much as we may deplore the results, we cannot blame the individual commanders. At Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges and many other famous Flemish cities the Germans appear to have made every effort to avoid wanton destruction and preserve the most notable historic edifices. After the war is over and we have learned exactly what structures have been destroyed, and under what circumstances, we can justly place whatever blame may attach to such a catastrophe where it belongs—but not until then. For the present we can only hope that the damage may be less than has been reported, and that in many instances it will be possible for the Belgians —so skilful in the work of restoration—to reconstruct the sections of famous buildings that have been damaged.

When the war is over many thousands of Americans and English will be eager to visit the battle-fields of Flanders and see for themselves the scenes of conflicts that will forever hold a great place in human history. The author ventures to hope that this little book may be found serviceable to such tourists as it contains much information not to be found in any guide book. If it aids any of them —or any of the far larger host of travellers whose journeys in far-off lands must be made by their home firesides—to understand Flanders better it will have achieved its purpose. It is one of the many ironies of the war that towns like Ypres and Malines, which were rarely visited by American tourists when they were in their perfection, will, no doubt, be visited by thousands now that the clash of arms has brought them at the same moment destruction and immortal fame.

Edward Neville Vose.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCING FLANDERS AND THE FOUR PILGRIMS

"Flanders! Why, where is Flanders?"

"There! I told you she'd ask that question. You'll have to start right at the beginning with her, and explain everything as you go along."

We were planning our next vacation tour in Europe, which we had long before agreed to "do" together this year. That meant a party of four—the "Professor," as I always called him, and his charming young wife, my wife, and myself. Like the plays in which the characters appear on the stage in the order that their names are printed on the programme, the arrangement I have just given is significant. The Professor is always first, a born leader-of-the-way. And I am usually last, carrying the heavy bundles.

Not that I am complaining. No doubt I was born to do it. Moreover, the Professor and I have been chums since boyhood. We worked our way through "prep" school and college together, came to New York together, and—in a modest way—have prospered together. At least, we felt prosperous enough to think of going to Europe. For some years he has been the head of the department of history in an important educational institution within the boundaries of the greater city, while I have devoted myself to journalism—and am therefore dubbed "the Editor," whenever he wishes to refer to me as a personage instead of a human being, which, happily, is not very often. Of the two ladies in the proposed party I do not need to speak—not because there is nothing to say, but because they can speak for themselves. In fact, one of them has just spoken, has asked a question, and it has not yet been answered.

"Flanders, my dear," said the Professor, speaking in his most sententious manner—as if delivering a lecture in his classroom—"is the most interesting and the least visited corner of Europe. It has more battle-fields and more Gothic churches per square mile than can be found anywhere else. In other parts of Europe you can see mediæval houses, here and there—usually in charge of a smirking caretaker, with his little guidebook for sale, and hungrily anticipating his little fee. In Flanders there are whole streets of them, whole towns that date from the sixteenth century or earlier—but for the costumes of the people, you could easily imagine yourself transported by some enchantment back to the days of Charles the Bold, or even to the time of the Crusaders."

"Yes," I added, "and there is no region in the world where the history of the past seems more real, more instinct with the emotions that govern human conduct to-day, than these quaint old Flemish towns. You stand in front of a marble skyscraper on Fifth Avenue and read a bronze tablet that tells you that here the Revolutionary forces under old Colonel Putnam, or whoever it was, delayed the advancing British and covered General Washington's retreat. Now, does that tablet help you to reconstruct your history? No, you are quite aware that the fight took place when Fifth Avenue was open country, but your imagination will not work when you try to make it picture that scene for you right there on Fifth Avenue where the tablet says it happened.

"Now, it's different in Flanders. You read in the history about how the burghers of Bruges, when the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, tried to overawe the city by placing an army of archers in the market-place, swarmed out of their houses and down the narrow, crooked streets like so many angry bees. There are the same old houses, the identical narrow, crooked streets—a bit of an effort and you can picture it all—and how the Duke and his archers were driven back and back, while the burghers swarmed in ever increasing numbers, and the great tocsin in the belfry shrieked and clanged to tell the valiant weavers that their liberties were in danger.

"And take that other famous event, when they flung the murderers of Count Charles the Good —who lived and died five hundred years before the other Prince who, like him, was surnamed "the Good"—from the tower of the very cathedral in which they had murdered him. Why, you can climb the tower and look off across the same sea of red-roofed houses and down upon the same square, paved with cruelly jagged stones, as did the condemned men when, one by one, they were led to the edge of the parapet and sent hurtling down."

"The point is well taken," interrupted the Professor, "only that particular church is no longer standing—it was destroyed during the French Revolution. But really that makes little difference—there are plenty of other towers in Bruges that have witnessed stirring scenes. And all over Flanders it is the same way—nothing is easier than to make your history live again, for everywhere you have the original setting practically unchanged."

"It's all very well for you men," observed Mrs. Professor, when her husband and I paused to get our breath, "who admire, or pretend to admire, battles and executions and that sort of thing, but if there is nothing else to see except places with such dreadfully unpleasant associations I, for one, don't want to go there."

"On the contrary," I hastened to reply, seeing that the Professor was much disturbed at this unexpected result of all our eloquence, "Flanders has a lot of things to interest the ladies. Think of its famous laces and lacemakers—we can still find the latter at work in places like Bruges, Malines and Turnhout—of its rare old tapestries from Audenaerde and Tournai, and the fine linens of Courtrai. Then there are wood carvings the like of which you will travel far to see, and old Flemish furniture everywhere."

"To say nothing of the pleasure of learning a little more about the great Flemish school of art in the very home towns of its most celebrated artists," added the Professor, who was much elated to see that the frowns were leaving the fair face of his better half.

"That's much better," she announced. "I've always thought fine hand-made lace the most wonderful product of feminine patience and skill, and I should certainly love to watch them make it."

"For my part," remarked the fourth member of the party, who had been strangely silent during all this discussion, "while I like to learn a little about the history of the old towns I visit, and see the fine things—whether paintings, or town-halls, or lace or tapestry—for which they are famous, what I like the best is to study the people themselves. I mean the live ones, not those who are dead and gone that our husbands are talking about. I love to sit on the sidewalk on pleasant evenings and have dinner and black coffee while watching the people of the town go by. It's better than a play. And on rainy days there is always some quaint old-fashioned inn or café where the whole scene looks like a painting by Jordaens or Teniers. The beamed ceiling and the pictures on the walls are grimy with the smoke and steam of countless dinners, the buxom landlady sits in state behind an array of bottles of all sizes and colours and labelled at all prices, her equally plump daughters wait on the tables, the very guests—including ourselves—form a part of the picture. Why, it makes me want to be back there again, just to think of it!"

"The Madame is right!" exclaimed the Professor heartily—all of our friends call my wife "the Madame" because she speaks French as fluently as English. "Our first object on this trip will be pleasure. A little knowledge of the history of Flanders, of tapestry and lacemaking, of architecture and art, may enhance our enjoyment of what we see, because we will thereby understand it better and appreciate its interest or beauty more keenly. But we are not going over as historical savants, or as authorities on art—or pretend that we know any more about such subjects than we really do—"

"Which is just enough to enable us to derive sincere pleasure from seeing them, and having them explained to us, without troubling our heads about this, that or the other element of technique," I interrupted, completing the Professor's sentence for him.

"And the best part of the day will be, just as Madame says," added Mrs. Professor gaily, "the dinners on the sidewalks, where we can watch the people as they go about and tell each other of what we have seen since morning. And, hurray! for the Flemish inns!"

"Well, as to Flemish inns," observed the Madame, "what I said related to eating a dinner in one. When it comes to sleeping in them there are other things to think of besides beamed ceilings and picturesque interiors.

"A few years ago we had an experience at Antwerp that taught us the folly of arriving at a great continental city late at night without having hotel accommodations secured in advance. We had started at eight in the morning from Hamburg, intending to stop at Antwerp just long enough to transfer our belongings to a train for Brussels that, according to the time-table, would leave fifteen minutes after our train arrived. Now, from Hamburg to Antwerp is quite a long ride—short as the distance looks on the map—and when we finally arrived at our destination, half an hour late, it was long after midnight and our train for Brussels had gone.

"We were both tired out, and hastily decided that we would put up at Antwerp for the night and go on to Brussels in the morning. As we emerged from the great Gare Centrale we found despite the lateness of the hour, about a dozen red-capped hotel runners, each of whom clamoured for our patronage. They all looked very much alike, the names on their caps meant nothing to us as we were not familiar with the Antwerp hotels, and we selected one at random. To our dismay we discovered, when it was too late, that, whereas most of them had hotel busses in waiting—into which they leaped and were driven off—our cicerone was not so provided. He attempted to reassure us by saying that the Grand Hotel de – was close by—a fact that produced the opposite effect from that intended, as we knew that the immediate vicinity of a large railroad station is seldom a desirable neighbourhood.

"However, the other porters were now gone and, unless we were disposed to sleep in the station, there was nothing to do but follow along. To our further alarm our guide presently turned into a most unprepossessing street on which several drinking places were still open, or were only on the point of closing. Into one of these he led us. After a short conference with the proprietress, who was sitting behind the bar counting the day's receipts, he took a candle and a huge key and led us out into the court, then up a flight of stairs placed on the outside of the house, and through several narrow passageways. But for the flickering candle everything was completely dark, and when he finally ushered us into an immense room with a mediæval four-post bed in its darkest corner we involuntarily looked for the trap-door down which the murderous inn-keepers of the stories were wont to cast their victims.

"Lighting a pair of candles on the mantelpiece from his, and wishing us a civil '*Bon soir*,' our red-capped guide now left us—to our great relief. Although we tried to dismiss our fears as childish, we both felt more insecure and helpless than we cared to admit, even to each other. None of our friends knew that we were in Antwerp. If we disappeared they would hardly think to look for us there—and still less on this shabby street, the very name of which we did not know.

"We barricaded the door against a sudden surprise, inspected the walls with a candle for signs of the secret door (at the head of the winding stairway up which the wicked innkeeper so often creeps upon his prey, according to the chronicles) and at last, the fatigue of the day overcoming our fears, we slept. It was broad daylight when we awoke, and the street was alive with people—mostly cartmen and peasants it seemed. With some difficulty we found our way down to the room where we had seen the landlady the night before. She greeted us warmly, our fears of the night had fled—and we sat down and ordered, and enjoyed, a most excellent breakfast. The hotel was quite a popular one, we learned, much frequented by people from near-by towns, and we had never been safer in our lives. Yet, just the same, we both vowed firmly that 'Never Again' would we take similar chances—and we never have."

"I have thought of that incident more than once while talking over our Flemish tour with the Professor," I observed, "and have decided upon this plan. When we find a hotel that suits us all, as regards cleanliness, cuisine and safety—or rather the sense of security, for I daresay we would be safe

enough in many that we would hardly care to patronise—we will stay overnight in whatever town we may chance to be visiting. If, on the other hand, we have not had time to find such a place, we'll take a train back to Antwerp or Brussels, where there are hotels that we know all about. We'll get second-class *billets d'abonnement* every two weeks anyway, so the rail trip will only cost us our time."

"And are Antwerp and Brussels both in Flanders?" inquired Mrs. Professor. "Between you, you have given me an idea that I should like to visit Flanders, but you have none of you answered my question as to where it is."

"I think I can answer you, my dear," replied her husband. "There are, as you probably know, two little provinces in the northern part of Belgium called East and West Flanders. The boundaries of the Flanders of history and of art, however, cover a considerable wider area than these two provinces. Over in France a considerable part of the Department du Nord was for centuries subject to the Counts of Flanders. On the other side, to the eastward, the cities of Antwerp and Malines were for many centuries independent of the Counts of Flanders, but their people spoke Flemish, their houses, churches and town-halls were built in the best style of Flemish architecture, and they became famous centres of Flemish art and learning. To my mind, therefore, they both belong to Flanders. Brussels, however, while its Hotel de Ville and Grande Place are splendid examples of Flemish architecture, is more French than Flemish, and belongs to the Walloon or French part of Belgium.

"Now, as the Editor here has proposed a plan which seems to me a good one as regards our hotels, I will venture to suggest one as regards our itinerary. It will make comparatively little difference which towns we visit first, and as some are more closely identified with the early history of Flanders than the others I propose that we visit these older towns first. At the time of the Crusades Ypres, for example, had two hundred thousand inhabitants when the population of London was less than thirty-five thousand and Antwerp was an obscure little town. Nieuport and Furnes were, at that time, the chief seaports of Flanders. Now they are miles from the sea. Dixmude, near by, was another important city of those olden days. Now all these places are country villages—'the dead cities of Flanders,' they are called, and scarcely a tourist from America ever visits them, although they are fairly familiar to our English cousins.

"If we start our pilgrimage in Flanders with Bruges, which was the first capital of the County of Flanders, and with these old towns—all of which are hard by—we can plan our journeys chronologically, so to speak, visiting first the monuments that date from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, then those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and so on. In that way we not only can keep the little history we know straight, but we can trace with our own eyes the gradual development of Flemish architecture and art."

