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Title: Peeps at Many Lands: Belgium

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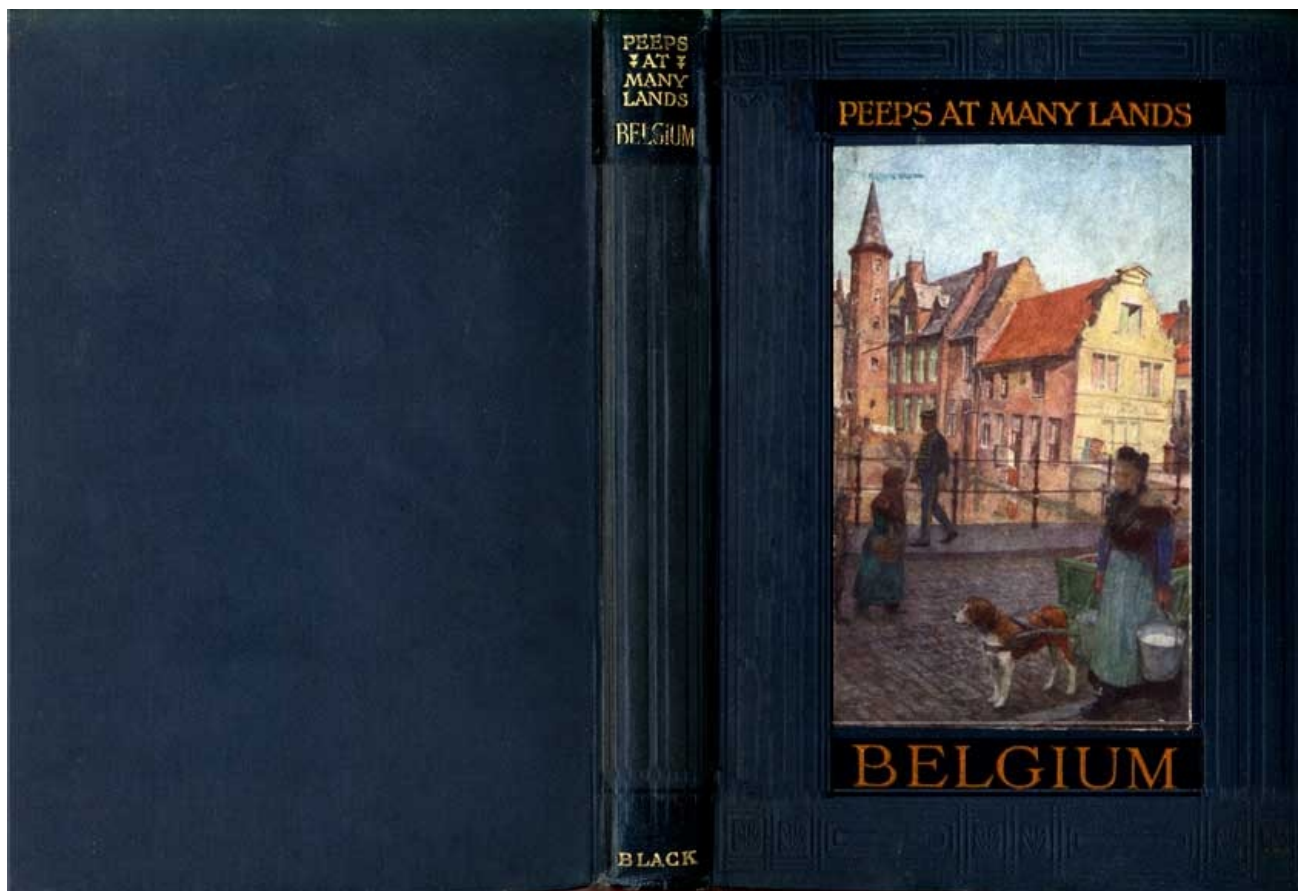
Illustrator: A. Forestier

Release date: November 1, 2006 [eBook #19692]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Bruce Albrecht, Sankar Viswanathan, and the  
Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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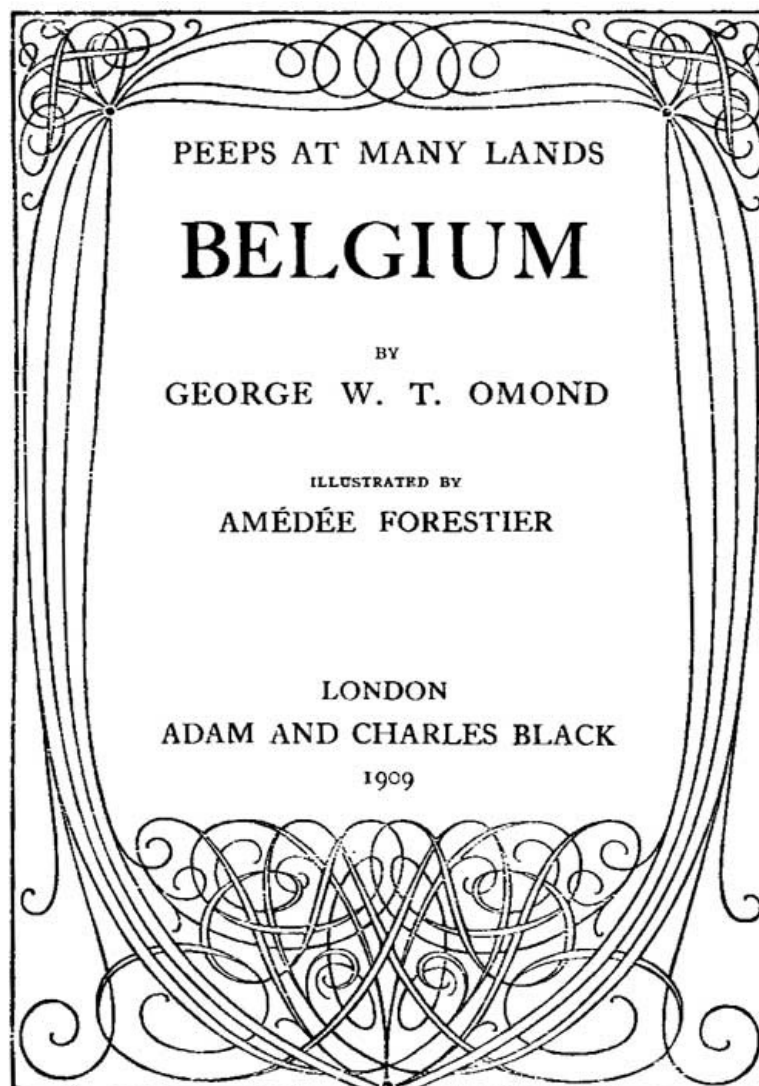




A MILK-SELLER IN BRUGES.



A PEASANT WOMAN OF THE ARDENNES.



**PEEPS AT MANY LANDS**

# BELGIUM

BY

GEORGE W. T. OMOND

ILLUSTRATED BY

AMÉDÉE FORESTIER

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1909

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SKETCH-MAP OF BELGIUM.



THE DUNES. PAGE 1.

## BELGIUM

### CHAPTER I

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[1]

## THE SANDS OPPOSITE ENGLAND

If you leave the mouth of the Thames, or the white chalk cliffs at Dover, and sail over the water just where the English Channel meets the North Sea, you will in about three or four hours see before you a long expanse of yellow sand, and rising behind it a low ridge of sandhills, which look in the distance like a range of baby mountains. These sandhills are called "dunes." Here and there at intervals you will see a number of little towns, each town standing by itself on the shore, and separated from its neighbour by a row of dunes and a stretch of sand.

This is your first view of the little country called Belgium, which is bounded on the east by Holland, and on the west by France. It is, from end to end, about half the size of Ireland.

There are no cliffs or rocks, no shingle or stones covered with seaweed. There are no trees. It is all bare sand, with moss and rushes on the higher ground above the beach. In winter the wind rages with terrific violence along the coast. The sand is blown in all directions, and the waves dash fiercely on the shore. It is cold and stormy, with mist and dark clouds, and sometimes violent showers of hail. But in summer all is changed. Often, week after week, the waves roll gently in, and break in ripples on the beach. The sky is blue, and the sands are warm. It is the best place in the world for digging and building castles. There are very few shells to gather; but there are no dangerous rocks or slippery places, and children can wade about and play in perfect safety. So many families—Belgians, English, Germans, and a few French—spend the summer holidays there. [2]

Hundreds of years ago the storms of winter used to drive the waves ashore with such violence that the land was flooded, and whole villages were sometimes swept away. So the people made ramparts of earth to keep back the water, till by degrees many parts of the Belgian shore were thus protected. They still continue to build defences against the sea; but instead of earth they now use brick and stone. It looks as if in a few years the whole coast will be lined by these sea-fronts, which are called *digues de mer*.

A *digue*, no matter how thick, which rests on the sand alone will not last. A thick bed of green branches is first laid down as a foundation. This is strengthened by posts driven through it into the sand. Heavy timbers, resting on bundles of branches lashed together, are wedged into the foundations, and slope inwards and upwards to within a few feet of the height to which it is intended to carry the *digue*. On the top another solid bed of branches is laid down, and the whole is first covered with concrete, and then with bricks or tiles, while the top of the *digue*, at the edge of the seaward slope, is composed of heavy blocks of stone cemented together and bound by iron rivets. [3]

The finest and longest *digue* is that which extends from Ostend for about nine miles. It is a good place for bicycle rides. No motor-cars are allowed on it.

Each of the little towns which you see dotted along the coast has a *digue* of its own, on which there is a row of villas and hotels facing the sea. Among the dunes behind the *digue* there are more villas. These are generally very picturesque, with verandas, red-tiled roofs, and brightly painted woodwork.

All day long in summer the *digue* of each town is crowded by people walking about in the sunshine, or sitting watching the bathers and the children playing on the sands. It is a very gay sight. There are prizes for those who build the best castles, and it is curious to see hundreds of little Belgian, English, French, and German flags flying on these small forts, and to hear the children shouting to each other in so many different languages. It makes one think of the Tower of Babel.

From six in the morning till six in the evening bathing-machines go to and from the water, and often there seem to be as many people in the sea as on the shore. There is a boat anchored a little way out, in which two men in red shirts, with ropes and lifebelts, sit watching to see that no one goes too far out, for the tide is often very strong. Sometimes these men, who are called *sauveteurs*, stand on the sand, and if they think anyone is swimming too far they blow a trumpet to call the swimmer back. [4]

In the evening, when it is dark and the lamps are lighted, there is dancing on the *digue* to the music of a barrel-organ. The Belgians are very fond of this dancing, and often the English and other visitors join in it too.

All summer this holiday life goes on, with bathing, lawn-tennis, and in some places golf, till at last the time comes for going home. The hotels and villas close their doors. The windows are boarded up. The bathing-machines are pulled away from the beach, and put in some sheltered place among the dunes. The *digue* is left in solitude, to be covered with driven sand, and splashed with foam from the waves which beat against it, till the season of summer gaiety comes round again next year.

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## CHAPTER II

### INLAND: THE FLEMISH PLAIN

[2]

[3]

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Let us now leave the shore, and go inland.

If you climb to the top of some dune, you will see before you a wide plain stretching out as far as the eye can reach. This part of Belgium is called Flanders. It is all flat, with canals, and long, straight roads, paved with stones, running across it. There are rows of tall poplar-trees or willows, which are bent slightly towards the east, for the wind blows oftenest from the west, small patches of woodland, gardens, and many sluggish streams. The fields, which have no fences or hedges round them, are large and well tilled, some bearing fine crops of wheat, rye, or potatoes and turnips, while others are rich pasture-lands for sheep and cattle. The whole of this Flemish Plain, as it is called, is dotted with farm-houses and cottages. There are a great many villages, and in the distance rise the roof-tops and the towers and spires of famous old towns.

Some of the villages are worth visiting. There is one called Coxyde, which lies low among the sandhills, not far from the sea. The people of this village live by fishing, but in a very curious way, for they do it on horseback. They mount little horses, and ride out into the sea with baskets, and nets fastened to long poles. It is funny to see them riding about in the water, and catching fish and shrimps in this strange fashion. [6]

There is another village, also only a short distance inland, where there is a church in which a number of toy ships are hung up. These are offerings made to an image of the Virgin Mary which stands there. If a crew of Flemish fishermen have escaped from some dangerous storm, they walk in silence to this church, and give thanks to the image, which is called Our Lady of Lombaerdzyde.

The farm-labourers in Flanders live very simply. Their food is chiefly black bread, potatoes, and salted pork or fish. There are lots of boys and girls who eat nothing all the year round but black bread and potatoes, and who look on pork or fish as quite a treat. Sometimes they spread lard on their slices of bread, and there are many who have never tasted butter in their lives. Yet they appear to be very strong and happy. They drink black coffee, or beer if their parents can afford it. The food of the older people is much the same.

Most of the people in the country districts of Flanders—men, women, boys, and girls—work in the fields. In summer they rise at four or five in the morning, and after eating a slice of bread go out into the fields. At half-past eleven or twelve they dine on bread and potatoes, with perhaps a slice of pork, and take a rest. Then they work again till about four in the afternoon, when they rest again, and after that they work on till it is dark. In the short days of winter they toil from sunrise till sunset. By this means they earn enough to live on. A boy or girl may get from 5d. to 7d. a day, a woman a little more, while a married man generally receives 1s. 8d. or 2s. Some farmers pay an unmarried labourer 10d. and his food. [7]

This seems a dull and hard life, but the Flemings do not find it so. Like all Belgians, they are fond of amusement, and there is a great deal of dancing and singing, especially on holidays. Sunday is the chief holiday. They all go to church in the morning, and the rest of the day is given up to play. Unfortunately many of the older people drink too much. There are far too many public-houses. Any person who likes can open one on payment of a small sum of money to the Government. The result is that in many quite small villages, where very few people live, there are ten or twelve public-houses, where a large glass of beer is sold for less than a penny, and a glass of coarse spirits for about the same price. Most of the drinking is done on Sunday, and on Monday morning it is often difficult to get men to work. There are many, especially in the towns, who never work on Mondays. This is quite understood in Belgium, and people who know the country are pleased, and rather surprised, if an artisan who has promised to come and do something on a Monday morning keeps his word. Of course there are many sober work-people, and it is a rare thing to see a tipsy woman, much rarer than in England; but there is a great deal of drunkenness in Belgium. [8]



A SHRIMPER ON HORSEBACK, COXYDE. PAGE 6.

There is one thing to which all the boys and girls look forward, and that is what is called the *Kermesse*. This is a kind of fair, which takes place at every village in summer, and lasts for two or three days. They talk about it for weeks before, and for weeks after. They save up every penny they can lay their hands on, and when the time comes they leave their work or the school as soon as possible in the afternoon, put on their best clothes, and enjoy themselves.

The village street is full of stalls covered with cheap toys, sweetmeats, and all sorts of tempting little articles, and you may be sure the pennies melt away very quickly. Flags of black, red, and yellow stripes—the Belgian national colours—fly on the houses. A band of music plays. Travelling showmen are there with merry-go-rounds, and the children are never tired of riding round and round on the gaily painted wooden horses. Then there is dancing in the public-houses, in which all the villagers, except the very old people, take part. Boys and girls hop round, and if there are not enough boys the girls take each other for partners, while the grown-up lads and young women dance together.

The rooms in these public-houses are pretty large, but they get dreadfully hot and stuffy. The constant laughing and talking, the music, and the scraping of feet on the sanded floor make an awful din. Then there are sometimes disputes, and the Flemings have a nasty habit of using knives when they are angry, so the dancing, which often goes on till two or three in the morning, is the least pleasant thing about these gatherings.

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This is a very old Belgian custom, but of late years the *Kermesses* in the big towns have changed in character, and are just ordinary fairs, with menageries and things of that sort, which you can find in England or anywhere else. If you want to see a real *Kermesse* you must go to some village in Flanders, and there you will find it very amusing.

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## CHAPTER III

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### TRAVELLING IN BELGIUM

Travelling in Belgium is cheap and easy. The best way to see the out-of-the-way parts of the country would be to journey about in a barge on the canals. There are a great many canals. You could go all the way from France to the other side of Belgium in a barge, threading your way through fields, and meadow-lands, and villages, and stopping every now and then at some of the big towns. If you read that charming book "Vanity Fair," you will see that Mr. Thackeray, who wrote it, says that once an Englishman, who went to Belgium for a week, found the eating and drinking on these boats so good that he went backwards and forwards on the canal between Bruges and Ghent perpetually till the railways were invented, when he drowned himself on the last trip of the boat!



But if that ever happened it was long ago. Nowadays, when travellers are in such a hurry, the canals are only used for carrying coals, timber, and other goods. They are largely used for that purpose. The Belgians are very wise about their canals; they keep them in good order, and send as many things as possible by water. It is not so quick, but it is much less expensive, and a great deal safer, than sending them by railway.

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It is interesting to stand on the bank of a canal and watch a row of barges moving slowly past. Sometimes a little steam-tug puffs along, pulling three or four barges after it. Some are pulled by horses, and often men or women labour along the towing-path dragging these heavily laden vessels by a rope fastened to a short mast set up in the bows.

This is hard work, but the barge-folk seem to think nothing of it. Whole families are born, live, and die on their barges. You often see the wife or daughter of the bargeman steering, while the children are playing on the top of the hatches, and the husband is doing some work among the cargo, or just sitting smoking his pipe. These floating homes are long and broad, painted in bright colours, with a deck-cabin, the windows of which are often hung with pretty curtains. The children run about, and seem never to tumble overboard. If they did they would be easily pulled out, for the barges are very low in the water.

As the country is so flat, bicycling is easy, and alongside most of the roads there is a path made for this purpose, which is kept up by a tax everyone who has a bicycle must pay. Always remember that if you meet another person you keep to the right, and not, as in England, to the left. The same rule applies to driving in a carriage or riding a horse.

The Belgians have an excellent system of light district railways, which run in all directions, some worked by steam and some by electricity. These are very useful, for the trains stop at every village, however small, and the country people can easily go to market or to visit each other. Outside each carriage there is a platform, on which you can stand and see the country. The fares are low, and you can go a long way for a few pence. The carriages are open from end to end, and if you travel in one of them you will generally see a crowd of peasants in blue blouses, old women in long black cloaks and white caps, priests, and soldiers (who only pay half-price), the men all smoking, and the women talking about what they have bought, or what they are going to buy. They are always talking about that, and, indeed, seem never to speak about anything else. A few hours' journey in one of these district railways, which are called the *Chemins-de-fer-Vicinaux*, is a far better way of getting a peep at the Belgian people than rushing along in an express train from one big town to another.

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The first railway on the Continent of Europe was in Belgium. It was opened seventy-four years ago—in May, 1835—and ran from Brussels, the capital of Belgium, to Malines, a town which you will see on the map. There are now, of course, a great many railways, which belong to the State and not, as in England, to private companies.

Season tickets are much used on Belgian railways. For instance, anyone wishing to travel for five days on end has only to pay £1 4s. 7d. for a first-class ticket, 16s. 5d. for a second-class, or 9s. 5d. for a third-class. For these small sums you can go all over Belgium on the State railways, stopping as often as you please, at any hour of the day or night, for five days. All you have to do is to take a small photograph of yourself to the station an hour before you intend to start, and tell the railway clerk at the booking-office by which class you wish to travel, and when you go back to the station you will find your ticket ready, with your photograph pasted on it, so that the guards may know that you are the person to whom it belongs. You then pay for it, and leave 4s. more, which are given back at whatever station your trip may end. There are also tickets for longer periods than five days. You can send a letter instead of going to the station. You can write from England, and find your ticket waiting for you at Ostend or Antwerp, or any other place in Belgium from which you may intend to start on your journey. This is very convenient, for it saves the trouble of buying a fresh ticket each day. Besides, it is a great deal cheaper. These tickets are called *abonnements*.

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There are also *abonnements* for children going to school, and for workmen. It is quite common in Belgium to be in a railway carriage where, when the guard comes round, all the passengers pull out season tickets.