This plan was unanimously voted to be a capital one—in theory, at any rate—and thus it was that in our subsequent wanderings about Flanders, under the guidance of the indefatigable Professor, we often crossed our trail, and now and then visited the same place more than once. In practice it did not accomplish quite all that was expected of it by its learned originator—but what plan ever does, or ever will? That it enhanced the interest of the trip manyfold we all agreed; it often sustained our flagging zeal, and it helped us to know Flanders—the Flanders of the past especially—far better than we would have done in any other way.

CHAPTER II
VIEUX BRUGES AND COUNT BALDWIN OF THE IRON ARM

It is not the purpose of this veracious chronicle to recount the doings and sayings, the incidents or lack of incident, on the voyage across. Suffice it to say that in due season the good ship *Lapland* turned its prow away from the white cliffs of Dover and straight toward the low-lying shores of Flanders. As she crossed the North Sea scores of fishing boats with brown sails hovered around her, while throngs of seagulls soared overhead, or now and then dashed madly into her foaming wake to grasp some morsel flung from deck or porthole, or fight fiercely with each other for its possession. Presently, in the haze ahead, a faint outline of land could be distinguished, and soon we could see through our glasses the heaped up dunes that mark the battle line between the North Sea and the fertile Flemish polders behind them. Here and there the shore was strengthened by rows of pilings to keep the waves of Winter from washing it away. As a "sight," however, it was dreary and uninviting enough—not at all like the picturesque headlands of Merrie England we had been looking at only a few hours before.

Now, for a time, the ship kept its course parallel to the shore, but at a distance of a mile or more. Gradually the coast became more inhabited, and soon we could see a row of stone and brick buildings facing directly on the beach which some one said was Blankenberghe. No doubt there were other rows of houses behind the first, but either they were lower, or in the haze our glasses could not distinguish them. Then the panorama of the Flemish coast unrolled a little further and we saw the long curved breakwater of Zee-Brugge, with its white lighthouse. This is an artificial port connected with the ancient capital of Flanders by a ship canal. Entrance to the canal from the sea is effected by a large lock which was faintly visible. Another beach city, Heyst, next appeared—the ship seeming to stand still while the shoreline marched slowly past. Then came a smaller place, which from our maps we concluded must be Knocke. Here the coastline of the present Kingdom of Belgium ends, the little River Zwyn—once famous as the channel up which one hundred and fifty ships a day made their way to Bruges in the days of its greatness—forming the boundary.

The Dutch are apparently not interested in sea bathing, for there were no more watering places. In fact the whole coast seemed to be dead and deserted, and we were glad when the *Lapland* began to turn her prow inland. We were now in the broad estuary of the Scheldt, and soon the tiny city of Flushing appeared. It was over on the other side of the ship and we all scampered across to take our first "near look," as Mrs. Professor expressed it, of the land we had come to see—for Flushing belonged for centuries to the great overlords of Flanders, the Dukes of Burgundy and their successors. It looked very small and compact from the towering deck of the big liner, but also very quaint and interesting, and we all agreed that as a sample of what we had come so far to see it was the reverse of disappointing.

Soon the propellers of the *Lapland* began to revolve again and the little Dutch city slowly slipped out of sight in the fast gathering gloom of a coming shower. As night came on the engines presently came to rest once more and we anchored to await daylight and flood tide which, the officers said, would come together. At four o'clock the following morning the Professor and I were on deck in order to miss as little as possible of the voyage up the "greyest of grey rivers," as the Scheldt has been called. The *Lapland* had started while we were asleep, and we were already in Belgium. This circumstance disappointed the Professor not a little as he had set his heart on seeing the remains of the Dutch forts at the boundary line that for nearly one hundred and fifty years—from the Treaty of Munster in 1648 to the French occupation in 1794—closed the river to ocean commerce. Meanwhile, grass grew in the streets of the all but deserted city of Antwerp. The French tore down the hated forts and for

nearly forty years the ships from oversea went up the river unmolested. Then came the Revolution of 1830 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Belgium, whereupon the Dutch proceeded to impose heavy navigation duties upon all ships passing through the lower part of the river. While this did not stifle the trade of Antwerp, it seriously crippled it, since the duties formed a handicap in the keen competition for traffic between the Belgian port and those of Holland and Germany farther to the eastward. It was not until 1863 that the Belgian Government was able to arrange a treaty whereby all river dues were abolished in return for the payment of a lump sum of 36,000,000 francs—of which only one-third was paid by Belgium, as other powers were interested in obtaining freedom of navigation on this important river and gladly contributed the remainder. The imposing monument by Winders on the Place Marnix at Antwerp, which was erected in 1883, commemorates this important event, to which the port owes its present prosperity.

As the *Lapland* slowly steamed up the river we could look down from her lofty decks upon the broad and intensely cultivated plain, stretching as far as eye could penetrate in the misty distance. Here and there we could see compact little groups of farm buildings, usually arranged around a central courtyard and with their outer walls well-nigh windowless, as if the peasant proprietors still counted on the possibility of a siege such as their ancestors no doubt often had to sustain against the wandering marauders and freebooters who for centuries infested the country. Along every road and canal, and beside nearly every cross-country path, we could see long lines of trees set out at regular intervals and cutting the landscape into sections of varying sizes and shapes. Now and then a little hamlet could be seen, with its red-tiled roofs nestling close together and a tiny church steeple rising from the centre. Often the roofs of the houses nearest to the river were below the top of the high dykes which here enclose the Scheldt on either side. Close to the banks an occasional fort commanded the river —outlying links in the great chain of fortifications that was thought to be impregnable until the huge German siege guns so quickly battered it to pieces.

Presently some one with a keener vision than the rest cries that the spire of the Cathedral of Antwerp is in sight and we all crowd forward and peer eagerly through the mist until at last we make out vaguely the shape of that marvel of Flemish architecture rising above the flat plain. At each turn of the river it draws nearer and we can see more clearly its delicate tracery of lace-work carved in stone, while one by one other spires loom up through the grey dawn.

The traffic in the river becomes more dense as we proceed slowly onward—huge red-bottomed tramp steamers with their propellers half out of the water and churning furiously in a smother of foam, clumsy canal boats with Flemish or German names lying at anchor close to the banks, barges with dingy brownish sails and all manner of strange cargoes. Then, suddenly, we swing around the last turn and the entire city lies before us, its houses with their high peaks and dormer windows rising tier above tier, while at the left we catch glimpses through the lock gates of the vast inner docks with their hundreds of masts and funnels. Curiously enough the view to the right is entirely different—the green fields and farmsteads stretching in this direction from the very edge of the river as far as the eye can see.

But now we are warping up against the Red Star Line pier and all eyes are gazing down upon the motley crowd that has assembled thus early in the morning—it is not yet seven o'clock—to welcome the new arrivals from America. The customs inspection proves to be a mere formality, half of our trunks and bags are chalk-marked by the obliging inspector without lifting a tray or disturbing any of their contents. A commissionaire is waiting to bear them away to the cabs and, after generously bestowing five cents on this worthy for his trouble, we are off for the Gare Centrale—for the Madame has decreed that we must all proceed forthwith to the home of a certain Tante (Aunt) Rosa, not far from Brussels, where we can get our land legs safely on before starting on our tour under the guidance of the Professor.

Throughout the morning it has rained heavily at intervals, and as the *rapide* for Brussels steams out of the station the grey clouds are pouring down their contents in torrents. This circumstance

disturbs us not at all, for we have agreed to pursue our course regardless of the weather and are prepared for anything short of a flood or blizzard. And right here it may be as well to state that any one who proposes to travel in Flanders must make up his or her mind to ignore the vagaries of the weather altogether. At Brussels the weather records show that it rains more or less during three hundred days in each year, and while there are many days when the showers are brief, and some periods when it is clear for several days, it is better to come prepared for anything. Somewhere in the direction of the English Channel there seems to exist a vast cloud factory, for day after day one sees the huge cloud masses rolling slowly eastward or southward across the country. Usually they are high overhead, with frequent intervals of brilliant sunshine, and the showers few and far between. At other times the clouds hang low and dark and the rain falls steadily, not in furious driving showers such as occur frequently during the summer time at New York, but with a monotonous continuity that is the despair of travellers who are equipped only for fair weather. It is no exaggeration to state that one may look out of his hotel window upon a cloudless sky and find that by the time he has descended to the street it is raining. Happily the reverse is equally possible, and frequently we looked out of the window while at breakfast at pouring rain and dripping roofs, only to find by the time we were ready to go out of doors that the shower was over, the sky clear and the sidewalks nearly dry. It is this rapid alternation of showers and sunshine that makes Flanders the land of flowers and vegetables, giving the former their brilliant colouring and the latter their indescribable succulence and freshness.

Another tip for the would-be traveller in Flanders is to come well prepared for cold weather even in June, July or August. The nights are always cool, and the prevailing winds are from the north or the northwest—the former cold, the latter wet. Many Americans contract serious colds because they come clad only for hot weather. Warm underwear, on the other hand, is best for the Flemish summer climate, with overcoats and wraps for evening wear. Raincoats, it is needless to say, should be in every suitcase—even for a day's outing, while a very handy article indeed is a *parapluie-canne*, or umbrella cane, such as can be purchased in Brussels for ten francs and upwards.

In less than three-quarters of an hour our fleet train was rolling into the Gare du Nord at Brussels; but Madame was in a hurry, so we became for the time birds of passage only and in another hour were already entrained again and speeding toward the steaming dinner that she assured us la Tante Bosa had awaiting us. Of the reception that we found when we arrived at last, and of the dinner which was presently spread before us, there is no need to say more than that the latter proved to be all that we had been led to anticipate. Served in the true Belgian style—customary alike in Flanders and in the Walloon provinces—it occupied our attention for the greater part of the afternoon, the courses following one another leisurely, with intervals between during which the men folk strolled about the garden and smoked. Two days later we started on the Professor's itinerary, completely refreshed after the fatigue of our voyage; and after a bit of shopping at Brussels, our pilgrimage into the heart of Flanders began.

It was a little after noon when we reached the old city of Bruges, and while we were eating our luncheon the Professor explained briefly the origin of the city and of the County of Flanders. In order to understand the kaleidoscopic history of Flanders it is necessary to forget entirely the Europe of to-day. Throughout the Middle Ages Europe was sub-divided into hundreds of separate sovereignties—duchies, counties, principalities large and small, whose rulers bore a score of titles. These, as a rule, acknowledged allegiance to some higher prince, while the most powerful yielded deference only to some King or Emperor. But this allegiance was usually a very shadowy affair, and the actual government rested absolutely in the hands of the local Count, or Duke, or whatever else his title may have been. The history of Flanders is, therefore, in a sense, the history of its Counts, for as their power waxed or waned the country itself grew powerful or weak. Gradually, however, the great cities of Flanders acquired from the earlier and better Counts rights and privileges that made them, in many respects, sovereign powers, and the most fascinating and instructive part of the history

of Flanders is the record of the brave struggle made by its burghers to maintain their liberties in the face of a steadily advancing tide of tyranny and oppression.

The first Count of Flanders, who won his title and his domains during the period of storm and stress that followed the breaking up of the great empire of Charlemagne, was a Flemish chief, called Baldwin of the Iron Arm. He chanced one day to see Judith, the beautiful daughter of Charles the Bald, the son of Charlemagne, fell in love with her, and carried her off for his bride. Judith had been previously married to Ethelwolf, King of Wessex in England, when he was a very old man; and had taught her stepson, who afterward became Alfred the Great, much of his learning. The old King Charles, her father, for a time opposed the marriage with Baldwin, but finally it was celebrated with much splendour at Auxerre in 863, and Baldwin was thereupon given the title of Count of Flanders. On his return, Baldwin built a great fortress on an island formed by the intersection of the River Roya with its little tributary, the Boterbeke. This was called the Bourg, and soon contained within its strong walls the nucleus of the future city of Bruges.

Mrs. Professor interrupted at this point to ask if the name Bruges was derived from Bourg, to which our learned friend replied that it was not, but that most historians ascribed the name to the bridge (in Flemish, brigge) from the island to the mainland; while some take it from the purple heather (brugge) which grows plentifully hereabout, and in August can be seen alongside the railway tracks and in great clusters by the country roadsides.

The first afternoon's programme was to discover as much as we could of the old Bourg of Baldwin of the Iron Arm. Not much of it is left in the Bruges of Albert the First. The Roya still runs where it did in the days of the first Counts of Flanders, but only along the Dyver, a terrace of middle-class residences, can it be seen by the tourist. Since the eighteenth century it has been vaulted over for much of its course through the city, and the Boterbeke runs through subterranean channels for the entire distance from where it enters the city limits to its junction with the Roya at the corner of the rue Breidel. It flows close to the Cathedral, or possibly beneath it, and directly under the Belfry, which is built on piles. For part of its course it runs, like a subway, under the rue du Vieux Bourg. The only building in modern Bruges that dates from the first Baldwin's time is the crypt of St. Basil, under the Chapel of the Holy Blood. Here, or assuredly hard by, the founder of the long line of Flemish Counts, and his beautiful and talented Countess, no doubt worshipped; and, in the main, the little chapel probably looks today very much as it did a thousand years ago. In one corner, apparently outside of the original outer walls of the structure, the concierge showed us a miniature model of the ancient castle of the first Counts of Flanders as archeologists have reconstructed it, with the little Chapel of St. Basil adjoining it. On the opposite side, and near the entrance, is a smaller chapel which some authorities state was the one built by old Iron-Arm, the main structure dating from the middle of the twelfth century. Be this as it may, here is unquestionably the very oldest relic of the ancient Bourg and one of the oldest places of worship in all Flanders.

After our inspection of St. Basil we decided to devote the rest of the afternoon to tramping around the streets of the Vieux Bourg, or, in other words, the section of the city within the circle of picturesque old quays that mark the approximate boundaries of the island-fortress where the first Counts of Flanders laid the foundations of their power. To be sure, none of the houses now standing date from a much earlier period than the fifteenth century, but all were so quaint and charming that we cared little for the archeologists with their dates, and felt ourselves transported without an effort to the days when might made right and the whole world was governed by the simple law that "he may take who has the power, and he may keep who can." We little dreamed, as we journeyed about amid these peaceful surroundings, that within a single month the world was to revert to the rule of might once more; that, to quote from Kipling's noble poem, stricken Belgium, and, indeed, all civilisation could say:

"Our world has passed away,

In wantonness o'erthrown.
There's nothing left to-day
But steel and fire and stone.

"Once more we hear the word
That sickened earth of old—
'No law except the sword,
Unsheathed and uncontrolled.'"

CHAPTER III
BRUGES IN THE DAYS OF CHARLES THE GOOD

To those for whom the past possesses elements of romance, of mystery and of fascination that our more prosaic and orderly modern world lacks, Bruges offers endless opportunities for enjoyment. To be sure, the streets are a bit more crowded than they were twenty years ago, and one sees more frequent groups of people, carrying little red-backed Baedekers and evidently intent on seeing all the "sights," than formerly. But these are evils of which all old travellers complain, as one compares notes with them at the hotel after the day is over. One caretaker told us, with evident pride, that thirty thousand tourists visited Bruges in 1913. If one divides this total by three hundred and sixty-five, and the result again by the score or more of places that every tourist wants to see, it will be perceived that the number in any one place at the same time is not likely to be excessive. In point of fact our little party was almost invariably alone, save when we encountered a party of "personally conducted" travellers rushing at break-neck speed from place to place.

If, after seeing all the "points of interest" enumerated by the faithful red-coated guide, philosopher and companion above mentioned, one should stray down one or another of the narrow, crooked streets in the older parts of the town he is certain to find bits of mediæval Bruges here and there so well preserved and perfect that if the few passers-by only wore the picturesque costumes of the olden days the illusion would be complete. Take, for example, the rue de l'Ane Aveugle, the Street of the Blind Donkey, with its attenuated sidewalks along which a tight-rope walker could hardly advance without stepping off, its roadway too narrow for two blind donkeys to pass abreast, and its charming archway from the Hotel de Ville to the Maison de l'ancien Greffe Flamand; or the rue du Poivre, with its tiny one-story houses, many of them with one room down-stairs and one overhead—the latter lighted by the quaintest of gable windows—surely we have stepped backward half a dozen centuries, for nothing like this could have continued to exist until the prosaic present!

In fact these queer little one-story houses abound in all parts of the city, and the Madame was constantly darting across the roadway to peer within whenever she saw a door ajar. She generally returned highly indignant that any one could think of existing in such narrow quarters. "I'd as soon live in a tomb!" she exclaimed, nodding in the direction of one little house which consisted of one room and only one, being devoid even of the attic room with its customary dormer window. Inside sat an old lady, gazing tranquilly out of doors and doing nothing whatever. Indeed, as the Madame pointed out, there was little enough to do as far as housework was concerned. In the morning everybody in Flanders washes the stone floors of their living-rooms, and frequently the sidewalk and out to the middle of the street as well. This done, the housework for the day is over, except for preparing the meals. We had hoped to see old ladies by the score sitting at the doorways making lace, but on only one street—the rue du Rouleau—did we catch a glimpse of any, and they went indoors as we approached them. It was only the estaminets that we could inspect within. Whenever we found what appeared to be an exceptionally old house that bore the legend "Hier Verkoopt men drank" the Professor and I often used to go in and order a glass of *Vieux système*, simply to get a look at the interior. If, as sometimes happened, mijnheer and his vroue were very accommodating and kind, we summoned the ladies—despite the fact that the sign without appeared to mean "for men only"—and together we explored the old house from garret to cellar.

More than once, as we journeyed about among these delightfully old and quaint surroundings, the longing to see some one whose costume would, in a measure, suggest the period when these structures were built came back to us. "Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Professor, as we sat one afternoon in a particularly cosy corner of one of the oldest interiors we had yet seen, "if two or three knights in armour—or in their lovely costumes of velvet, silk and old lace—would stalk in and sit down at that

table over there it would make the picture complete." We found, however, one spot in Bruges, dating from the twelfth century, in which even the costumes were unchanged. This was the Béguinage, close to the Minnewater and the ancient city ramparts—a city of the past where, shut off by high brick walls from the noise and bustle of the outer world, peaceful figures clad in sombre grey and white move noiselessly about as if the big figures on the calendar read 1114 instead of 1914.

Except for two institutions of the kind in Holland, Belgium is the only country in Europe in which these Béguinages have survived—all of them in Flanders. No institution of the present day recalls so vividly the conditions that existed at the time when Flanders was the name of a wild marsh country peopled by yet wilder men. In 877 the Emperor made the title of Count of Flanders hereditary—the oldest title of the kind in Europe. Baldwin II, son of Baldwin of the Iron Arm and the beautiful Judith, married Alfrida, the daughter of Alfred the Great. The second Baldwin was renowned chiefly for his work in fortifying the towns of Bruges, Ghent, Ypres and Courtrai as a means of protection against the robber chiefs who still—despite the energetic warfare of his father—infested this entire region. The necessity for protection against robbers, and occasional incursions of savage Danes from the North Sea, caused population to flock speedily into these walled towns, and thus laid the foundation for the wonderful civic development of the next four centuries. The son of Baldwin II, Arnulph—often called Arnulph the Great—continued the policy of strengthening the cities, and also established or restored nearly a score of monasteries and convents for the protection of men and women against the many dangers of that lawless age. The famous chapter of St. Donatian's at Bruges was one of these, and while the Béguinage dates from a somewhat later epoch in the town's history, it admirably exemplifies many of the principles that made these early religious orders the strongholds, not only of piety in a period of semi-barbarism, but of learning and civilisation.

The Béguinage at Bruges is much smaller than the famous Grand Béguinage at Ghent, which so many tourists visit, but is far more ancient—its arched gateway dating from the thirteenth century and its gloomy and barn-like chapel from 1605. How old the houses are no one seemed to know, but probably many of them are older than the chapel. The little bridge by which one enters its quiet precincts was first built in 1297, of wood, according to the records, but its present picturesque stone arches date from 1570—a respectable antiquity, even for Bruges. We found several of the little houses untenanted for some reason, but even the empty ones were spotlessly clean. The Béguines live in small communities or "convents," under the superintendence of a Lady Superior called "de Juffer"; or in "houses" where two or three live together. In the convents there are usually about twenty inmates. Each has her little cell, but these we were not permitted to see. We did, however, inspect the kitchen and dining-room of one of the convents—and the large sunny workroom, in which the Béguines were assembled. Each was chatting aloud as she worked, but whether in Flemish or Latin we could not tell. On every face there rested the same expression of absolute peace and quietness, nor did a single one betray the slightest interest or curiosity at our presence.

In the early annals of Bruges no story is more dramatic than that of the murder of Charles the Good. It is, in fact, the theme of the great Flemish novelist Hendrick Conscience's most famous book, *De Kerels van Vlaanderen*, and has been told by several contemporary chroniclers. When Charles became Count of Flanders the feudal system was slowly displacing the anarchy that had resulted from the breakdown of all centralised government as the Norsemen swept over northern Europe. Charles was an ardent believer in the new order, but was opposed in his policy of building up a strong feudal state by the Karls, a class of free landholders of Saxon descent, who stubbornly refused to swear allegiance to any feudal over-lord. The greatest of these was the house of Erembald. Desiderious Hacket, the head of the family, was Châtelain of Bruges, ranking next to the Count himself; while his brother Bertulph was Provost of St. Donatian, the principal ecclesiastical position in the County, and chancellor of the Count. The head of the feudal lords was Tancmar, Lord of Straten. Between the powerful houses of Erembald and Straten there was a deadly feud, which culminated in a challenge

to mortal combat delivered to Walter, a nephew of Tancmar, by Richard de Raeske, a baron allied by marriage to the house of Erembald.

To the amazement of all Flanders the challenge, delivered in the presence of Count Charles and all his court, was refused. Walter, whom the historians call "the Winged Lie," proclaimed that he would fight only with a free man, and that the Lord of Raeske, by wedding a serf, had become a serf himself. This was in accordance with a law recently promulgated by Charles, but the house of Erembald, perceiving that its very existence was threatened by the charge, fiercely repelled the accusation and was supported not only by all of the Karls, but by most of the feudal nobility as well —the latter no doubt fearing lest one of their own houses might be attainted in a similar manner at any moment.

The country was plunged into what was virtually civil war, when Charles was suddenly summoned by his feudal over-lord, the King of France, to come to his aid at Clermont. On his return, assured of the King's powerful support, Charles undoubtedly meditated the complete overthrow of the Erembalds, whom he had steadfastly claimed as his vassals since "the Winged Lie" had denounced them as serfs. He arrived at Bruges late in the evening, and early the following day, March 1, 1127, repaired to St. Donatian to hear mass. It was a foggy morning and the Count went almost unattended. Hardly had he knelt before the altar when a party of followers of the attainted house of Erembald swarmed into the church and he was struck down before he had time to rise, much less to defend himself.

If, in his lifetime, the Count was a dangerous foe to the Erembalds, in his death he proved to be far more deadly. As his body lay on the stone floor of the great church, clad in the crimson robe the chroniclers so often allude to, and surrounded with flaming torches, the heads of the house hastily consulted as to what was to be done with it. To inter the body at Bruges would be to risk an outbreak of popular passion at the murder, and it was decided to secretly convey it away. This plan was rudely frustrated by a mob of citizens who forcibly prevented the removal of the body, which was therefore laid to rest with imposing ceremonies in the very church where the Count had been assassinated.

Meanwhile the story of the murder spread far and wide, and, in a few days, a huge host was marching on Bruges from every part of Flanders. For a time the burghers stood by the Châtelain and the Provost, but when the city was entered by stratagem and the Erembalds driven back into the Bourg the mass of the citizens went over to the side of the avengers. After a short defence the Bourg in turn was captured—its defenders failing to guard one small gate by which their enemies entered unopposed—and the remnant of the Erembalds fled into the very church that had been defiled by their kinsmen's crime, St. Donatian. Here, for a time, they were left in peace while the victors pillaged the rich palaces in the ancient Bourg.

The day before the capture of the Bourg Bertulph, the Provost managed to escape and fled to a little village near Ypres. Here, after remaining in hiding for some three weeks, he was captured. The next morning he was brought to Ypres, walking on foot all the way, although a horse was offered him. That he was going to his death he well knew, and asked for a priest to whom he confessed. The old man—who had been "a soft, luxurious prelate," proud and haughty in his days of power—made his last journey like a martyr. As the prisoner and his captors neared the gates of the city a great throng came forth to meet them, beating the Provost with their staves and fists and pelting him with the heads of fish. Arrived in the market-place he stood amid the huge jeering throng, not one of whom looked with pity on him, and there, for his greater shame, he was fastened naked to a cross like a common thief. On his refusing in a steadfast voice to reveal the names of any of those implicated in the Count's murder, "those who were assembled in the market-place to sell fish tore his flesh with their iron hooks, and beat him with rods, and thus they put an end to his days."

The news of this tragedy was brought to the little band still being besieged at St. Donatian and caused great grief and terror. Of the very considerable army of Erembalds and their partisans who had taken refuge in the Bourg only thirty now remained, most having been killed, while some no

doubt had escaped. King Louis, with a host of French knights, had joined the men of Flanders in the attack and it was seen that further resistance was hopeless. The only terms were instant surrender or instant death, and as they looked across the country from the church tower they could see no hope of succour and surrendered. After keeping them prisoners for a fortnight, Louis directed that all save one, who was of somewhat nobler lineage than the rest, should be flung from the tower of the now thrice historic St. Donatian. This sentence was duly carried out. The cruel soldiers told the condemned that they were about to receive a proof of the King's mercy and they remained ignorant of their terrible fate until, one after another, they stood on the lofty tower overlooking the city for a brief moment and were then dashed down headlong to the jagged pavement below. The bodies were denied Christian burial and thrown into a marsh outside of the city, and it is related that for many years thereafter "no man after nightfall would willingly pass that way."

The house of Erembald was well-nigh annihilated during this short, but sanguinary, war. The sole survivor of the band captured in the church was beheaded by King Louis as soon as he crossed the French frontier, while most of the great names in the family were heard of in Flanders no more —some having perished in battle, others in exile. Only one, Hacket the Châtelain, returned after the cry for vengeance had died down, was placed on trial for the murder, proved his innocence, and eventually recovered much of his former power and wealth. The charge of serfdom was never raised again, and his descendants for many generations stood high in the rolls of the Flemish nobility.