There is one thing about travelling by railway in Belgium which English people don't always know, and that is the rule about opening and shutting windows. The Belgians are not so fond of fresh air as we are. They sleep with their bedroom windows shut, which makes them soft, and apt to catch cold. So they are always afraid of draughts, especially in a railway train. The first thing a Belgian does, as soon as he enters a carriage, is to shut the windows, and the rule is that if by any chance there were, say, five people who wanted a window open, and only one who wanted it shut, that one can refuse to let the others have it open. If you are sitting near a window, and open it, you may be sure that someone, who is perhaps sitting at the other end of the carriage, will step across and shut it. They never ask leave, or, indeed, say a word; they just shut it.

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One day, two or three years ago, there was a great crowd in a district train. It was July, and very hot. All the windows of one first-class carriage were, as usual, shut, and it was so stifling that some of us stood outside on the platform so as to get some fresh air. A feeble old lady chanced to be sitting next one of the windows, and wished to open it. All the other passengers refused to allow her. She told them she felt as if she would faint from the heat. Not one of the Belgian ladies and gentlemen, who were all well-dressed people, cared about that. They just shrugged their shoulders. At last the old lady, who had been turning very pale, fainted away. Then they were

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afraid, and the guard was sent for. He insisted on letting in some air, and attended to the lady, who presently revived. The other passengers at once had the window shut again, and the lady had to be taken into another carriage, on which everyone began to laugh, as if it was a good joke.

Some Englishmen are always having rows about this window question; but the best plan is to say nothing, and remember that every country has its own customs, which strangers ought to observe.

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## CHAPTER IV

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### SOME OF THE TOWNS: THE ARDENNES

England, as you know, is not a very big country. But Belgium is very much smaller. It is such a little bit of a place, a mere corner of Europe, that in a few hours the train can take you from one end of it to the other. I suppose that from Ostend to Liège is one of the longest journeys you could make, and that takes less than four hours. So it is very easy to go from one town to another.



THE VEGETABLE MARKET, BRUGES. PAGE 18.

Suppose we land at Ostend, which, as you will see on the map, lies in the middle of the Belgian coast. It is the largest of the seaside towns, and one of the oldest. In ancient times it was fortified, and during the wars between the Spaniards and the Dutch the Spaniards defended it for three whole years. It must have been very strong in those days. But now it is quite changed, and has no walls, but just a long *digue*, and a great many hotels, lodging-houses, and big shops. Crowds of people go there in summer. There are horse-races, concerts, dancing, and a great deal of gambling. One part of the beach in front of the *digue* is crowded with bathing-machines, and it is said that during one day in August a few years ago no fewer than 7,000 people bathed.

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Ostend, however, is not a nice place to stay in. In summer it is noisy, and full of people who care for nothing but eating, drinking, dressing up, and gambling. In winter it is an ugly, dull, stupid town, in which there is nothing to do, and nothing to see except fishing-boats and the steamers which carry travellers to and from Dover. So we shall not say anything more about it, but take the train, and in twenty minutes find ourselves in a really interesting place.

This is Bruges. They call it *Bruges la Morte*—that is to say, "Bruges, the Dead City." Once upon a time, long, long ago, this town was great, and rich, and prosperous. It was surrounded by strong walls, and within it were many gilded palaces, the homes of merchant princes whose wealth was the talk of all the world. Their houses were full of precious stones, tapestries, silk, fine linen, and cloth of gold. Their warehouses were stored with costly bales. They lent money to Kings and Princes, and lived themselves in almost royal luxury. A broad channel led from the sea to Bruges, and ships entered daily laden with goods from every country in Europe, as well as from India and all parts of the world. In those days the cloth made by the Flemish weavers was famous, and the greatest market for wool was at Bruges.

So Bruges grew richer and richer, and much money was spent in beautifying the town, in which there are said to have been 200,000 industrious people. Churches rose, and other noble buildings. There were endless tournaments and festivals. Painters flourished there. Bruges was spoken of as the Venice of the North.

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But all this came to an end. The channel which joined this great city to the sea dried up. There were wars and rebellions which drove the foreign merchants away. They went to Antwerp. Bruges fell, and has remained fallen ever since.

It is now a quiet, sad place, so poor that the streets are badly lighted, seldom cleaned, and have a desolate, neglected appearance. The few families of the upper class who live there belong to what is called the *petite noblesse*; there is almost no trade or commerce; and many of the lower orders live on charity.

But this dead city is very romantic, with all its memories of olden times. Nobody should go to Belgium without visiting Bruges, once so famous and now so fallen, not only because it is picturesque, with its old buildings and quaint views such as artists love to paint, but also because it is so quiet that you can watch the customs of a Belgian town without being disturbed by a crowd—the market-folk with their wares spread out on the stones of the street, the small carts drawn by dogs, the women sitting at their doors busy with lace-making, the pavements occupied by tables at which people sit drinking coffee or beer, the workmen clanking along in their wooden shoes, and numberless little things which are different from what you see at home. [19]

Every town in Belgium has its "belfry," a tower rising over some venerable building, from which, in the days of almost constant warfare, a beacon used to blaze, or a bell ring out, to call the citizens to arms. The belfry of Bruges is, I think, the finest of them all. If you have ever been to Bruges you can never forget it. It rises high above the market-place. All day long, year after year, the chimes ring every quarter of an hour; and all night too, unceasingly, through winter storm and summer moonlight, the belfry pours forth its perpetual lament over the dead city.

Not far from Bruges, only forty minutes by railway, is another ancient town called Ghent; but instead of being dead like Bruges, it is alive and busy. In the days of old the people of Ghent were the most independent and brave in Belgium. In the belfry there was a famous bell called "Roland," and if any of their rulers attempted to tax them against their will, this Roland was rung, and wagged his iron tongue so well that the townsmen armed themselves at once, and the tax-gatherers were driven away. It was no easy task to rule them, as all who tried it found to their cost. They grew very rich, chiefly because of their trade in wool with England. But evil days came, and for more than 200 years this mighty city remained in a most forlorn state.

In the nineteenth century, however, when there was settled peace in Belgium after the Battle of Waterloo, the people of Ghent set to work in earnest once more, and made up for lost time so well that now their town is full of flourishing factories, and has a harbour from which a deep canal leads to the River Scheldt, and is used by many ships. Most beautiful flowers are cultivated in nursery gardens and hothouses, and are sent all over the world in such quantities that Ghent has been called "The City of Flowers." [20]

From busy Ghent, where the belfry in which Roland used to hang and the walls and towers of many an ancient building look down upon the crowded streets, you may go to the still busier town of Antwerp, which stands on the River Scheldt.

Like Bruges and Ghent, and, indeed, every town in Belgium, Antwerp is very old. It is said that long ago there was a giant who lived on the banks of the Scheldt, and compelled the captain of every ship which came up the river to give him money. If the money was refused, the giant cut off one of the captain's hands, and threw it into the river. In Dutch the word *werpen* means "to throw," and thus the place where the giant lived was called *Hand-werpen*, which became, in course of time, *Antwerp*. Perhaps you may not believe this story, but in one of the squares at Antwerp there is the statue of a man called Brabo, who is said to have killed the giant.

Close to this statue is the cathedral, which is one of the grandest in Europe, and where there are some famous paintings by the great artist Rubens, who lived at Antwerp for many years. [21]

Another very interesting thing to see at Antwerp is the Plantin-Moretus house. It was the home, more than 300 years ago, of a printer called Plantin, who made a great fortune, and whose descendants took the name of Moretus, and carried on the business for a long time. You will see there the types and printing-presses of the sixteenth century, and also the very furniture of the sitting-rooms and bedrooms, just as they were in those bygone days. One of the rooms was the nursery of the Plantin children. The men who show you over the house are dressed as servants were in Plantin's time. By going there you will get a far better idea of the family life of those times than by reading any number of story-books or looking at any number of pictures.

Antwerp has, like the other Belgian towns, had its ups and downs, but now it is one of the greatest harbours in the whole world. So many ships go there that there is hardly room for all of them. It may seem an extraordinary thing that a country like Belgium, so small that two or three English counties would cover it, should have such an important harbour crowded with the shipping of all nations. But Antwerp is connected by railways and canals with the busiest parts of Europe, and the Scheldt is a noble river, by which merchantmen can find their way to every region of the world. [22]

A hundred years ago Antwerp was in the hands of the French, who had seized Belgium; and when Napoleon was beaten he clung to Antwerp as long as he could. Just before he fell, there was a conference at a place called Chatillon, when they tried to make peace, but could not; and afterwards, when he was at St. Helena, Napoleon declared that the war continued chiefly because he would not give up Antwerp. "Antwerp," he said, "was to me a province in itself. If they would have left it to me, peace would have been concluded." He wanted to keep a fleet in the

Scheldt, so as to threaten England. If you look at a map of Europe, you will see how near the Scheldt is to Kent and Essex. The Belgians cannot do us any harm, but it would be a dangerous thing for England if some strong and unfriendly nation had possession of Antwerp.

But we must leave Antwerp, and hurry on to Brussels, which is the capital of Belgium.

It is just an hour by railway, and as the train rushes on you will see on your right a town from the middle of which rises a massive square tower. The town is Malines (or Mechlin), and the tower is that of the Cathedral of St. Rombold. Malines was once, like Bruges, a most important city, and so many pilgrims went there that the cost of building the cathedral was paid out of their offerings. It is now the seat of the Archbishop of Belgium; but its former glory has long since departed, and it is even more quiet and desolate than Bruges. [23]

It is said that once upon a time, when the moon was shining brightly through the open stonework of the tower, the people thought there was a fire, and tried to put it out with water! Ever since then the townsmen of Malines have been laughed at, and called "moon-quenchers" by the other Belgians.

When you are in the train between Malines and Brussels, you may recollect that you are travelling on the first railway-line that was made on the Continent. Well, when the engineer had finished his work, the very day before the first train was to run, he looked at some plans he had of railways in England, and exclaimed: "By Jove! I've forgotten a tunnel!" And so, without more ado, he sent for some workmen, and had an archway made over a cutting! Then he thought his railway was complete!