The church of St. Donatian no longer stands, having been destroyed during the French Revolution. In the small museum of antiquities in the Halles adjacent to the Belfry we were shown some stone railings, carved in imitation of rustic woodwork, that the concierge assured us had come from the ruins of the famous church. From a painting made in 1710 the student can obtain a fair idea of the appearance of the structure, which can hardly be said to have been imposing externally. It stood opposite the Hotel de Ville, and the statue of Van Eyck in the centre of the little shaded square is said to mark the spot where Charles the Good fell at the hands of his assassins. The stones with which the Cathedral was built were carried away, and some of them were used to build a château a short distance outside of the city. According to the peasants in the neighbourhood, ill-luck has always followed those who lived there. If so, the spirit of the murdered Count would seem to have been as dangerous in the nineteenth century as it was in the twelfth.

Every morning here at Bruges, and elsewhere throughout our pilgrimage, the Professor and I sallied forth between five and six o'clock to explore as many of the by-ways and quaint out-of-the-way corners as we could before breakfast. The sun rises in Belgium long before five, in fact it is light as early as three in the summer time, but we found very few people astir, and those who were up were usually engaged in the morning scrubbing of floors and sidewalks—a fact that made us keep pretty much to the middle of the road on these expeditions. Cleanliness is certainly honoured next to godliness in Belgium, for this morning ablution of the premises is universal—the big department stores at Brussels observing the custom as faithfully as the tiniest *estaminet* in the remotest hamlet. Every one, rich and poor, performs this rite, and the tourist could safely eat his breakfast off the doorstep of any house when it is over. Nor is the rest of the interior neglected, for every pot and pan that we could see within the little houses as we passed their doors shone with a lustre that bespoke perpetual polishing. On the other hand, the good vroue herself, or her maidservant, was not so clean, and it is in this respect that the people of Holland are superior, for they somehow manage to keep themselves as immaculate as their little houses.

It was at Bruges that the Professor had his first experience with the Belgian species of barber. Instead of the massive reclining chair, with which all Americans are familiar, one finds in all parts of Belgium, save the big tourist hotels and resorts, stiff little arm-chairs with immovable head rests that look as if they could never serve the purpose for which they are intended. In point of fact they do fairly well, once one becomes accustomed to them. Razors in Belgium, however, are almost invariably dull—especially with the lady barbers who abound in the smaller villages. Avoid these sirens if you

value your skin, for they certainly will slice off a bit of it. On Sundays and holidays, it appears, their husbands officiate, but week days the better half does her best to accommodate the public—but her best is none too good, and the experience is usually a painful one for the unwary tourist.

The shave over, the barber says, "S'il vous plaît, monsieur," or its equivalent in Flemish, motioning meanwhile toward a small wash basin that is placed in front of the chair. To the uninitiated this is somewhat bewildering, but the professor desires that monsieur will kindly wash his own face. The ablution performed, he proceeds to rub a piece of alum over the face, after which he sprays it with perfumed water, then dries and powders it much in the manner of the American barber. When one becomes accustomed to this performance—which costs two to three cents in the villages and five to ten cents in the large towns—he is apt to prefer it to the American method. Certainly it is vastly superior to the hot towel torture so deservedly caricatured some years ago by Weber and Fields. In the smaller villages of the industrial provinces we found that the first and second class distinction that one encounters everywhere in Belgium extends even to the barber's chair. The rough clad workman is simply shaved—a few fierce scrapes with the razor and it is all over—and is left to wipe off the remnants of lather as best he can, usually with a red bandanna handkerchief. For this the charge is only two cents—the alum, the spraying and the powder being reserved for first-class patrons only.

On our way back to the hotel from these early morning promenades the Professor and I kept on the look-out for some *patisserie* where *brioches* or *cuches au beurre* could be had with a pot of coffee. This formed our usual breakfast for, it may as well be admitted right now, we did not feel that we could afford the extravagance of a three-franc breakfast at the hotel. The ladies were ready to join us by eight o'clock—before that hour it would be useless to look for a place open for business—and we conducted them to the *patisserie* we had discovered. The *brioche*, it may be remarked, is a light spongy preparation—half cake and half biscuit—while the *cuche au beurre* is apparently made from a kind of light pie-crust, rolled thin and built up in several layers with butter between. When served fresh and hot from the oven the latter is most delicious, but when cold it is as tough and soggy as a day-old griddle-cake. The usual charge for these delicacies was five centimes (one cent) each, and as three made a very substantial meal, and the coffee cost three or five cents per cup, our total expenditure for four people was less than two francs. If, as often happened—in addition to getting everything hot and delicious—we were served on little tables out of doors with a view of a cathedral or Hotel de Ville thrown in, we felt that we were getting a very good bargain indeed.

Of the Bruges of Charles the Good the most important existing monument is the great Cathedral of St. Sauveur, which was rebuilt by him after having been partially destroyed by fire in 1116, the work being completed in 1127. Probably very little of the structure as we see it to-day dates from this period, as the edifice has been enlarged and restored many times, much of it dating from the fourteenth and part from the sixteenth century—the era when architecture in Flanders flourished as never before or since. The tower was begun in 1116, continued in 1358, and its upper portions added during the last century, so that nearly eight hundred years elapsed before it was finally completed in its present form. Many writers speak of this tower as clumsy and unsightly, but to me it is one of the most majestic and stately structures in Flanders. At any rate, there is no other tower like it, and the way in which it lifts its castle-like mass of tawny brick high above the tiny houses that surround it is profoundly impressive. The lower part of the tower is Romanesque, being, no doubt, the portion erected under the supervision of Charles the Good. The rest is Gothic, if so unecclesiastical a style can be so denominated.

The interior of St. Sauveur dates in the main from a much later period than Charles the Good, and as we visited this interesting edifice several times an account of its later constructions and paintings will be found in a chapter devoted more particularly to the art treasures of Bruges. It is not the purpose of this book to weary the reader with detailed descriptions of this and every other "monument" in Flanders. For those who are interested in architectural details there are numerous works written by experts and discussing exhaustively—if not exhaustingly—every feature of technical

importance. Our little party was not learned and these random jottings will therefore record only such facts as seemed interesting to the average American visitor. Nor would it be possible to attempt a detailed account of the pictures and sculptures, either at St. Sauveur or elsewhere. Many of the great Flemish churches are literally museums of early Flemish art and a mere catalogue of their contents would fill many pages. For the most part the works are of mediocre merit, but nearly every church possesses one or more masterpieces—which the uninformed visitor can generally distinguish by the fact that a charge is made to uncover them. At times this practice becomes a bit annoying, particularly when—in addition to paying the fee—one has to hunt around for half an hour to find the sacristan, who may live two or three blocks away; but, after all, it is the tourist who is under obligation for the privilege of visiting the churches when they are closed to the general public, and all the fees in Flanders add only a trifle to the expense account of one's tour.

In St. Sauveur on the occasion of our first visit we were especially interested in a curious painting of the Crucifixion located in the Baptistry and said to be the earliest picture of the famous Bruges school in existence. The savants assign a date prior to 1400 to this work, the author of which is unknown.

The name of Charles the Good is also associated with the Church of Notre Dame, part of the present structure dating from his reign. The bulk of the edifice was erected during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The spire was begun in 1440, torn down and rebuilt, being finally completed nearly a century later. There is a legend that the architect, in despair over the fact that it leans considerably to the east, threw himself from its summit. At present it is one hundred and twenty-two metres in height, which is said to be the greatest elevation ever attained by a structure of this kind built of brick. It can hardly be described as beautiful, the dark red of the top portion being out of harmony with the rich tawny grey of the lower part, but it forms a splendid feature in the sky-line of the city. Perhaps the most charming view of it is that obtained from the opposite side of the Lac d'Amour. Another excellent point of view is from the Dyver with the outline of the tower, reflected in the still waters of the Roya.

The interior of this church is, like the tower, built of brick, only the great supporting pillars being of stone. The general effect of the interior is greatly marred by a wooden rood-loft that separates the nave from the choir. In this church there is an interesting "Adoration of the Magi" by Daniel Seghers, a painter of the later Antwerp school, who became a Jesuit but continued to practise his art and was especially renowned for the flowers and butterflies with which he adorned his pictures. This work, which was finished in 1630, is thought by many to be the artist's masterpiece. Another notable treasure is the statue of the Virgin and Child by Michael Angelo, executed in 1503.

The most famous of the possessions of Notre Dame, however, are the superb tombs of Charles the Bold and his daughter Marie of Burgundy, to be seen only by paying a small fee to enter the chapel in which they are placed. That of Marie is the older, and by far the finer of the two, and consists of a sarcophagus of black marble upon which rests a life-sized recumbent figure of the famous princess—"the greatest heiress in Europe"—who died at the age of twenty-five as a result of an injury received when hunting in 1482, less than five years after her marriage to Maximilian who later became Emperor. At the command of her son, Philip the Handsome, this masterpiece of stone and bronze was begun by Pierre de Beckère in 1495 and completed in 1502. Around the altar-tomb are exquisitely carved statues of saints and angels, with twining plants and scrolls and the heraldic shields of all the provinces and not a few of the cities within Marie's wide domains. The figure of the princess lies above all this with her hands folded as if in prayer, a crown upon her head and two hounds lying at her feet. The bronze has been cunningly carved to represent the finest lace and richly gilded until it seems to be pure gold. The body of Charles the Bold was brought from Nancy in 1550 at the command of Charles the Fifth, his grandson, and eight years later the funeral monument was begun by order of Philip II. It was completed in 1562, and is designed in imitation of that of Marie.

The figure of “the terrible Duke” is shown clad in armour, with his helmet at one side and a lion crouching at his feet.

“Here, in this little chapel,” said the Professor, “one can see the beginning and the end of the most interesting period in the long history of Bruges, the alpha and omega of her greatness. At the time of Charles the Good the little Bourg on the Roya was slowly emerging from obscurity and beginning to assume the aspect of a great capital. For three hundred and fifty years its power and fame grew until ‘the Venice of the North’ was everywhere recognised as one of the most beautiful and brilliant cities in the world. Then suddenly, almost within the span of a single generation, the fickle sea abandoned it and it became the quiet inland city that it is to-day, living largely upon the memories of its splendid past. When the beautiful Marie was brought home to the Princenhof, dying from her fall at Wynandael, the decline had already begun, and when the remains of her father were placed beside her here in Notre Dame the end had already come and the city’s merchants and prosperity had departed.”

CHAPTER IV
HOW BRUGES BECAME "THE VENICE OF THE NORTH"

After the murder of Charles the Good had been so thoroughly avenged, the King of France sought to foist one of his own underlings upon the people of Flanders, but they would have none of him, and he fell fighting before the gates of one of the Flemish cities. Dierick of Alsace was the popular hero and became Count on the death of this rival. The King of France sought once more to interpose, but the burghers of Bruges retorted proudly: "Be it known to the King and to all princes and peoples, and to their posterity throughout all time, that the King of France hath no part in the election of a Count of Flanders."

Of all the Counts of Flemish blood Dierick proved to be the greatest and the wisest who ever ruled over the land. During his long reign of forty years (from 1128 to 1168) and that of his son, Philip of Alsace, who ruled until 1191, the country prospered and grew rich. Both princes encouraged commerce, industry and the arts, and were liberal in their policy toward the cities. It was during this Golden Age of Flemish history—the longest period of happiness the country ever knew—that municipal charters were granted to the cities of Bruges, Ghent, Ypres, Furnes, Gravelines, Nieuport, Dunkerque and Damme.

While the memory of Dierick of Alsace deserves to be fondly cherished by the people of Flanders as that of a wise and liberal ruler, his most famous exploit was bringing back the relic of the Precious Blood from Jerusalem. Like most princes of his time, Dierick joined in the Crusades, but, unlike many of them, he left his government so strong and secure that no harm came to the country during his absence. It was the second Crusade, and Dierick departed in 1147, and returned in 1150, bringing with him this relic, a portion of the most precious possession of the Holy Church of Palestine, consisting of a small crystal vial filled with what was alleged to be the blood of Christ, preserved by Joseph of Aramathea who prepared the body for burial. Deeming himself unworthy to bear so holy a relic, the Count entrusted it to his chaplain, who never parted with it until the returning crusaders delivered it to the chaplains of the court who placed it in the chapel built by Baldwin of the Iron Arm, where it still remains in its original receptacle.

On the 2nd of May every year from 1303 until now—save for a brief interruption during the stormy times of the French Revolution—the city of Bruges has celebrated its possession of this holy relic by the great Procession of the Holy Blood. At first simply a religious ceremony, the procession gradually took on spectacular features such as the Flemings love, including representations of the Apostles, the Nativity, King Herod, and so on. At present *La Noble Confrerie du Precieux Sang*, or Honourable Society of the Holy Blood, is a very wealthy and aristocratic organisation, even its affiliated members—of whom there are several thousands, of every nationality—esteeming their connection with it a great honour.

During the French Revolution mobs stripped the chapel of everything that could be torn down or broken, leaving it such a wreck that the municipal authorities were considering tearing it down, but were happily prevented from doing so by Napoleon. The lower chapel was, however, used as a jail for drunken and disorderly persons—and even as a pound for stray dogs—until 1818. The upper chapel meanwhile was roofless and windowless, a sad wreck of so ancient and famous a structure. Both have since been restored, the lower—or Chapel of St. Basil—being now just as it was in 1150, and, in the opinion of many critics, "the most beautiful and perfect specimen of Romanesque architecture in Europe." We had already inspected the lower chapel while exploring the Vieux Bourg of Baldwin of the Iron Arm our first day at Bruges, but had not spent much time in the upper one. Here the most interesting object was naturally the chasse, or casket, containing the holy relic after which the chapel

is named. This is on one side of the little museum of the chapel and is of silver-gilt, standing four feet, three inches high. It was made in 1617 by a silversmith of Bruges and, while not regarded as a masterpiece of its kind, is very graceful and elegant. The chapel itself is richly decorated and has some excellent stained glass windows, all of this work dating from the middle of the last century.

Adjoining the Chapelle du Saint-Sang is the Hotel de Ville. This structure is a very fine example of Flemish municipal architecture, dating from the last quarter of the fourteenth century. Here the Counts of Flanders formerly took the oath to respect the rights and privileges of the city, this formality taking place in the last window to the right. Originally there were statues of former princes on the façade and six of these were coloured by Jean Van Eyck in 1435. All were destroyed during the Revolution. Part of the interior is still used by various government officials, while up-stairs the tourists usually visit the ancient Salle Echinivale, or Council Chamber. This was restored in 1895 and decorated with a series of twelve mural paintings representing notable scenes in the history of the city. Of these eleven are by Albrecht de Vriendt, and the last by his brother, Julian, the first artist dying just before his work was completed. As these pictures form an interesting epitome of the history of the city, the subjects are given herewith:

1. Return of the Brugeois from the Battle of the Golden Spurs at Courtrai in 1302.
2. Foundation of the Order of the Golden Fleece by Philip of Burgundy at Bruges in 1430.
3. Dierick of Alsace bringing the Holy Blood to the chapel of St. Basil in 1150.
4. The interior of the ancient Hospital of St. Jean.
5. Magistrates of Bruges renewing the privileges of the Hanseatic League.
6. Count Philip of Alsace granting a charter to Bruges (1190).
7. Magistrates visiting the Studio of Jean Van Eyck (1433).
8. The printing by movable type in Bruges by Jean Britto in 1446.
9. Count Louis of Maele laying the foundation of the Town-hall (1376).
10. Jacob Van Maerlant, father of Flemish poetry, born at Damme.
11. The Free-fair.
12. Opening of the new Zwyn canal in 1404.

One of the most interesting of the almost innumerable mediæval buildings in Bruges is the Palais du Franc which, with its many quaint turrets and gables, overlooks the fish market on the Quai Vert. The associations and history of this sumptuous bit of sixteenth century architecture date from the twelfth century—1190 to be exact—when Philip of Alsace granted a charter to the region stretching to the northward from the city to the sea, and from Aardenburg (now just across the Dutch frontier) to Dixmude. This wide tract of territory was called the Franc or Liberty of Bruges, and comprised ninety-one parishes and the towns of Ostende, Blankenburghe, Eccloo, Lissweghe, Aardenburg, Sluys and Dixmude. Of these only the first two are known to the tourists of the present day, while one must needs search the map very closely to find one or two of the others at all, but in the time of Philip all were busy centres of trade and industry. This was the hereditary land of the Karls, whose revolt against the attempt of Charles the Good to force them under the feudal yoke cost that monarch his life.

The charter was called the *Keurbrief* and laid the foundation for the administration of a code of justice that, rude as it was, meant liberty for those who otherwise would have been utterly at the mercy of any feudal lord or wandering knight. It was the *Magna Carta* of a large part of the Count's dominions and even its stern eye-for-eye and life-for-life doctrine was tempered by equivalents in cash that might be paid. The life of a Karl was worth twice as much as that of a monk or priest, while for each injury there was an appropriate fine. He who broke a dyke must lose the hand that did the damage, besides forfeiting all his goods; for false weights the penalty was a fine of three livres

for each offence. Fencing one's property against game entailed branding with a red hot iron, or trial by the Count—who might confiscate the goods of the guilty party, but his life and liberty were to be safe. This cruel game law was not repealed for nearly three centuries, and must have entailed much hardship. On the whole, however, the charter was liberal for its day, and the country under it flourished exceedingly—a sure evidence of wise laws.

The Keurbrief was administered by the Magistrates of the Franc in the Palais du Franc, which was therefore a sort of special court. The present edifice is not the one erected by Philip, or used by him for the purpose, but dates from the early part of the fifteenth century. Part of it is still used as the Palais de Justice, but that part of the present structure is for the most part modern. The most interesting portion of the edifice, and the only one shown to tourists, is the Court Room containing the magnificent Cheminée du Franc, or chimney-piece, erected in honour of the Ladies' Peace negotiated by Margaret of Austria while Regent of the Netherlands in 1529. The work was executed from designs by Lancelot Blondeel, a painter of Bruges, and was completed in 1530. The fireplace itself is of black marble, surmounted by a frieze in white marble containing four bas-reliefs representing the history of the chaste Suzanne. One cannot but wonder what was the connection of thought that suggested this story in conjunction with the commemoration of the Treaty of Cambrai, but at all events here it is. The reliefs are of varying excellence, the one showing Suzanne about to be seized by her aged admirers being very sharp and clear, while the fourth which shows the culprits being stoned to death is rather indistinct.

The upper part of the monumental chimney is of oak and occupies almost the entire side of the room. In the centre stands Charles V, represented as a Count of Flanders, nearly life size and finely carved. At his right are statues of Maximilian and Marie of Burgundy, and at the left Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile—these being the Emperor's ancestors on his father's and mother's sides respectively. On the throne behind the Emperor are the busts of Philip the Handsome and Joanna of Spain, his father and mother, and below these are the portraits in small medallions of Charles de Lannoy, who won the victory of Pavia where Francis I, the King of France, was captured, and Margaret of Austria, who negotiated the treaty. As the last mentioned portrait is almost invisible in the shadow of the Emperor it hardly seems as though the chimney-piece does justice to the loyal and talented woman whose successful diplomacy the entire work is intended to commemorate. As an example of sixteenth-century wood-carving, however, and as a most important historical monument, this chimney-piece is by no means the least interesting of the many things to be seen at Bruges.

Unlike most tourists, the Professor seemed to be in no hurry to inspect the famous Belfry, although we had passed it a score of times during our stay. Facing the Grande Place, and towering three hundred and fifty-three feet into the air, it could not be overlooked, while its loud chimes—which rang every quarter of an hour, and can be heard for many blocks around—insured that it could not be forgotten. Moreover, we more than once took our evening meal at a little restaurant just across the Place from it and saw its graceful octagonal parapet on one occasion outlined against the fast-flying grey clouds of a summer storm and the next day against the blue sky of one of the few perfect June days it was our fortune to enjoy. "Too soon," he said, in answer to our inquiring glances—"the Belfry belongs to the period of Bruges' splendour, while the buildings we have seen thus far date from the formative period when she was still little more than a fortress on a marsh."

The original structure dates from the very early Counts of Flanders—possibly from the time of the first Baldwin—but was practically destroyed by a fire in the year 1280. It was then that the present edifice was begun, at a period when the commercial and industrial importance of the city was already very great. The city's seal and archives were stored in a strong room within the belfry walls, where four wrought iron doors secured by ten locks and ten keys guarded them against abstraction by the emissaries of some Count who might desire to curtail the privileges of the city. Eight of these keys were kept by the deans of the eight leading guilds—the butchers, bakers, shoemakers, tailors, weavers, brokers, carpenters and blacksmiths—who thus virtually controlled the government. This

room the Professor desired to see above all else in the old structure. We found the four wrought iron doors, but the archive chamber no longer contains archives or the city's seal. It was a most interesting old room, nevertheless, and one that ought to particularly interest the builders of the elaborate burglar-proof and earthquake-proof vaults that extend below so many great banking houses in America. Alas! neither the four doors nor the ten locks rendered this ancient strong-room for the protection of the city's liberties proof against the cunning and power of tyrants, and the precious charters it once held were gradually taken away, despite the stout handiwork of one Erembald, blacksmith, who received eighty-one pounds for forging the doors in the year 1290.

To reach the bells one mounts a steep, dark staircase which is said to contain four hundred and two steps, although we did not count them. The chimes are claimed to be the finest in Europe, and comprise forty-nine bells weighing in the aggregate fifty-six thousand, one hundred and sixty-six pounds. They were cast by George Dumery in 1743 and are noted for their soft tone. The *tambour* which operates the chimes that ring every quarter of an hour weighs nineteen thousand, nine hundred and sixty-six pounds and is pierced by thirty thousand, five hundred square holes in which are fixed the pegs that pull the strings commanding the hammers hanging outside the bells. By altering the position of these pegs the tunes can be varied, but the programme played while we were in the city was as follows:

At the hour: "Rondo, 15th sonata," by Mozart; at the quarter past: "Le Carillon de Dunkerque," a popular air; at the half: "The Day of Happiness," by Mozart; at the three-quarters past: "The Three Drummers," a Flemish popular air. The official bell-ringer is M. Toon Nauwelaerts, a native of Lierre, where his ancestors have been bell-ringers for more than a hundred years. Although a young man, M. Nauwelaerts won an international competition of bell-ringers organised by the city of Bruges in 1911.

The view from the summit of the Belfry is one of the most superb in Flanders, especially if the visitor is so fortunate as to have fallen on one of those days when the clouds roll in great fleecy masses of dazzling white that form a wondrous background for the grim grey tower of St. Sauveur and the tapering red spire of the cathedral. As one looks down upon the sea of tiny red-roofed houses far below he is transported in fancy to the time, centuries ago, when watchmen peered off across these very parapets day and night to sound the alarm of an approaching foe, or announce the approach of their mighty Count or some noble visitor. In so doing he can realise what the old Belfry has meant to the city on the Roya. "For six hundred years," wrote M. Gilliodts, one of the city's learned archivists, "this belfry has watched over the city of Bruges. It has beheld her triumphs and her failures, her glory and her shame, her prosperity and her gradual decay, and, in spite of so many vicissitudes, it is still standing to bear witness to the genius of our forefathers, to awaken alike memories of old times and admiration for one of the most splendid monuments of civic architecture which the Middle Ages have produced."

The best time of all in which to study and admire the external aspect of this noble structure is when the sun is sinking to rest and its rays fall slantingly across the sombre pile of tawny brick, touching up its projections here and there with high lights that contrast sharply with the deep shadows behind them, and listen—as did so often our poet Longfellow—to the wonderfully sweet chimes as they ring the quarter hours:

"Low and loud and sweetly blended,
Low at times and loud at times,
And changing like a poet's rhymes
Ring the beautiful wild chimes
From the Belfry in the market
Of the ancient town of Bruges."

The Halles themselves, of which the Belfry is the chief ornament, are notable for their considerable size, forming a rectangle one hundred and forty-three feet broad and two hundred and seventy-six feet deep. The archeological museum in one wing—which is in course of removal to the Gruuthuise Palace—enabled us to see the interior of the structure, the extent of which indicates the volume of business that was transacted there when Bruges was known as "the Venice of the North." The great commercial activity of Bruges during the period of its prosperity, from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, was due primarily to the fact that the Counts of Flanders decreed that it should be the sole port of entry for the entire country. The burghers quickly perceived the priceless value of this privilege, and by their enterprise and liberality made the city the foremost metropolis in Europe in the volume and variety of its international trade. With London its relations were especially intimate and cordial, each city granting to the merchants of the other privileges that in those days were almost unheard of. For example, the merchants of Bruges in time of war were granted forty days of grace in which to dispose of their property and provide for their personal safety. On one occasion, while a war was actually going on, they were given a special truce of ninety days in which to traffic freely with the subjects of the King of England. The reason for these unusual favours was that Bruges was the great market where the wool of England, on which the prosperity of the country depended, was disposed of. Not infrequently the archives record instances where the Kings of England treated with the chief magistrates of Bruges on terms of complete equality, as if with a sovereign power.

Nor was England the only country represented in the market places of Bruges during this period. The Doges of Venice often treated directly with the Burgomasters of the Italian city's Flemish rival, while the powerful Hanseatic League established here their chief establishment for the Netherlands. The list of the "Nations," as the groups of foreign merchants were called, makes curious reading at the present day. There were English, Scotch, French, Lusitanians, Castilians, Venetians, Genoans, Florentines; merchants from Aragon, Biscay, Lucca, Milan, Lombardy and Navarre. The German merchants from the Hanseatic towns of Lubeck, Hamburg, Cologne, Dantzig and Bremen numbered no less than forty houses in the year 1362, while the Italian and Spanish firms resident in the city were still more numerous. Many of these concerns were among the foremost trading and banking houses of the Middle Ages, with mercantile transactions extending into every part of the known world and strong enough financially to loan money to princes. When the Duke of Pembroke was captured by Du Guesclin in the Hundred Years' War between England and France it was in Bruges that his countrymen borrowed the seventy thousand pounds demanded as ransom.