Brussels is by far the nicest town in Belgium. It is a charming place to live in, clean, bright, and gay. The walls which once surrounded it were taken down many years ago, and replaced by beautiful roadways called *boulevards*, with a broad carriage-drive in the middle, and on each side a place for riding on, shaded by rows of trees. There is a park, not very large, but with many trees and shady walks, and a round pond, in the centre of which a fountain plays. At one end of this park is the King's Palace, and at the other end the Houses of Parliament. In the new parts of the town the streets are wide, and there are spacious squares, with large and handsome houses. There are no end of carriages and motor-cars driving about, people riding on horseback, and all the bustle of a great city of pleasure. [24]

The people of Brussels are very fond of jokes and fun. They always seem to be in good humour with each other and with themselves. The part of Belgium in which Brussels lies is called Brabant. In olden times it was spoken of as "gay Brabant," and so, indeed, it might be nowadays. Dull, pompous people are not liked there. You must be lively and amusing, like the town itself, of which the people are so proud that they call it the Little Paris.

Close to Brussels, on the south and west, there is a great forest—the Forest of Soignies. The part of this forest nearest the town is called the *Bois de la Cambre*, which is a favourite place for walking and riding in. You reach it by a fine *boulevard* called the Avenue Louise. In the middle of this *Bois de la Cambre* there is a lake with an island, on which stands a little coffee-house, the Châlet Robinson; so called, perhaps, after Robinson Crusoe, who lived on an island. Belgian families often go there to spend the summer afternoons. There are lots of pigeons on the island, so tame that they run about on the grass, and eat out of the children's hands, while the fathers and mothers sit drinking coffee at tables under the trees.

In Belgium the fathers and mothers of the *petite bourgeoisie*, or lower-middle class, seem always to go about on holidays with their children. They dine at half-past twelve, and after dinner off they go, the parents arm-in-arm, and the children strolling before them, and spend the rest of the day together. It is quite a sight on a summer evening to see them coming home in crowds down the Avenue Louise, the father often carrying the youngest on his shoulders, and the mother with a child hanging on to each arm. [25]



ANTWERP. PAGE 20.

The Avenue Louise is in the modern part of the town. Brussels, however, is not all modern. Most of the Belgian towns are quite flat, but to reach the old Brussels you must go down some very steep, narrow streets, one of which, called the *Montagne de la Cour*, where the best shops are, leads to the Grande Place, a picturesque square surrounded by quaint houses with fantastic gables. These were the houses of the Guilds, or Merchant Companies, in the old days. One of them is shaped like the stern of a ship. Most of them are ornamented with gilded mouldings. They are beautiful buildings, and the finest is the Hotel de Ville, the front of which is a mass of statuettes. Its high, steep roof is pierced by innumerable little windows, and above it there is a lofty and graceful spire, which towers up and up, with a gilded figure of the Archangel Michael at the top.

A flower-market is held in the Grande Place, and in summer, when the sun is shining brightly, it is a very pretty sight. But the best time to see the Grande Place of Brussels is at night, when all is silent, and the tall houses look solemnly down on the scene of many great events which took place there long ago.

[26]

I cannot tell you one-half of all there is to see in Brussels—the beautiful churches, the picture-galleries and museums, the splendid old library, and the gardens. The largest building is a modern one, the *Palais de Justice*, where the law courts sit. It cost nearly £2,000,000 to build, and is much bigger than anything in London. It stands on an eminence overlooking the lower part of the town, and is so huge that it may almost be said to make the capital of this tiny kingdom look top-heavy.

There are many other towns in Belgium besides those we have been looking at: Louvain, with its ancient University; Liège and Charleroi, with their steel and iron works; Courtrai, celebrated for the manufacture of linen; Tournai, where carpets are made; Mons, with its coal-mines; and more besides, which all lie within the narrow limits of this small country. Most of them have played a great part in history. Belgium is, above all things, a country of famous towns.

When you wander about among the towns of Flanders and Brabant you might think that the whole of Belgium was one level plain. But if you leave Brussels and journey to the south, the aspect of the country changes. Beyond the Forest of Soignies the tame, flat fields, the formal rows of trees, and the long, straight roads begin to disappear, the landscape becomes more picturesque, and soon you reach a river called the Meuse, which flows along through a romantic valley, full of quiet villages, gardens, woods, and hayfields, and enclosed by steep slopes clothed with trees and thickets, and broken here and there by dells, ravines, and bold, outstanding pinnacles of rock, beyond which, for mile after mile, an undulating tableland is covered by thick forests, where deer, wild boars, and other game abound. This district is called the Ardennes.

[27]

In the Valley of the Meuse there are three old and famous towns—Liège, Namur, and Dinant—each nestling at the side of the river, at the foot of a hill with a castle perched upon it.

Other rivers flow into the Meuse. There is the Sambre, which runs from the west, and joins the Meuse at Namur; the Lesse, which rushes in from the south through a narrow gorge; and the Semois, a stream the sides of which are so steep that there is not even a pathway along them in some places, and travellers must pass from side to side in boats when following its course.

This is the prettiest part of Belgium, and in summer many people, who do not care for going to the seaside, spend the holidays at the towns and villages which are dotted about in the valleys and among the hills and woods.

## BELGIAN CHILDREN: THE "PREMIÈRE COMMUNION"

The Belgians may be divided, roughly speaking, into five classes of people. There are those of the highest rank, who are called the *grande*, or *vraie*, *noblesse*. Of these there are not many, but they belong to old families, some of which have been famous in the history of their country. They have often fine country-houses, and the towns in which you will find them most often are Brussels and Ghent. Then come those of a much lower class, the *petite noblesse*, of whom there are very many. They seldom mix in society with the *grande noblesse*, and their friends are generally members of the *haute*, or *bonne*, *bourgeoisie*. The *bonne bourgeoisie* are like our middle class, and there is no difference between them and the *petite noblesse* as to the way in which they live. Below these are the *petite bourgeoisie*, who are mostly shopkeepers, clerks, and people in various employments. Last of all are the artisans and working-class people.

It is about the children of the *bonne bourgeoisie* that I am going to speak, for they are a very numerous class, and their customs are in many respects the same as those of most Belgians.

[29]

When a child is born, the parents should send to all their friends a box of *dragees*—that is, sugared almonds or sugar-plums. If the child is a boy, the box is tied with pink ribbons; and if it is a girl, with blue. Cards announcing the birth of a child are often sent nowadays, but the real old Belgian fashion is to send the *dragees*, and it is a great pity that people are giving it up so much.

The next thing is to find a name for the child, and that is done by the godmother, who either chooses some family name or calls the child after its patron saint—that is to say, the saint on whose day it was born—for in Belgium, as in all Catholic countries, each day is dedicated to some saint. The commonest name, however, for girls is Marie, a name given in honour of the Virgin Mary, to whom many baby girls are devoted from their birth. The mothers of these little girls vow never to dress them in anything but blue and white till they are seven years old. When the baby is baptized, the godfather gives a pair of gloves to the mother and the godmother. Curiously enough, most Belgian parents would rather have a baby girl than a boy, because a boy costs more to educate, and also because boys, when they grow up, have to draw lots for service in the army, and almost every father who can afford it buys his son off, and that costs money.

There is no nursery life such as we have in England—at least, in very few Belgian families. Here again money is grudged. People who will pay high wages for a good cook hire young girls of fourteen or fifteen to look after their children, and these *bonnes*, as they are called, are paid very little, and are often careless and stupid. The result is that the children are constantly with their parents, and, to keep them quiet, are dreadfully spoiled and petted. It very often happens that, when a Belgian lady has a friend calling on her, young children, who ought to be in a nursery, are playing in the drawing-room. Their mother has no control over them, and if she ventures to tell them to keep quiet, or to run away, they don't obey her, and then she gives in, and lets them have their own way.

[30]

Another thing which follows from this want of nursery training is that if, as sometimes happens, there are disputes between the parents, the children are mixed up in them. You will hear a Belgian mother say to her young daughter: "Imagine what your father has done!" Or if the husband is angry with his wife, he will turn to his boy, and exclaim: "That is just like a woman!" Of course, this is very bad for the children, who hear a great deal which they would know nothing about if they were not always with their parents.

From being so much with older people these children get strange ideas. I know a lady who said to a small Belgian girl, who was an only child: "Would you like a little brother or sister to play with?" "Oh! no, no," replied the child, "because when my father and mother die, I shall have all their money." Whereupon the mother exclaimed: "There! the dear child; how well she knows the world already!"

[31]

The children of the *petite bourgeoisie* are the most unruly. One sees them often at the various holiday places, at the seaside or in the Ardennes, where they dine, however young, along with their parents at the *tables d'hôte*, or public dining-tables, of the hotels. They eat untidily, spill their soup, throw bread at each other, upset their tumblers of beer or wine (for they are allowed to have whatever their parents are drinking), talk at the top of their voices, and really make such a row that the older people can't hear each other speaking. The moment they have had as much food as they want, they jump up, push their chairs noisily aside, and begin to chase each other round the room. Their parents never think of stopping them, and care nothing about the annoyance such unmannerly behaviour causes. It is curious how few Belgians, old or young, rich or poor, consider the feelings or convenience of others. They are intensely selfish, and this is doubtless caused by the way in which they are brought up.

As you know, parents in England are forced by law to send their children to school, or have them taught privately. There is no such law in Belgium, and parents, if they like, may leave their children without any education. The number, however, of those who do not go to school is gradually decreasing, and most children get lessons of some sort or another.

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THE HÔTEL DE VILLE, BRUSSELS. PAGE 4.

No religious instruction is given in Belgian schools, except in convent schools, or in those where the teachers are entirely under the Church. But almost all children have to learn the Catechism at home. They need not understand it, but they must be able to repeat the words. This is to prepare them for their *Première Communion*, or first Communion, to which they go when they are eleven or twelve years old. It takes place two Sundays before Easter Day.