As befitted the first mercantile city in the world, business methods were more advanced at Bruges than anywhere else. It is claimed that the first insurance policies ever drawn up were devised and signed in Bruges about the year 1300. A form of registration of land titles was in use there as early as the fifteenth century. Its Bourse, or central exchange for merchandise of all kinds, is claimed to have been the first ever established.

In a single day in the year 1456 no less than 150 foreign vessels arrived at Bruges through its canals and the River Zwyn, and while these were, of course, small craft as compared to those of the present day there was then no port in the world that could boast of an equal quantity of shipping. Industrially, the town was no less important, having some fifty thousand artisans belonging to fifty-two different guilds.

The silting up of the Zwyn, rendering the approach and departure of shipping difficult and uncertain, started a downward movement that in less than a century destroyed all of this great activity and prosperity. Had it come alone it is probable that the sturdy merchants of Bruges would have found a way to overcome this adverse factor to their continued success, either by digging a new channel to the sea or by dredging, but misfortunes—as is their proverbial wont—did not come singly. In 1488, as a result of a conflict between the city and Maximilian, the stores and exchanges were closed for three months and all business came to a standstill. Seven years later it was said that nearly five thousand houses stood vacant and abandoned, no one caring either to buy or rent them. One by one the great

merchants of the city closed their counting-rooms and went away; one by one the artisans departed. The last of the "Nations" to desert the declining city was the Hanseatic League, which stood by it loyally until 1516, when it removed its offices to Antwerp, by that time the acknowledged metropolis of the North.

The Minnewater, or Lac d'Amour, is—apart from its exquisite beauty—of interest as another memento of the city's former commerce. This was the chief harbour for shipping, and, no doubt, was thronged with sailing craft, while its banks must have swarmed with merchants checking their arriving or departing cargoes, stevedores carrying bales and boxes to and fro, clumsy wagons and carts for transporting merchandise to the warehouses of the city and all the varied noise and bustle of a great seaport. It is strangely silent and deserted now, and the grass grows tall around the round tower built in 1398 by Jan van Oudenaarde, and the white swans float slowly and majestically beneath the black arches of the adjoining bridge which is eight years older than the tower. It is said that he, or she, who stands on the central arch of this bridge at midnight and expresses a desire will have the wish fulfilled, but we did not try it. Before leaving this charming spot, however, we went along the banks of the little lake to a point where, looking back, we had the round tower and the bridge in the middle distance, the lake in the foreground, and the towers of the city on the horizon. This view is, without doubt, the finest the old town affords.

The visitor to Bruges who is interested in the past should devote at least half a day to a pilgrimage to Damme, distant about an hour's walk along the canal that leads from the new port of Bruges to the sea. In 1180 this now all but forgotten town was made an independent commune with two burgomasters, and for two centuries thereafter it enjoyed a great and increasing prosperity. It became the chief entrepôt for the great commercial city of Bruges during its period of splendour, and most of the leading merchants maintained offices there. Its warehouses were crowded with merchandise from every corner of Europe—wines from France and Spain, beer from England, wool from Scotland, silk from Italy, all manner of cloths and stuffs, spices of all kinds, metals of every variety known to the metal workers of those days, rare and precious goods of every description.

To-day the very scene of all this mercantile activity has vanished. Gone are the busy warehouses, the docks and wharves, even the very harbour in which—according to ancient chroniclers—a score of ships of the largest size then built could anchor easily. All that remains is a diminutive Grande Place surrounded by several ancient edifices, and the ruins of a huge church. In the centre of the Place is a modern statue of Jacob van Maerlant, called "the Father of Flemish Poets." Fame has surely never played any more astounding trick than that out of the great host who lived in this busy commercial town in the days of its prosperity—portly burgomasters, skilled in winning the plaudits of the populace; shrewd, far-sighted merchants grown rich from the commerce with distant lands; skilled artisans and craftsmen in a hundred guilds—all, all are forgotten, while an obscure poet, whom very likely many of those who knew him derided as a fool, is alone remembered as the one great man of Damme.

Facing the Grande Place is the ancient Hotel de Ville, which, in addition to being the most notable monument of the dead town, is also an estaminet where the living can get a little refreshment. The main floor of this edifice is divided into three large rooms. The first one is the estaminet, with its array of bottles and its beer pump contrasting most incongruously with the remaining vestiges of its ancient grandeur.

Adjoining this is a large, irregular and unfurnished room, bare of ornamentation save for two corbels, or Gothic brackets, which support the main rafters of the ceiling. These are of wood, elaborately carved. One represents Van Maerlant in his study, seated at a desk, with what M. Havard calls a "chaste Suzanne" bathing in a tub over his head. The other shows King David with his harp, and is embellished with sundry other figures.

The remaining room is by far the most interesting, for it was here that Charles the Bold publicly betrothed Margaret of York. The room, which is officially termed the *Salle des Délibérations*, or

Council Hall, has a fine old fireplace said to have been restored during the seventeenth century. It is decorated with two female figures in hoop skirts and bears the motto "*Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*." This quotation from Vergil (Æneid 6:853) sounds rather pompous and out of place in the council chamber of this now completely vanquished and ruined city, and must have seemed so even in the seventeenth century, but it may have been a survival of an inscription placed over the original fireplace in the days when Damme dared to close its gates even against the men from Bruges itself, and the puissant Counts of Flanders had to use force to compel it to open them.

It was in the year 1468 that this room in which we are now standing had its one great day and became, for a brief space, the setting of one of those splendid mediæval scenes that bards and novelists so fondly recall, and that—in our age of up-to-date inventions—the moving-picture men are so busily reconstructing and re-enacting. The Princess had landed at Sluys, near the mouth of the River Zwyn, where the Duke of Burgundy paid her a brief visit in secret—possibly to see what she looked like, for this was a marriage of state and intended to further his far-reaching ambitions. Probably if she had been as homely as a witch the wedding would have taken place just the same, but as the reverse was the case the preliminary inspection must have been very gratifying. The following day the royal lady and her company rode to Damme in a fleet of barges gorgeously decorated with gold, rich velvets and rare silks. Here she was lodged in this very Council Chamber of the Hotel de Ville, and here the Duke came in great state to perform the public ceremony of betrothal. The wedding ring was given in the presence of the English Bishop who had accompanied the Princess, and Charles announced that he would await her presence on the morrow at Bruges, where the wedding itself was to be celebrated in the Cathedral.

The wedding procession as it departed for Bruges the next day must have been another brave sight for the proud citizens of Damme. The bride, reclining in a litter borne by four white horses, wore a magnificent gown of cloth of gold, a crown on her forehead, a jewelled necklace, and a mantle clasped with precious stones. Around her pranced her ladies of honour, mounted on white horses gaily bedecked with crimson satin. Immediately behind this picturesque group came five decorated chariots bearing a score of beautiful ladies from the English court, and following these came the guard of honour, or escort, provided by the Duke—a squadron of counts, barons and knights, with their faithful squires, their horses covered with gold and silver, the riders resplendent in bright coloured velvet and rich lace. The good people of the Middle Ages dearly loved a pageant, and this surely was one to rejoice the heart of every citizen of Damme, for here was the pride of the chivalry of all Europe —fair ladies and brave men from oversea and from every corner of the great Duke's wide dominions —thronging the Grande Place as the procession formed, and then falling into their respective places as the long line passed out through the city gate and proceeded on the straight, tree-lined *grande route* that led to Bruges.

CHAPTER V
DIXMUDE AND FURNES

The tourist who desires to get away from the main thoroughfare of European travel, to explore out-of-the-way corners, and discover for himself wonders and beauties that the learned Mr. Baedeker never heard of, cannot do better than to turn away to the westward from the great Ostende-Brussels express route and visit the all but forgotten cities of Dixmude, Furnes and Nieuport. All but forgotten, that is, in June, 1914. The world has heard of them since, and it will be many hundreds of years before it forgets them again! These little places, which when we visited them were nothing but sleepy and quiet country towns, were great and prosperous cities in the period when Bruges was slowly rising toward its zenith, and the Professor therefore decreed that they must come next on our itinerary. We accordingly spent an evening studying the *correspondences*, or connections, of the State Railway and the *chemin de fer vicinal*, or local steam tramway, and started at daybreak the next morning.

Right here it may be said that the Belgian State Railway did its best to compensate us for whatever shortcomings we found in the weather or in the country generally. Perfect its service can hardly be said to have been, but it was excellent and amazingly cheap. Our party purchased every two weeks *billets d'abonnement* that cost us just forty-one francs each, or about $8.00, and entitled us to ride on any State-owned railway line in the country day or night for fifteen days. These were second-class, the third costing twenty-three francs, and first sixty francs. The last, by the way, is a useless luxury, as on the local lines the first-class compartments are identical with the second-class except for a white tidy placed at the back of the cushions. Frequently there was not even the tidy, but the sign, "*Reservé—Voorbehouden*," converted an ordinary second-class compartment into first-class—a distinction that gave the traveller very little for his money, save the privilege of riding alone.

On the main express routes that radiate outward from Brussels in every direction there were a number of *rapides*, or fast express trains, that made very good time indeed—a speed of a kilometre per minute being about the average. On the international express trains, some of which are first-class only, the speed was somewhat higher, but these we never had occasion to use. After the *rapides* came the express trains, generally marked "*direct*" or "*semi-direct*," according to whether or not they made any intermediate stops before reaching their final destination. These were only moderately fast, and, if they did stop anywhere, lingered so long that the time gained by their previous speed was largely lost. Then came the type of local train called *omnibus* or *ordinaire*, that stopped at every station. To the American these trains would seem astoundingly slow, even for a land that is never in a hurry. Each stop is dragged out, minute after minute, until it seems certain that either a terrible accident must have occurred ahead, or the train crew has gone on strike. Actually, more than once, we did see part of the crew returning from an estaminet hard by whither they had gone to have a friendly glass. Finally, however, the red-capped station master blows his whistle and the train reluctantly pulls away. To make a trip of sixty kilometres (forty miles) by one of these trains took, on more than one occasion, two hours and a quarter, and the train arrived on time!

This last point is a feature of the Belgian railway trains. They are almost invariably on time, and lateness is a matter for strict examination on the part of the officials and severe penalties for those responsible. However, there does not seem to be much credit attached to being on time when the schedule allows for a stop of from two to fifteen minutes at each station. The man primarily responsible for the movement of the trains is not the conductor or engineer but the *chef de gare*, or station-master. He, or his deputy if the station is a large one with many trains, must be on hand when each train pulls in, and give the signal for its departure. His dark-red cap, embroidered with gold braid, is therefore in evidence at every station, and until this high functionary gives the word no train

moves. As it is, each leaves exactly on time—but not a second before, no matter if every passenger has been in place and the doors slammed and fastened for the last five minutes!

The foregoing description of the Belgian State Railway refers, of course, to the service as it existed down to the end of July. Since then the destruction of tracks, bridges and tunnels by one army or another has put most of the system out of operation. One of the saddest phases of the war is that every one of the thousands of employés of the Belgian State Railway—from the highest supervising official to the humblest track walker—was working faithfully and efficiently, and planning the future of his frugal life, upon the assurance that promotion and an old-age pension would reward his zeal. This obligation toward its employés the Belgian Government has ever faithfully observed, and in the course of our travels we met many middle-aged men who told us that they were looking forward to the day when their terms of duty would end and they would be pensioned on half pay to enjoy a few years of well-earned repose. Probably not one of these men ever seriously dreamed that an event could occur that would, in the course of a few swift weeks, blot out the record of his life work, and deprive him of all opportunity for promotion, for pension, and even for employment. No doubt the death toll of the battles on the plains of Flanders has been heavy among these courteous, capable and industrious men—many of whom were liable for military service in time of war—but let us hope that peace, when it comes, will bring to each survivor his old post again, with the old good service record unforgotten, and that he will receive the pension he rightfully expects and that his country would gladly give—at last.

To those who enjoy rambling through the byways of history there is no town richer in associations, yet less spoiled by the visits of the all but ubiquitous tourist, than Dixmude. At present this little city is situated fifteen miles from the sea, yet all the ancient chroniclers aver that prior to the thirteenth century it was a seaport with a commerce overseas and a not inconsiderable fishing fleet. As one looks across the miles and miles of pleasant fields, interspersed with waving windmills and tiny villages, this part of the ancient city's history seems utterly incredible, but it is too well authenticated to be disputed. Ten times, so the histories tell us, Dixmude was besieged and bravely defended by its citizens. More than once it was destroyed by fire and rebuilt, but at last the blight that destroyed the prosperity of its larger and more powerful neighbours, Ypres, Bruges and Ghent, struck at the heart of its industries as well and it sank by imperceptible degrees into its long sleep.

Like the abode of the Sleeping Princess, of whom Tennyson wrote, one might almost fancy that all life had stopped centuries ago at the wave of some magic wand. The summer's sun and winter's rain and snow of half a thousand years have left but the faintest traces on its old houses and its great parish church of St. Nicholas. The pride and joy of this church is its altar screen, or *jubé*, said to have been designed by Urban Taillebert, the architect of the Church of St. Martin at Ypres and many other celebrated works of around the year 1600. There is also an "Adoration of the Magi" by Jordaens, and the usual collection of minor works of art. To us, however, this old church was far more interesting externally than within, its huge clock tower resembling nothing else that we had seen in Flanders or elsewhere. The Grande Place, from which one can obtain a fine view of the old church with a row of Lilliputian houses nestling below it, is big enough to accommodate all the present inhabitants of the town in one corner. In its prime Dixmude is said to have had thirty thousand inhabitants, and all the room on the Place was, no doubt, needed on market days, but it does not have a fifteenth of that number now, and the wide, grass-grown expanse of cobble-stones is entirely deserted.

The *jubé*, or altar screen, already mentioned, is the one great "sight" of the little town, and every one asks without fail whether you have yet seen it. It is assuredly well worth seeing, being wonderfully graceful and dainty, and, perhaps, the finest thing of its kind in Northern Europe. The other famous *chef d'œuvre* of Dixmude is culinary instead of artistic. This is a kind of brioche called *zieltjenskoeken*, or *gateaux d'ames*—a sort of "soul cooky," as it were. Twice a year, on certain religious occasions, the inhabitants of Dixmude consume vast quantities of these confections, which are claimed to possess the property—if eaten on the prescribed days—of delivering one's soul from purgatory and sending

it straight to Paradise. We were unfortunately unable to verify this, as our visit did not come on the right day, but we found the butter of Dixmude—which has enjoyed a great reputation for centuries—to be all that was claimed for it, although the Professor insisted on putting a shake of salt on his, to the great horror of the maid who served our dinner.

Had some Madame Thebes told us what the near future had in store for this sleepy and quaint old city we would have spent days instead of hours in it, but last June its importance did not seem to justify giving it a chapter so we planned to visit Furnes the same day. To-day the name of Dixmude has been heard to the farthest ends of the world, its great square echoes to the tramp of armed men, its old church—after standing for so many centuries—is said to have fallen before the withering storm of shrapnel and shells that for days rained down upon its defenders. It has been taken and retaken by each side in the gigantic combat more than once. It is asleep no longer, forgotten no longer; and, in years to come, reverent visitors from many nations will visit what may remain of the ancient town. For these the chief interest will not lie in the walls of the ruined church or the relics of the departed *jubé*, if any there be, but out in the open, pleasant fields where, in trenches that the kindly hand of nature will gradually obliterate, the brave men of four nations met in one of the fiercest and bloodiest death grapples of the great war.

But last July both Madame Thebes and the cannon were silent, so again taking our faithful *omnibus* after the dinner—which we obtained at one of the little restaurants overlooking the Grande Place—we next journeyed northward to Furnes, which is only a few miles distant across the flat Flemish plain. Furnes, according to the antiquarians, dates from as early as the year 800, and its day of greatness had come and gone centuries ago. Its crooked streets, quaint gabled houses, and picturesque corners seemed more mediæval than any place we had visited—surpassing even Dixmude in this respect. It was here, by the way, that Leopold I was welcomed to the country when he arrived after being chosen to be the first King of the Belgians in 1831. The Hotel of the Nobele Rose, near the Grande Place, is said to have been the Palace of the Countess Gertrude of Flanders in 1093, and if so, must be one of the oldest houses in Flanders. The widow of Count Philip of Alsace is also said to have resided here in 1218. More celebrated, in years to come, than any of these incidents, will be the fact that Furnes was for many months of the Great War the headquarters of the brave Belgian army, and the place of residence of Belgium's heroic King.

The great annual event at Furnes is the famous Procession, which takes place the third Sunday in July. It dates from 1100 or thereabouts, when, according to the legend, Count Robert of Flanders was on his way back from the Holy Land, bringing with him a piece of the true cross. His voyage across the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar and past the stormy Bay of Biscay, was without incident, but as he was nearing home a fearful storm in the English Channel threatened to send his frail bark to the bottom. The waves were running mountain high and all the party expected each moment to be their last when the Count suddenly bethought himself of his holy relic and vowed that, if his life were spared, he would present it to the first church of which he might see the spire.

Immediately the storm ceased, the wind died down, the sea became as smooth as a mill-pond, and as the happy mariners looked toward the shore of their dear Flanders a ray of sunlight fell upon the tower of Ste. Walburge in Furnes. To this church, therefore, in fulfilment of his vow, Count Robert presented the relic, now doubly precious by reason of this miracle. To commemorate this event the canons of the church organised a procession which took place every year and was marked by various historical representations of the return of Count Robert. About 1650 an act of sacrilege committed by a soldier, who was publicly executed for his crime, led to the procession taking on certain penitential features by way of expiation on the part of the city for this sin. From that time on the procession has included representations, for the most part by peasants dressed up for the parts, of Abraham and the Prophets, the Flight into Egypt, the Visit of the Three Wise Men to the Cradle at Bethlehem, so often painted by the artists of the Flemish school, the Stable and the Birth of Christ, the Court of Herod, Jesus in the Midst of the Doctors, the Penitent Magdalen, the Entry of Christ into Jerusalem,

the Feast at Cana, the Garden of Olives, the Betrayal of Judas, and a series of scenes representing the crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Following these tableaux come the penitents, walking masked and barefooted, clad for the most part in brown Capuchin robes, and singing or chanting certain lines in Flemish. Many of the leading actors in the tableaux have "speaking parts," all of them in Flemish and delivered with varying degrees of histrionic skill to the crowd that lines the streets. The whole performance, apart from its great antiquity, is of interest as being a local and original representation of the Biblical story—a sort of Flemish passion play, less refined and artistic than that of the Swiss peasants of Oberammergau, but none the less conscientious, earnest and sincere.

At one time Furnes ranked next to Ghent and Bruges among the cities of Flanders in official importance, if not in population and industry, its *châtellenie* comprising fifty-two villages. In 1297 it was besieged by Robert, the Count of Artois, who fell five years later at the great battle of Courtrai. At Furnes the French arms were successful and the city was captured and sacked, "more than two thousand houses being burned in two days," according to the contemporary chronicles. Philip the Bold, the first of the Burgundian Dukes to rule over Flanders, rebuilt its fortifications, and the city was deemed worthy under Philip the Good to be designated as the place of residence of the French Dauphin, who subsequently became Louis XI, when that remarkable young man was in exile through his father's displeasure. It may well have been here that the wiliest and most unscrupulous of all the Kings of France planned that tortuous and secretive policy that—steadily pursued year after year—brought the powerful House of Burgundy low at last and made France one nation instead of two or three.

The quaint old Grande Place of Furnes, while smaller than that of Dixmude, is equally picturesque. On one side is the old Meat Market, dating from the first quarter of the seventeenth century; and hard by is the *Maison des Espagnols*, or House of the Spaniards, formerly used as a town-hall and erected in the thirteenth century. The present Hotel de Ville also faces the Place and is well worth a visit, although none of its rooms are sufficiently notable to merit a detailed description. The ancient *Châtellenie*, now used as Court House, was begun in 1612—the year the Hotel de Ville was finished—and is chiefly memorable as the meeting-place of the Spanish Inquisition. This body held its sessions in the antechamber on the first floor and not in the main hall, which is decorated by a mural painting by de Vriendt representing Philip the Fair swearing to observe the rights and privileges of the city. The establishment of the Inquisition by his namesake and grandson, Philip II, affords a ghastly commentary on the manner in which that monarch kept the similar pledges with which he began his reign. Another fine old edifice on the Grande Place is the Belfry, square for half its height, then octagonal, and finally surmounted by a bulbous spire, heavy and clumsy, but none the less exceedingly quaint and picturesque. Not a few of the ancient houses around the Place and in the adjacent streets were sufficiently mediæval to have merited a visit had our stay in this fine old Flemish town been longer; but, so far as we could learn, none possessed any particular historical interest.

Besides Ste. Walburge, already mentioned—which was evidently planned to be a cathedral, but of which only the choir was ever completed—Furnes possesses the church of St. Nicholas, which has a noble square tower, also unfinished. Both churches are disappointing within, although the former is, no doubt, of great interest to architects as an example of the ogival style, while the latter is Gothic and dates from the fourteenth century. The choir stalls in St. Walburge are notable examples of the Flemish woodcarvers' art, although far less ancient than the church itself.

If the time of your stay is midsummer, as it will be if you come to Furnes to see the Procession, do not go away without a day on the dunes at Coxyde. This beach is less well known, as yet, than those at Ostende, Heyst and Blankenburghe farther to the east but it is increasing in popularity very rapidly. A land company, with head offices at Brussels, is engaged in erecting summer houses among the dunes which look too American in architecture and manner of construction for this country where houses are generally built as if intended to last a thousand years. A little *chemin de fer vicinal* runs from Furnes to Coxyde. In addition to the splendid beach and the dunes, which have a dreary grandeur

that is always fascinating, the shrimp fishermen, or *pecheurs de crevettes*, will make the short trip well worth while.

These weather-beaten men, with their rough oilskin hats and suits, are the modern representatives of an ancient Flemish industry—shrimp fishing having been carried on along these coasts literally from time immemorial. They are very picturesque, both while at work on horseback dragging in their nets, and while lounging along the shore, pipe in mouth. Jean Delvin has a fine painting representing them in the Museum at Ghent, while one of the most powerful of Meunier's statues is devoted to the same subject.

CHAPTER VI
NIEUPORT AND THE YSER CANAL

When the war is over, and the era of commemoration begins, Belgium, if she is free, should erect at Nieuport, close to the great locks that mark the outlet of the Yser Canal—or at some point along the canal where the fighting was the fiercest—a monument higher than that at Leipzig where the Germans recall their victory over Napoleon, higher than the great lion that guards the field of Waterloo. At its summit should stand a heroic-sized figure in imperishable bronze of a Belgian infantryman, one of the round-capped "demons" whose indomitable will and unwavering courage held this last bit of Belgian soil against overpowering numbers for days. It was here that Germany's magnificent rush from Antwerp to the Channel ports was stopped, and it was the last remnant of the little Belgian army that, turning on its foe like a lion at bay, hurled back every assault until the little Yser Canal ran red and until, at last, the great reinforcing hosts of the allies came.

The little straggling town of Nieuport, peaceful and sleepy as it looked last summer, is not a stranger to battles and sieges. In the time of William the Conqueror Lombartzyde, now a little hamlet on the *chemin de fer vicinal* behind the dunes from Nieuport to Ostende, was the shipping port of this region, but great storms filled the harbour with sand and the citizens established a "New Port" on another branch of the Yser in 1160. It was fortified three years later, and for several centuries was one of the strong towns defending the Low Countries on the French frontier. Its strategic importance made it the scene of many battles and sieges. It was destroyed by the English and their allies, the men of Ghent, in 1383. The lonely tower or Donjon of the Templars, standing on the edge of the town, is all that remains of a monastery of that order which was ruined at that time.

The city itself, however, was quickly rebuilt, and among other memorable sieges beat off a great French force in the year 1489. In 1568 the Spanish, under Condé, beat a French army commanded by Turenne not far from the city. Another famous fight before the walls of the old town took place in the year 1600 during the long war between Spain and her revolted Provinces. Count Maurice of Nassau, at the head of twelve thousand men from the United Provinces, had invaded Flanders, which still remained under the power of Spain, and marching rapidly from the Scheldt past Ostende, proceeded to besiege Nieuport. The Archduke Albert, hastily raising an army of fifteen thousand Spaniards, advanced unexpectedly on the Dutch, who were taken completely by surprise. Perceiving that he was caught in a trap, Count Maurice—in order to give his men the courage of despair—ordered the Dutch fleet to withdraw, and told his soldiers that they must either conquer or "be prepared to drink all the water behind them."

Meanwhile an advance guard of the Dutch army was driven back by the advancing Spaniards who, thinking they had met the whole army, sent couriers to Bruges and Ghent announcing the victory. Bells were rung to celebrate the Archduke's supposed success which, as the event proved, was a strategic victory for Nassau as it delayed the enemy several hours. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when the advancing Spaniards found themselves face to face with the main army of the republic, drawn up on the very beach outside the city walls. Perceiving their sturdy ranks and unyielding front the Archduke hesitated, but the Spaniards urged him not to let them lose their prey, whom they regarded as hateful rebels and heretics.

Thus encouraged, the Archduke gave the order to advance and the battle soon became general. The fate of the day was decided by the artillery of the Dutch which, by a fortunate order of their far-sighted commander, had been lifted off from the sand and mounted on platforms made from boughs, brush and such timber as was handy. That of the Archduke, mounted in haste directly on the beach, embedded itself in the sand at each discharge until it became useless, while that of the republicans became more accurate and deadly. At the same time the rays of the setting sun falling directly in the

eyes of the Spanish soldiers, who were facing westward, blinded them and caused them to fire wildly. The Archduke performed prodigies of valour, having two horses killed under him and being himself slightly wounded, but as darkness began to fall on the bloody beach Count Maurice ordered a charge by a force of cavalry he had held in reserve. This fresh force proved irresistible, the Spanish lines began to give way on all sides, and the retreat quickly turned into a rout. Even the proud Archduke had to seek safety in flight, and the day, which had begun so auspiciously, ended in one of the greatest disasters of the disastrous war.