The custom is for all members of the family to wear new clothes on the day of a *Première Communion*, but the child's dress is the important thing. In Belgian towns, for some time before, the windows of the shops in which articles of dress are sold are full of gloves, stockings, ties, and other things marked "*Première Communion*." A boy's dress is not much trouble. He wears black trousers, a black jacket, and white gloves and tie. But great thought is given to seeing that a girl looks well in her white dress, and other nice new things. She thinks and talks of nothing but her clothes for ever so long before, and especially of her "corsets," which she then puts on for the first time. Her mother takes her to the shop to try them on, and is at much pains to make her waist as slender as possible. "Can't you pull them a little tighter?" she will say to the shopwoman. The girl has tight new shoes to make her feet look as small as possible; the *coiffeur* dresses her hair; and she is very proud of her appearance when, squeezed into proper shape and decked out in her new clothes, she sets off to church. [33]

The children are confirmed on the Monday, the day after their first Communion, and are then taken to visit the friends of the family to be shown off, and to receive presents. The windows of the confectioners' shops are full of little white sugar images of boys and girls saying their prayers, and even the poorest people manage to have a feast of some sort on this occasion. They often beg money for the purpose. It is, of course, difficult for parents who are poor to buy new clothes. But any little gifts of money which a child may receive are taken and hoarded up to be spent on its first Communion.

All Belgian children, even those whose parents are not Catholics, go, with scarcely an exception, to first Communion, and are confirmed, for there may be relatives with money to leave, and they must not be displeased.

The *Première Communion* is the chief event in the life of a Belgian child.

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## CHAPTER VI

### CHRISTMAS IN BELGIUM

Christmas is not kept in Belgium in the same way as in England, Germany, and other countries.

There are special services in church, but no Christmas-trees, Christmas presents, or family dinner-parties.

This was not always so, and some traces still remain in different parts of the old customs which used to be observed in Belgium. The ancient Belgians had a festival at mid-winter, and when they were converted to Christianity they continued to use a good many of their old rites at that season of the year, and the few very old Christmas customs which survive really began when Belgium was a pagan or heathen land.

Some of these customs are rather curious. In the Valley of the Meuse the pagans used to feast on the flesh of wild boars at their mid-winter banquets, and now the people of Namur have roast pork for dinner on Christmas Day. The *petite bourgeoisie* of Brussels often eat chestnuts on that day—an old usage handed down from the days when the Germans ate acorns—and think they can find out what is going to happen in the future by burning them. For instance, a young man and woman who are engaged to be married throw two nuts into the fire. If they burn peacefully, the marriage will be happy; if they crack and jump away from each other, it will be unhappy. If a candle or lamp goes out suddenly on Christmas Eve, it is believed that someone in the room will die soon. Another sign of death is if you throw salt on the floor and it melts. In some places candles are burnt all night to scare away evil spirits. Another custom is to go into orchards, and strike with an axe trees which have not been fruitful. This, it is thought, will make them bear next year. [35]

There are many other superstitions like these which can be traced back to heathen times, but are now mixed up with the rites of Christian worship. One strange superstition, which a few old peasants still have, is that when the clock strikes twelve on Christmas Eve all the water in the house may turn into wine. This comes down, no doubt, from early Christian times.

In some Belgian towns the children of the poor go round on Christmas Eve, from house to house, singing, and asking for bread, fruit, or nuts. One of their favourite songs begins:

"Blyden nacht,  
O blyden nacht! Messiah is geboren!"

That is Flemish, their language, and it means: "Happy night, oh, happy night! The Messiah is born." Another song begins: "Een Kindeken is ons geboren," which is the same as "Unto us a Child is born." [36]

Good children, who have said their prayers every night, expect to find under their pillows on Christmas morning a cake, or rather a bun, which is called an *engelskoek*, or angel's cake, which the Archangel Gabriel is supposed to have brought during the night to reward them. Naughty children find nothing. In some places the children are told that it is the *petit Jesus* (the little child Jesus), who puts the bun under their pillows.

In many churches, but by no means in all, there is a midnight service, at which there is a manger surrounded by wax candles, with an image of the Holy Child in it. But this late service was so often made an excuse for going to public-houses, and drinking too much, that the hour has been changed, in most places, to five in the morning. The custom of having shrines, with a manger and candles, known as "Bethlehems," is, however, common, even in private houses.

On Christmas Day in Flanders people wish each other "A Merry Christmas," just as they do in England; and many parents of the upper classes send their children, in charge of a servant, to visit their relatives, from whom they may receive some small gifts.

But Christmas Day is not the same, in the way of presents and merry-making, as it is in England.

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## CHAPTER VII

### NEW YEAR'S DAY

New Year's Day is a great day in Belgium.

December 31, the last day of the old year, is dedicated to St. Sylvester, and there is a custom, at least in Antwerp, that the child who gets out of bed last is called a "Sylvester," and must give the best of its toys to its brothers and sisters. If one of the older girls in a family does not finish any sewing or fancy-work she may have on hand by the end of the day, she is afraid of being haunted by evil spirits. Some people say that a young woman who does not finish her work before sunset has no chance of being married for a year. So they all get their various tasks done, and the last night of the year is spent in amusement. The whole family, children and all, sit up till midnight, singing, reciting, or playing games till the clock strikes twelve, when they all kiss each other, and give wishes for "A Happy New Year."

In the big towns, however, many of the *petite bourgeoisie* do not "bring in the New Year" at home, and the restaurants and cafés are crowded till twelve o'clock, when healths are drunk, and there is cheering and singing, which are continued in the streets when the people are going home; and there is a great deal of noise for a long time after all the cafés are closed. [38]



It used to be the fashion to fire guns at midnight on New Year's Eve, but that is not common now except in one part of Belgium, called Limburg, where any girl who has a lover expects him to fire off shots in front of her window. The more shots he fires the more she thinks he loves her, and to reward him she ought to hide a bottle of gin in some corner outside the house, from which he can drink her health. Mischievous young men, however, sometimes find the bottle, and drink the gin before the lover comes, and so the girl often waits till she hears the shots, and then lowers the bottle by a string from the window. This funny custom, like many others, is now going out of fashion.

On New Year's Day all Belgians call on their friends to wish them "A Happy New Year," when they are offered wine, sweetmeats, and things of that sort. This paying of visits on New Year's Day goes on to such an extent in Belgian towns that people who have many friends spend almost the whole day in walking or driving about from one house to another. As everyone is doing the same thing, of course a great many people are not at home when their friends come, and so the hall-table of nearly every house is covered with calling-cards before evening. The servants have almost nothing to do all day but answer the door-bell, which is constantly ringing. [39]

In some towns, Antwerp among others, it is supposed to be quite allowable for grown-up people, ladies and gentlemen, to kiss anyone they know on New Year's Day. A Belgian lady once told me that it brought good luck to kiss an officer of the army; but, of course, there are limits to this, as there are to kissing under the mistletoe in England.

In the country parts of South Belgium it is the custom to try to be the first to call out "Good New Year" when you meet a friend. If you say it first you have something given you. The children try to surprise their fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and all the friends of the family in this way. They get up early, and hide themselves, so as to be able to jump out suddenly, and say "*Een Zalig Nieuwjaar*," which means "A Good New Year." All day long they go on doing it, and are never tired of telling each other about the tricks they have thought of to *verassen*, as it is called, the older people, who must give them gingerbread or sugar-plums as the penalty for being surprised in this way.

On New Year's Day in Belgium it is not only your friends who stop you in the street or call at your house. Every man, woman, boy, or girl who has done any work for you, and often those who have done nothing, expect to get something. They are very greedy. Railway-porters who have once brought a box to your house, ring your bell and beg. Telegraph-boys, scavengers paid by the town, bell-ringers, policemen, shop-boys, everyone comes bowing and scraping, and men who in England would be ashamed to take a "tip" will touch their hats, and hold out their hands for a few pence. They don't wait to be offered money; they ask for it, like common street-beggars asking alms. [40]

January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, is known in Flanders as *Groot Nieuwjaar* ("Great New Year"), and is kept to some extent by the working-people in the same way as the first day of the year. Mondays are always idle days with working-men in Belgium, and the first Monday after Epiphany is the idlest of them all. It is called *Verloren Maandag*, or, in French, *Lundi Perdu*, which means "Lost Monday," because no one does any work. The day is spent going about asking for money, and at night there is a great deal of drinking. On one of these Mondays not long ago some drunken troopers of a cavalry regiment stabbed the keeper of a village public-house near Bruges, broke his furniture to pieces, and kept the villagers in a state of terror for some hours.

One very bad thing about the lower-class Belgians is that when they drink, and begin to quarrel, they use knives, and wound or kill those who have offended them. By a curious superstition it is thought unlucky to work on Lost Monday, so the people get drunk, and more crimes of violence are committed on that day than at any other time of the year.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### PAGEANTS AND PROCESSIONS

The Belgians are very fond of pageants and processions. In each town there are several, and in all villages at least one, every year. It has been so for hundreds of years, and these spectacles must have been magnificent in the Middle Ages, when the narrow streets were full of knights in glittering armour riding on their strong Flemish war-horses decked with embroidered saddle-cloths, bishops and priests in gorgeous vestments, standard-bearers, trumpeters, heralds in their robes of office, images of saints borne high above the crowd, mingled with jesters and the enormous giants with grotesque faces which were carried along on these occasions. The tall houses with their projecting wooden gables were gay with flags. The windows and balconies were hung with rich tapestry, and from them the wives and daughters of nobles and wealthy merchants looked down upon the scene below. A Queen of France once rode in a procession through the streets of Bruges, and was moved to jealousy by the sight of so many ladies decked in jewels as rich as her own. "I thought," she said, "that I alone was Queen, but here I have hundreds of rivals." [41]



AT THE KERMESE. PAGE 8.

One of the most splendid of these pageants was in the summer of the year 1468, when an English Princess, Margaret of York, married a Prince called Charles the Bold, who was Duke of Burgundy. On that occasion there was a famous tournament in the market-place of Bruges, in which many valiant knights took part. It was called the "Tournament of the Golden Tree." Two years ago, in the summer of 1907, there was a pageant at Bruges, when the marriage festivities of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York were represented. A young Belgian lady took the part of the English Princess, and a Belgian gentleman appeared as Charles the Bold. There were knights in armour, ladies of the Court of Burgundy, heralds, men-at-arms, and pages, all dressed in the picturesque costumes of the Middle Ages. There was tilting in the lists, when lances were broken, and, in short, everything was done very nearly as it was 440 years ago. This spectacle, which was produced on three days, was attended by thousands of people, who came from all parts of Belgium to see it. It was a very good example of how well the Belgians can manage a pageant, and how popular these shows are with the people.