Nieuport and its sister cities in this, until lately, half-forgotten corner of Flanders were, in former times, renowned for other contests happily less bloody than these famous battles. Here, during the Middle Ages, flourished a group of societies devoted to rhetoric. In place of the still more ancient tourneys, where armed knights fought with lance and sword, these "Chambers of Rhetoric" held annual contests of oratory. From one end of Flanders to the other the movement spread; and these debating societies did much to cultivate a regard for learning and dialectic skill among the mass of the population. Sternly suppressed by Alva, implacable foe of every form of free thought, these societies were revived after the Spanish scourge was withdrawn, and some of them continue to the present day.

The visitor who wandered around the long, slightly hilly streets of the Nieuport of last July would have had little trouble in locating plenty of the "monuments" of its famous past, although the beach has now receded two or three miles to the northward and pleasant fields extend along the edge of the wide marshes which then were probably part of the sea. A curious old lighthouse with a pointed tower stands about midway between the present town and Nieuport *Bains*, as the beach town is called, showing where the coastline lay some three hundred and fifty years ago. Even this spot is now too far inland for the light to be seen at sea and a new lighthouse has been built on the rampart of dunes that runs, like a miniature mountain range, almost to Ostende toward the east, and westward to Coxyde and beyond.

Our first visit at Nieuport was to the Tower of the Templars, a huge square pile of brick standing in the midst of a potato patch. This prosaic environment detracted not a little from the sentimental interest of the edifice, and we were unable to get into the structure, although one of the gens d'armes of the village was said to have a key to the low wooden door at its base. Equally disappointing was a visit to the ancient *Halle aux Draps*, or Cloth Hall, now used on certain days as a local butter market. Here again, the door was locked and no one seemed to know who had the key. Curiously enough, although situated very close to the French frontier, we found in this little town and its neighbours, Dixmude and Furnes, very few people who understood French. Flemish is the universal language hereabouts apparently, but it was only on this little trip that we were at all inconvenienced by our inability to speak it. Elsewhere in Flanders—even at Ypres and Audenaerde, where our friends said we would have trouble—we were able to make our French universally understood.

On the Grande Place, close to the Cloth Hall, we found a little inn, called the Hotel du Pelican, where the Professor proposed that we should get some liquid refreshment. We failed, however, to obtain any response to our raps and thumps on the door, and concluding that the establishment must be run for pelicans only we took ourselves and our patronage elsewhere. The Church of Notre Dame, which stands just off the Grande Place, we found to be a most quaint and interesting old structure dating, it is said, from the thirteenth century. While less imposing externally than St. Nicholas at Furnes its massive square baroque tower was very striking, and formed a fine picture in conjunction with the more slender tower of the Cloth Hall hard by. The approach to the main entrance of the church was beneath some lofty trees and we did not see a solitary human being either outside of the edifice or within it. This church has an interesting *jubé* or rood loft, a fine wooden pulpit, and we also noticed a curious winding stairway that seemed to lead upward within one of the pillars at the intersection of the transept and the choir. As the tower is not built at this point, but at one end of the edifice, it was quite a mystery where this stairway went and what its purpose might be, but as

it seemed exceedingly narrow and dark we did not explore it, nor did we find any one to whom we could apply for information about it.

It was in this church, by the way, or possibly in one of those at Dixmude or Furnes, that the Madame developed a violent antipathy to a certain painting that seems to be one of the most cherished possessions of nearly every church in Flanders. As old Cotton and Increase Mather delighted in scaring and harrowing their audiences with word pictures of the tortures of the burning fiery pit, so nearly every old Flemish artist seems to have delighted in portraying most vividly the sufferings and martyrdoms of the saints, and one subject in particular appears to have caught the fancy of every one of them. This was the beheading of John the Baptist. At times the head is shown rolling in the dust or mire of the street, at times it is represented as being served on a platter—but to one and all of these works of art the Madame objected. This circumstance added not a little to the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Professor, who were continually contriving to lead her artfully around to inspect some new wonder, which proved to be another representation of this agreeable scene. As works of art they were nearly all atrocities, but as jokes on the Madame they were one and all great successes, and it was really surprising how many of them there were.

The Hotel de Ville, a somewhat commonplace looking structure, is said to contain a small collection of paintings, but we were unable to make any of the phlegmatic gens d'armes whom we found lounging close by take enough interest in our questions to inform us where admission might be obtained. In fact the whole town seemed singularly uninterested in tourists, apparently caring not a bit whether they came or stayed away. While the war will undoubtedly change this, still any one desiring to visit it will do well to make the trip from Ostende or Furnes, returning for the night to some point where hotel accommodations are more adequate. In our case we went over to Ostende, where there are many good hotels. No doubt a pleasant week or month could be spent in this corner of Flanders, but for such a stay the best plan would be to go to one of the many little seaside resorts between Coxyde and Ostende for one's hotel or pension, and explore the hinterland from there.

The ride by the little *chemin de fer vicinal* from Nieuport to Ostende is a very interesting one. At the outset the line crosses the huge locks that join the canals to Ostende and Furnes with the tidal river Yser. There are seven or eight bridges in all, the different canals and channels being separated by tiny islands. Had Madame Thebes only suggested that we explore the Yser Canals while we were there last July how much more interesting this part of the book would be! Unfortunately they looked then much as hundreds of other Belgian canals had looked and we gave them only a passing glance. While the newspapers in their accounts of the great battle of Flanders usually spoke of the Yser Canal as though there was but a single canal, in reality there are three canals that flow into the tiny Yser River at this point. One of these runs parallel with the coast to Ostende, and then onward to Bruges and beyond; the second runs behind the range of dunes westward to Furnes, where it divides and crosses the French frontier in two branches, one going to Bergues and the other to Dunkerque. It is the third branch that achieved immortality in the Battle of Flanders. This runs straight inland, at right angles to the other two, following the tortuous channel of the old river much of the way to Dixmude. A short distance beyond Dixmude the canal ceases to follow the River Yser, which here flows eastward from a source well across the French boundary, and ascends the Yser's smaller tributary, the Yperlée, to Ypres. It did not seem like very much of an obstacle from a military standpoint, but brave hearts can make the most of a small advantage. Below the big locks the little river runs in its own bed to the sea. Here the tide was out the day of our visit and a few small fishing boats were lying tipped over sideways in the mud, while two or three English ladies were busily sketching the not over-picturesque scene. There will be a great many people sketching in this vicinity by and by!

About two miles from Nieuport the train passes the church of Lombartzyde, within which is a statue of the Virgin known among mariners far and wide as the *Bonne Mére de Lombartzyde*, and who is devoutly believed able to protect the faithful seaman from perils by sea, to aid the farmer in his harvest, to cure the sick and succour the distressed. Many are the little ships, patiently carved by

fingers hardened by toil and exposure, that have been reverently hung before the good Virgin's shrine. There are perhaps fewer now than formerly, but faith in her protection and power is still strong and will probably always continue to be so, for the Flemings are intensely loyal to the church.

Not a few of those who visit these little towns, rich in mementoes of the past, but otherwise apparently very sleepy and dull, wonder what the inhabitants do for amusement. No one who has ever spent a Sunday in a Belgian country village need ask this question. From one end of the country to the other, in the Borinage or mining provinces of the southwest as well as in the Flemish counties of the north, the male population devotes the greater part of the day to what may unhesitatingly be termed the Belgian national sport—archery. In the early part of the Middle Ages Flemish archers were as famous as the longbowmen of Merrie England, and on many a hard fought field they gave a good account of themselves. Curiously enough, the archery societies into which they formed themselves for practice have survived all the wars and changes of the centuries, have continued in spite of the invention of gunpowder and the perfection of firearms—an industry in which Liége, in southern Belgium, has led all other cities—and seem to be as vital a part of the national life of the country as ever they were. The fact that the bow and arrow is an anachronism troubles your Belgian peasant not at all; he shoulders his long bow as cheerfully on a Sunday morning as if he were carrying the latest model of smokeless powder repeater, with Maxim silencer and all modern improvements, instead of a weapon that was out of date and useless five hundred years ago.

As practised in Belgium, archery contests are carried on in two ways. There is first what is known as the *Tir á l'oiseau* or *Perche*. In the centre of the village green of the smaller towns, and in some open space in the suburbs of the larger places, the traveller cannot fail to notice what looks like a flag pole, the top of which, however, tapers to a slender point, from just beneath which four short arms point upward diagonally, while three cross arms are placed horizontally below them. On these are fixed the *oiseaux*, or birds—blocks of cork covered with tinsel or gaily-coloured paper, each with a tuft of feathers stuck at the top. The archers gather below the pole and shoot upward, aiming at the "birds" and endeavouring to knock them off cleanly. Each shoots in turn, and the prizes—which have been duly announced by posters for days beforehand—go to those capturing one of the "birds," the value varying according to its position. In the contests entitled "*Tir du Roi*," the archer bringing down the last bird wins the largest prize and is called the "*Roi*," or King, and as by that time the archers have one and all consumed a goodly portion of their favourite beverages there is general hilarity—especially if the victor is a popular favourite. Immemorial custom decrees that the King should deal liberally with his subjects and dispense in libations whatever sum he may have gained as a prize, after which he is usually escorted, or if necessary carried, home in great state with a band in advance and all the members of the contest following in a disorderly, but jolly, crowd.

The second form of contest is known as the "*Tir au berceau*," and consists of shooting at a target. The birds, in this case, are fastened about the bull's eye. The archers stand at a distance of one hundred metres from the target, which is usually placed at the rear of a walled court or garden. Generally a series of wooden arches placed at intervals along the line of fire serve to arrest any arrows that go wild, while the back of the target is reinforced strongly with straws about a foot long laid lengthwise with the line of the shooting and packed under great pressure. There is invariably a public café or estaminet attached to the places where archery contests *au berceau* are conducted, while such places are always found close by the spot where a *Tir á l'oiseau* takes place. Between shots the men consume liberal quantities of lambic, faro, or the beer of some neighbouring brewer, and discuss politics or the news of the day. A circumstance that renders disorders comparatively rare is that each archery society consists of men of a single party. The Catholics have their favourite places that are patronised exclusively by Catholics, while the Socialists in the southern provinces, where that party is strong, have their own societies and places of rendezvous. The clergy are heartily interested in the Catholic contests, giving liberal prizes and attending in considerable numbers to cheer the victors and console the vanquished.

During the early part of the war numerous references were made in the despatches to the marvellous accuracy of the Belgian riflemen. To one who has attended scores of these archery contests it is not surprising that the Belgians are good shots. Out of date though the bow and arrow is, yet the sport cannot fail to train the eye and hand, and constant rivalry in such a pastime has made the Belgians literally a nation of sharpshooters. On one occasion the writer and a friend took a couple of shots with a carbine in one of the little shooting galleries that accompanied a village kermesse. We both missed. A young man standing by, who worked in the village sugar mill, politely asked which of the various pipes and other objects we were aiming at. We indicated one of them and, zip! his bullet had shattered it. Half a dozen shots in quick succession at different objects we pointed out proved equally accurate. It was an exhibition of marksmanship such as one frequently sees on the stage in the United States, but being made by a casual bystander in a village street it was most impressive. Nor was the lad, as I took pains to inquire, noted particularly for his skill in this direction—having seldom won prizes in the official contests.

All ages join in this sport, the small boys erecting diminutive poles in the fields around the villages, where they imitate their elders with toy bows and arrows, while men of seventy or eighty take their turn with beardless youths in the prize competitions. While I was visiting in the Borinage two years ago the uncle of my hostess shouldered his two-metre bow and started off to a “meet” despite his eighty-seven years. What is more, his hand had lost none of its strength and firmness, and his eyes none of their keenness, for twice while I was present he brought down one of the “birds,” and I later learned that he had won one of the principal prizes. Only the year before he had been crowned “King” at one such contest, and the first time he ever won that coveted honour was when he was sixteen—or seventy-one years before. I doubt whether there is any athletic game in the world of which the devotees can point to a longer record of success.

This fine old athlete had two brothers older than himself alive at the time, the combined ages of the three aggregating two hundred and eighty years. One of them, aged ninety-four, recently expressed some anxiety as to what would become of him in the event of the death of the daughter with whom he was living.

“What will I do if Amèlie should die?” he asked of one of his other daughters.

“Why, papa, then you would come and live with me,” she replied, adding with a flash of characteristic Belgian humour, “and when I am dead you’ll go to live with Fèlicienne” (a granddaughter still in her ’teens). As this provided safely for his future for at least another fifty years, the old gentleman was greatly relieved, feeling perhaps that if he survived Fèlicienne her children would by that time be old enough to take care of him.

While archery is everywhere the dominating pastime of the working class it is by no means the only form of popular amusement. The bicycle has not yet gone out of vogue in Belgium, and societies exist in hundreds of cities and communes for the encouragement of bicycle racing. The day of our arrival in the village where Tante Rosa spread for us the banquet mentioned in the second chapter, we were so fortunate as to witness the final sprint of a twenty-five kilometre race. A score of contestants had pedalled ten times over a course consisting for the most part of roadways paved with ragged cobble-stones, the rest being dirt roads filled with mud puddles owing to a recent rain. The riders, as they rushed by, were literally covered with mud and had evidently struggled hard to gain one of the five prizes which aggregated, as we afterwards learned, the munificent sum of eighty francs, sixteen dollars, of which the winner received thirty—six dollars!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.