A very celebrated pageant takes place every year at Bruges, the "Procession of the Holy Blood," which devout Catholics from every country in Europe attend. There is a small chapel in that town, where they keep, in a crystal tube, what is said to be some of the blood of our Lord. It has been there for more than 700 years. The tube is preserved in a beautiful case adorned with precious stones, which is carried through the town on the first Monday after May 2. The houses are decorated with flags, and candles burn in almost every window. Through the streets, between crowds of people standing on the pavements or looking down from the windows—while the church bells ring, and wreaths of incense fill the air, bands of music, squadrons of cavalry, crucifixes, shrines, images, the banners of the parishes, heralds in their varied dresses, bareheaded pilgrims from England, France, and other countries, maidens in white, bearing palms or crowns of thorn or garlands—priests and chanting choristers, move slowly along, and, when the relic of the Holy Blood passes, all the people sink to the ground. Bruges, usually so empty, is always crowded on that day.

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Seven or eight years ago at Lierre, a town near Antwerp, I saw three processions in one month, each of which showed the Belgian fondness for such things. One was the procession of St. Gommarius, the patron saint of the town, when a golden shrine, said to contain his bones, was carried through the streets, just as the relic of the Holy Blood is carried through Bruges. There were a great many little children in that procession, dressed as angels and saints—in white, pale green, blue, crimson, and other colours. Some had wreaths of flowers on their heads, and some carried lighted tapers. They all seemed proud of taking part in the procession. The smallest, who were tiny mites, with their mothers walking with them to take care of them, were very tired at the end, for they had to walk slowly for hours on the hard stones, stopping often before sacred images, when the priests burned incense, and all the people went down on their knees. This, like that at Bruges, is a religious procession, and there are many others of the same kind all over Belgium.

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Another procession was in honour of an old couple, who had been married for fifty years. They were poor people, and the parish was celebrating their "golden wedding." There was a service in the Cathedral of St. Gommarius, and when that was finished the old man and his wife were put in a carriage and four. They were neatly dressed, and each had a large bouquet of yellow flowers. At

the head of each horse walked a young man, leading it by a long yellow ribbon. In front of the carriage a band of musicians played, and behind it came a number of peasants, all in their best clothes. They wore white cotton gloves and yellow wedding-favours. The man and his wife, who were evidently feeble as well as very old, seemed rather bored, but all the people in the procession were in high spirits, for they were on their way to a good dinner paid for by the parish.

A few nights after that there was a tremendous noise of music in the market-place, and another procession was formed, which marched off round the town, and at last stopped before the door of a house. Here they remained for a long time. There was a great deal of cheering, and the band played tune after tune, finishing up with the Belgian National Anthem. And what do you think it was all about? A boy whose parents lived in the house had gained a prize at school. That was all; but it was an excuse for a procession, music, and drinking healths. [45]

Not long ago a young man won a prize at a great School of Music in Brussels called the *Conservatoire*, and so his native town must needs have a procession. There were two bands, a number of flags, and several carriages, in one of which the young fellow sat, bowing from side to side as he was driven through the streets to a café, at which what they call the *vin d'honneur*, or cup of honour, was served.

In the same town two years ago the football team of a regiment quartered there won a cup, and there was a long procession of soldiers and townsmen in honour of the event. The cup was carried in triumph on a platform adorned with wreaths, and the crowd shouted as if the soldiers were returning victorious from war.

The Belgians have always been the same in their love of such displays. Long ago their country was oppressed by the Spaniards, who killed and tortured many of them without mercy. But that made no difference, and their sorrows were soon forgotten if their conquerors provided some pageant to amuse them. A circus procession of buffoons, with dromedaries, elephants, sham giants, and pasteboard whales and dragons, seems to have consoled them for all their misery. [46]

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## CHAPTER IX

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### THE STORY OF ST. EVERMAIRE: A COUNTRY PAGEANT

Once upon a time there was a good man called St. Evermaire, who went on a pilgrimage to a part of Belgium called the Hesbaye, which is near the River Meuse. As he and his companions were journeying along, they came, when it was growing dark one evening, to a great wood. Being afraid of losing their way, they went to a village to ask for shelter. This village belonged to a fierce robber, called Hacco, and it was at his door that the pilgrims knocked. The door was opened by Hacco's wife, who received them kindly, but told them that her husband was a robber, and that, though he was away from home, it would not be safe for them to remain there long. So very early next morning, as soon as it was light, they went into the wood, and lay down to sleep beside a fountain among the trees.

They had scarcely gone when Hacco, who had been out all night looking for people to rob, came home. When he heard about the strangers who had just left, he flew into a terrible rage, and went to look for them. He soon found them fast asleep in the wood, and killed them. Then he tore off their clothes, and left their bodies lying on the ground. [48]



A CHÂTEAU IN THE LESSE VALLEY. PAGE 27.

After a little time some huntsmen found the dead pilgrims, and dug a grave for them. But these people, noticing that the face of one dead man shone brightly, and feeling sure that he must be some very holy person, buried him in a grave by himself. This was St. Evermaire.

The wood was many years later cut down, and a village called Russon was built near the place where Hacco murdered the pilgrims. The first priest of this village discovered the grave of St. Evermaire, whose bones were placed in a tomb in the church of Russon; but they were afterwards laid to rest in a chapel which was built on purpose to receive them. This chapel stands in a grove of beech-trees, on a meadow surrounded by a hedge, in one corner of which there is a fountain whose water is said to be a cure for ague. It is supposed to be on the very spot where the pilgrims were killed. Over the altar in the chapel is a painting of the murder. There are also statues of the Virgin Mary and of St. Evermaire, and a gilded case, which contains the bones of the saint.

On May Day there is a procession from Russon to this chapel. First two vergers come out of the village church, dressed in "tights," and covered from their ankles to their necks with ivy-leaves. They wear pointed caps on their heads, and brandish huge clubs, with which they threaten the country people, who roar with laughter at the faces they make. Seven men are dressed up to represent St. Evermaire and his companions. The saint himself wears a tunic of coarse brown cloth, girt about with a leather belt, from which hang a string of beads and a pilgrim's bottle, a short cloak of ox-hide, and a round hat; but the other pilgrims have just black coats and breeches, with white stockings. They are followed by about fifty men on horseback, dressed up as Hacco and his band of robbers.

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This strange-looking procession goes to the chapel, where there is service, the vergers in their ivy-leaves assisting at the altar; and the moment the Benediction has been said, the whole congregation rushes out to the meadow. The pilgrims stand in a circle near the fountain, where they sing a quaint old country hymn.

In the meantime Hacco and his band gallop about outside the meadow; but when the pilgrims have done singing, they enter it, and ride round and round several times. Then the pilgrims go near the chapel, and a short conversation is sung between them and Hacco, they imploring mercy, and he abusing them for trespassing on his lands. At last Hacco becomes impatient, draws his sword, and advances upon the pilgrims, declaring in a voice of thunder that he is about to kill them.

At this point the spectators are expected to weep; but all of a sudden the youngest pilgrim takes to his heels, and scampers away as fast as ever he can. Hacco and the robbers run after him, scrambling about among bushes and trees, as if they were playing at hide-and-seek. The spectators laugh and clap their hands, and the village children scream with delight. Hacco fires a pistol at the runaway, but misses, on which everybody cheers. Then he fires again, and the pilgrim tumbles down, and is killed with an arrow by one of the robbers, who picks him up, throws him across the back of a horse and brings him back to the meadow.

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During this chase the other pilgrims have thrown themselves, as if in despair, on the grass, where presently Hacco and his followers proceed to kill them. But by this time all the actors are tired and thirsty; so St. Evermaire and his friends rise up, and the whole company of robbers and pilgrims walk off, and swill beer together for the rest of the day. So ends the rustic pageant of Russon.

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## CHAPTER X

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### THE CARNIVAL

The week before Lent begins is called in Flanders *Duivelsweek*, which means "The Devil's Week"; and on the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday there is the Carnival, so called from the Latin words *carni vale* (which mean, as every school-boy knows, "farewell to the flesh"), because during Lent good Catholics should abjure "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and refrain from eating meat. In Ghent the Monday of that week is called *Zotten-Maanday*, or Fools' Monday, and all over Belgium the next day (Shrove Tuesday in England) is called *Mardi Gras*—that is, Fat Tuesday—the day on which people can eat and drink as much as they like before beginning to fast.

During the Carnival people go about the streets in fancy dress, sometimes with their faces hidden by masks. Often they are dressed as clowns, and make a great noise, blowing horns, dancing, singing, and making fools of themselves in every possible way. In the shops bags of confetti are sold—little bits of coloured paper, like what you see in England too—which you may throw at other people, whether you know them or not. The children have often great fun, covering each other with these bits of paper, which stick in the hair and are very difficult to shake off. In some of the streets at Brussels the pavements are carpeted all the time of the Carnival with thousands of these small pink, yellow, and white fragments, which the people have been throwing about. Then there are false noses, wigs, and other disguises, so that you may pass people you know quite well without an idea who they are. A person may speak to you; you fancy you know the voice, but a beard, and perhaps a long blue nose, hide the face, and you are in doubt. A handful of confetti is thrown in your face, and in a moment the figure is gone and lost in the crowd.

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A few years ago there was a Carnival procession in most of the towns, and then all the huge wickerwork giants were carried about. They all have names. The Brussels giant is Ommegan. In another town there is, or was, one called Goliath. There is a very old giant called Lange Man, or Long Man. He is probably still to be seen at Hasselt, in the South of Belgium, which was his native place. A good many years ago he was carried through the streets on a car drawn by four horses, and all the poor people got soup, which he was supposed to give them in memory of a famine from which the town had suffered at one time. A good deal of money is collected for the poor during the Carnival by people who go about with boxes, into which everyone is expected to put something.

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There are not so many Carnival processions as there used to be, and within the last two or three years they have been entirely given up in some places. But the Carnival goes on, with more or less gaiety, everywhere. There are few towns where masked balls do not take place, and these usually last all night, so that some of the dancers never go to bed. During the Carnival most of the public-houses remain open all night, and there is dancing in them, and a great deal of noise.

The fourth Sunday in Lent is called *Mi-Carême*, or, in Flemish, *Half-Vasten*, when the fun of the Carnival is renewed; and on that day a person like Santa Claus, whom you know in England, makes his appearance. He is called *De Greef van Half-Fasten*—that is, the Count of *Mi-Carême*—and comes to give presents to all good children. But he is so like Santa Claus that we shall leave him alone in the meantime, for I shall presently be telling you what Santa Claus does in Belgium.

There is, however, another Count who does not visit England—the Count of Nut Land, who rides along with a sack of nuts, which he throws about for anyone to pick up. Strange to say, cracking these nuts is supposed to be a cure for toothache! Is not that a funny idea?

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## CHAPTER XI

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### CHILDREN'S WINTER FESTIVALS

Very young children in Belgium look forward to the evening before November 11, which is the Day of St. Martin, because they have heard that something very exciting is going to happen.

Their parents make them stand in a corner, with their faces to the wall. They must not look round, for if they do nothing will happen. But if they are not inquisitive, ask no questions, and stand quite still, a shower of nuts and apples suddenly falls on the floor behind them. They are told that these have been thrown down from heaven by St. Martin, and they at once turn round and scramble for them.

There is another thing which is sometimes done on St. Martin's Eve. The father, or some big boy, comes into the younger children's bedroom, dressed up as the saint, with a beard and robes, and asks how the children have been behaving. If he is told they have been good, he gives them apples or sweetmeats; but if he hears they have been naughty, he pulls out a whip, throws it down, and leaves the room.

At Malines, and perhaps elsewhere, the children of poor people have a little procession of their own on St. Martin's Day, when they dress up and go about singing from house to house. One of them, who is dressed as St. Martin, carries a large basket, into which the people at whose doors they ring put apples or money. At another town, called Furnes, there is also a procession of children, who carry paper lanterns, with lighted candles in them, and march singing through the streets. The same thing is done in the country round Bruges, where the children visit the farm-houses at night, singing and asking for apples and nuts. [55]

There are cakes, called *gauffres*, which are often eaten on St. Martin's Day, and are therefore sometimes called St. Martin's cakes. That favourite saint is so much spoken of in connection with eating good things that in the Valley of the Meuse they call him *le bon vivant*, which means the person who lives well.

Just as in England bonfires are lighted on Guy Fawkes' Day, November 5, so in Belgium they light them on the evening of St. Martin's Day. Indeed, they are known as St. Martin's fires, and the children call lighting a bonfire "warming the good St. Martin."

About a month after St. Martin's comes the Day of St. Nicholas—December 6. During the night before this saint is supposed to ride through the sky, over the fields and above the housetops, mounted on a donkey or a white horse, with a great basket stuffed full of toys, fruit, sweetmeats, and other nice things. Down the chimney of every house where there are children sleeping he drops some of these things, if the children have been good, or a whip if they have been naughty. [56]

So on the Eve of St. Nicholas Belgian children, before they go to bed, fill their shoes, or sometimes a basket, with hay or carrots, and place them near the chimney of their sleeping-room, so that when St. Nicholas comes to the house he may find something for his donkey or horse to eat, and in return leave presents for them.

Having made these preparations, the children ought to sing or repeat verses addressed to the saint. Here is one of them—the one they sing at Lierre:

"Sinte Niklaes,  
Nobele Sinte Niklaes!  
Werpjet in myn Schoentjen  
Een Appeltjen of een limoentjen!"

This means in English: "Noble Saint Nicholas, please throw into my little shoe just a small apple or lemon."

There is another of these rhymes which is not so polite, in which the saint is told that if he gives something, the child will serve him for life, but if he doesn't, the child will not serve him at all!

Next morning the children wake early, and jump out of bed to see what has happened during the night. They expect to find, if St. Nicholas is pleased with them, that the hay and carrots have disappeared, and that their shoes are full of presents; but that if they have not been good enough, the shoes will just be as they were the night before, and a birch-rod stuck into the hay. But, as you may suppose, it always turns out that St. Nicholas is pleased. The presents are there, and amongst them there is sure to be a gingerbread figure of the saint, which they may eat or not, as they please; so they are happy for the rest of the day. [57]



St. Nicholas, you see, is much the same as Santa Claus, for whom stockings are hung up in England.

About a fortnight after this comes December 21, dedicated to St. Thomas, when Belgian children can play tricks on their parents in a curious way. The game is to get your father or mother to leave the house, and then lock the door and refuse to let them in till they have promised to give you something. A child will say: "Mother, somebody wants to speak to you in the garden." The mother goes out. Of course there is nobody there; and when she comes back the child calls out: "St. Thomas's Day! What will you give me to let you in?" So the mother promises something, which is usually chocolate, with a piece of *cramique*—a kind of bread with currants in it—and not till then is the door opened. This, of course, is great fun for the children, who always hope that their parents have forgotten what day it is, and so will be easily tricked.

A week later is the Festival of SS. Innocents, or *Allerkinderendag* (the day of all the children), as it is called in Flemish, which is observed in memory of the slaughter of the children by Herod. On this day Belgian children are supposed to change places with their parents, wear their best clothes, and rule the household. [58]

They can put on their parents' clothes, and go about the house making as much noise as they like, teasing the servants and giving them orders. The youngest girl has the privilege of telling the cook what she is to prepare for dinner; and all the children may go out and walk about dressed up as old people. This is not often seen now, though poor children sometimes put on their parents' things, and beg from door to door, calling themselves "the little fathers and mothers."

These winter festivals, when the children have so much liberty and get so many presents, take the place in Belgium of the Christmas-trees and parties you have in England.

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## CHAPTER XII

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### THE ARCHERS: GAMES PLAYED IN BELGIUM

Let us imagine we are taking a walk along some country road in Flanders on a summer afternoon. There is a cinder-track for cyclists on one side, and the lines of a district railway on the other. The road between them is causeway, very hard, dusty, and hot to walk on. But we can step on to the railway, and walk between the rails, or take to the cycle-track. If a train comes up behind, the engine-driver will whistle to give us warning, but we must keep a sharp lookout for cyclists, who seldom ring their bells, but rush swiftly and silently past, and perhaps shout something rude to us for being on their track. There are no fences or hedges, but a straggling row of tall poplar-trees on each side of the road, and beyond them square fields of rye or pasturage divided by ditches of stagnant water.

It will not be long before we come to a village, a row of white cottages with roofs of red tiles, and outside window-shutters painted green. In front of each cottage there is a pathway of rough stones, and a gutter full of dirty water. There are about fifty of these cottages, of which half a dozen or so have signboards with *Herberg*, which means public-house, over their doors. The railway passes close in front of them. A little way back from the road there is a church, with a clock-tower, and a snug-looking house, standing in a garden, where the parish priest lives. [60]

Just outside the village we notice a meadow, in which there is a wooden shed open at one side, with benches in it, and reminding us of the little pavilions we often see on village cricket-grounds in England. The part of the meadow just in front of this shed is covered with cinders or gravel, in the middle of which rises a very high pole, tapering towards the top, and looking like a gigantic fishing-rod stuck in the ground. It is crossed, a long way up, by slender spars, like the yards of a ship, only they are no thicker than a walking-stick. On these spars, and along the pole itself near the top, a number of little wooden pegs, with tufts of yellow worsted attached to them, are fixed. One bigger than the rest is perched on the very summit of the pole, which bends over slightly to one side. They look like toy canaries, but are called "pigeons," and they are put there as marks to be shot at with bows and arrows.

Presently a number of men come from the village, each with a long-bow and some arrows. It is a holiday, and the local Society of Archers is going to spend the afternoon shooting for prizes. One of them takes his stand close to the foot of the pole, fits an arrow on his bowstring, aims steadily, and shoots straight up. It needs a good deal of strength, as the bow is stiff to bend. The arrow flies whistling among the "birds," touches one or two without bringing them down, rises high above the top of the pole, turns in the air, and comes down again to the ground with a thud. It is the duty of two or three boys to pick up the arrows, and bring them back to the shooters. The arrows are blunt, but to protect their heads these boys wear hats with thick flat crowns and very broad brims, which make them look like big mushrooms with legs as they run about to fetch the arrows. [61]

When a bird is hit fair and square it comes down, and the shot is cheered. Sometimes shot after shot is fired, and nothing falls, especially if there is a wind. But the interest never flags, and the shooting goes on for hours. There is a great deal of talking and laughing, much beer is drunk in

the pavilion, and the fun only ends when the light fails.

This is the great national sport of Belgium. There is scarcely a town or village which has not a Society of Archers, called generally after St. Sebastian, the patron saint of archers. Many of them were founded 600 years ago, at the time when the famous archers of England were showing how well they could hold their own with the bow against knights clad in heavy armour. In 1303 a society called the Confraternity of the Archers of St. Sebastian was founded at Ypres, a town in Flanders, to celebrate a great battle, the Battle of the Golden Spurs, in which the Flemings had been victorious over the French the year before, and this society still exists. The chief Society of Archers in Brabant in the old days was at Louvain, and it was founded just three years before that Battle of Cressy of which you have so often heard, when, as the old chronicler Froissart says, the English arrows flew so thick that it seemed to snow.

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Thus the history of this national sport goes back to the time when arrows were used in battle, and men had to practise constantly with their bows in order to be able to defend their country or attack their enemies. But when the use of firearms became universal, and archers were no longer employed in warfare, the societies still continued to exist, and their meetings gradually became what they now are—social gatherings for the practice of archery as a form of sport.

At Bruges there is a company of archers called the Society of St. Sebastian, whose club-house was built with money given by Charles II. of England, who lived in that town for some time when he was an exile; and it may interest you to know that Queen Victoria, when on a visit to Bruges, became a member of this society, and afterwards sent two silver cups as prizes to be shot for.

Another form of this sport is shooting with crossbows at a target. St. George is the patron generally of those who use the crossbow. The Society of St. George at Bruges has a curious festival, which is observed in February. It is called the *Hammekensfeest*, or festival of the ham. The shooting takes place in a hall, where a supper-table is laid with various dishes of ham, salads, fish, and other eatables. The target is divided into spaces marked with the names of the dishes. If anyone hits a space marked, for example, ham, he may go and help himself to ham; but if someone else, shooting after him, hits the same place, he must then give up his seat. In the bull's-eye of the target there is the figure of an ape, and if anyone hits that he can eat of any dish he pleases. You may suppose what an amusing supper-party this is, when all the guests are shooting and eating by turns, and no one knows whether he may not have to rise suddenly and give up his place to somebody else.

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There are many other customs and festivals connected with the archer societies, which are very flourishing in Belgium, chiefly among the *petite bourgeoisie*.

There are athletic clubs in Belgium, and rowing is a favourite sport, especially at Ghent. Two years on end the Ghent Rowing Club won the Grand Challenge Shield at Henley, beating all the English crews which rowed against them.

As in all countries, the children have many games. One, which they call *balle dans la maison* (ball in the house), is much the same as rounders, and there is another game called *camp ruiné*, which girls play at school. There are two sides. A ball is thrown up, and each side tries to prevent the other catching it. Each player who is prevented has to join the opposite side or camp, and so on till one camp is "ruined" by losing all its occupants.

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PLAYING "JEU DE BOULE," AT A FLEMISH INN.

There is a very popular game among Belgian working-men called the *jeu de balle*. There are five players on each side, who stand on two large courts marked on the ground. The ball is served by



hitting it with the hand (as at fives) by a player on one side over the line which divides the courts, and is returned in the same way by a player on the other side. The ball must not touch the ground, and is taken full pitch. A point is lost by the side which sends a ball outside the lines of the court into which it ought to have been served or returned. The points count fifteen, thirty, forty, and five for the last, which wins the game.

This is the chief game played by working-men in Belgium. In some places it seems to be quite unknown, but in others it is very popular. But there are so many rules that it is impossible fully to understand it without seeing it played, or to explain it without a diagram showing the positions of the players, who have all different names, like men fielding at cricket. The *jeu de boules*, which you may hear mentioned in Belgium, is quite different from the *jeu de balle*, and is much the same as skittles.

Of the more important games football is the most popular in Belgium. Great crowds assemble to watch the matches, which are always played under "Association" rules. Rugby football would be impossible for Belgians, because they would never keep their tempers when caught and thrown down. There would be constant rows, and no match would ever be finished. As it is, there is a great deal of quarrelling, and when one town plays another the visitors, if they win, are hooted, and sometimes attacked, when they are leaving the ground. Lately, after a football match in Flanders, knives were drawn, and some of the players had to escape in a motor-car.

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Cricket has lately been tried, but it has not as yet spread much, and is not likely to become very popular, as it requires too much patience and steadiness for Belgian young men and boys. Lawn-tennis and hockey, however, are quite the fashion, especially lawn-tennis, which many Belgians, ladies as well as men, play extremely well. Important tennis tournaments are held every summer at Ostend and other places on the coast.

In recent years several golf-courses have been made in Belgium. There is one at a place called Le Coq, near Ostend, where Leopold II., the present King of the Belgians, founded a club. It is very pretty, and there is a fine club-house; but good English players do not like it, because the course is too artificial, with flower-beds and ornamental shrubs, whereas a golf-course ought to be as natural as possible. Golf is played also at Brussels, Antwerp, Nieuport, and Ghent.

Another place for golf is Knocke, a seaside village near Bruges, where the game was introduced by a few Englishmen some years ago. The golf-course at this place is laid out among the dunes, and is entirely natural, with "bunkers" of fine sand. A great many players go there from England and Scotland, as well as from various parts of Belgium, and the Flemish "caddies," who cheerfully carry the clubs for 5d. a round, speak English quite well, and know all about the "Royal and Ancient Game."

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## CHAPTER XIII

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### WHAT THE BELGIANS SPEAK

Three different languages are spoken in Belgium. These are Flemish, Walloon, and French. Flemish is spoken in Flanders, in the provinces of Antwerp and Limbourg, and in a part of Brabant. Walloon is the language of Liège and the Valley of the Meuse, Luxembourg, and the western districts. French is spoken all over the country. Some Belgians speak nothing but Flemish, some nothing but Walloon, and some nothing but French. A great many speak both Flemish and French, and there are some who speak all three languages.

Though Flemish is the language of the majority of Belgians, most of the books, newspapers, and magazines are published in French, which is the "official" language—that is to say, it is the language of the Court and the Government—and all well-educated Belgians can speak, read, and write it. In Brussels almost everyone speaks French.

Though many Belgians know French thoroughly, they speak it with an accent of their own, which is unlike anything you hear in France, just as English people speak French or German with an English accent. So Belgium is not a good place to go to if you want to learn French. The worst French is spoken in East Flanders and the best in Ypres.

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There is a great likeness between Flemish and Dutch, which were originally one language, and a book printed in Flemish is almost exactly the same as a Dutch book. But there are many different ways of pronouncing Flemish. The accent of Ghent is so different from that of Bruges that the people of these towns do not always understand each other, and in neither do they speak with the accent which is used in Antwerp. Thus, in little Belgium there are not only three different languages, but various ways of speaking Flemish, the original language of the country. So French is not only the official language, but the most useful for travellers to know.

Though French is the official language, there are laws which have been made to allow the use of Flemish in the law courts, and Belgian officers must be able to command the soldiers in Flemish. In the *Moniteur* (a paper like the *London Gazette*) Royal Proclamations, and things of that sort, are published in both Flemish and French. Railway-tickets are printed in both languages. So are the names of the streets in some towns. In the Belgian Parliament, though the members generally make their speeches in French, they may use Flemish if they like, and they sometimes do.

Walloon may be described as a very old form of French, but though the Walloons are the most active and industrious of all the Belgians, their language is not much known, and you will never hear it spoken except in the Valley of the Meuse, and in the country parts of South-West Belgium. [69]

The three Belgian words for Christmas are *Kerstdag* in Flemish, *Noël* in French, and *Nouée* in Walloon.

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## CHAPTER XIV

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### A SHORT HISTORY

I must write just one chapter on Belgian history.

Dates are tiresome things, though they are useful pegs, so to speak, on which to hang the facts of history, and help us to recollect the order in which they happened. However, we shall not bother with many dates. I shall make the whole story as plain and simple as possible; and, besides, you can skip it all if you find it too stupid and dull.

The first thing to understand about the tiny corner of Europe which is now called Belgium is that very long ago it was divided into a great many small States, each of which was ruled over by some Duke, or Count, or Baron, or some noble with another title, who made peace or war with his neighbours, just as the Kings of Europe do nowadays. There were the Dukes of Brabant, and the Counts of Flanders and of Namur, the Lords of Malines, and the Bishop-Princes of Liège, and many more. You will see where their States lay if you look at the map.

The most famous was Flanders, for the great Flemish cities, such as Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres, became strong and rich by reason of their trade and manufactures. [71]

In the towns the merchants and tradesmen were banded together in societies called guilds. There were guilds of weavers, and butchers, and other trades; and they defended themselves so well against the nobles, who often tried to attack their liberties, that the towns became strongholds of freedom.

But, unfortunately, they were always quarrelling. Each town wanted to be richer than its neighbour. Each town cared only for itself, so they often fought. Ghent wanted to ruin Ypres, and the men of Ghent helped an English army to attack Ypres. At other times the guildsmen of Bruges fought against those of Ghent. Thus for many years this part of Europe was divided into petty States, and the towns, in spite of their wealth and freedom, were always rebelling against their Princes, or fighting with each other. And all this time, close at hand and watchful, there was a mighty State, called "The Burgundies," whose dominions were ever stretching farther and farther.

At last a day came when a certain Count of Flanders died, leaving no heir male, and a Duke of Burgundy, called Philip the Hardy, married a Flemish Princess, and obtained possession of Flanders. Gradually after that the Dukes of Burgundy became rulers of all the country which we now call Belgium, except the Principality of Liège, which remained independent under its Bishop-Princes till recent times. [72]

The last Duke of Burgundy was Charles the Bold, a brave warrior, but very fierce and cruel. He was killed in a battle, and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, married an Austrian Archduke called Maximilian; and then Flanders, Brabant, and the other places we have spoken of, passed under the Austrian Royal Family, which is called the House of Hapsburg.

Maximilian and Mary had a son, called Philip the Handsome, who married Joanna the Mad, daughter of King Ferdinand of Spain. The son of this marriage was Charles V., who was neither mad nor handsome, but one of the most famous men in history. He not only ruled over the Netherlands, as Belgium and Holland were called, but also over Spain, and all the immense Spanish Empire, and was, moreover, Emperor of Germany.

After reigning for forty years, Charles V. gave up his royal honours to his son Philip; and then began a terrible time for the Netherlands.

Philip hated the liberty which the people of the Netherlands loved. They had, especially in the towns, been accustomed to make laws for themselves, which their old Dukes and Counts, and also the Hapsburgs, had always sworn to maintain. But Philip resolved to put an end to all this freedom, and to be their absolute master.

He also hated the Protestants, of whom there were many in the Netherlands, and resolved to destroy them. For this purpose he introduced a kind of court, called the Inquisition, which inquired into the religious faith of everyone, and sent people to be tortured and burned to death if they were not Catholics. [73]



**VILLAGE & CANAL, ADINKERQUE.**

The people became furious against Philip, and rebelled in defence of their liberty, and against the Inquisition. For a long time the contest, which is called the "Revolt of the Netherlands," went on. Philip was enormously rich, and had a great army and a strong fleet. The Spanish soldiers, whom he let loose upon the people, were cruel, as well as highly trained. Men, women, and children were tortured, robbed, burnt to death, killed in battle, and murdered in cold blood by thousands. Few things, if any, more terrible have been known in the history of the world.

The chief Protestant leader was that Prince of Orange called William the Silent, of whom you must often have heard. After the contest had continued for some years, instead of being dismayed, he was more resolute than ever, and persuaded the Southern or Belgian part of the Netherlands, and the Northern or Dutch part, to promise that they would help each other, and fight against the Spaniards till they were free.

But in a very short time the Southern and the Northern Netherlands drifted apart. The Dutch stood firm, and were saved in the long, weary struggle. They shook off the yoke of Spain, and gained their liberty. The Belgians halted between two opinions, and were lost. Most of them were Catholics, which made it easier for them to submit to Philip. But the most industrious of the population fled, and the trade and manufactures which had made their country prosperous went to Holland. After that, a great historian says, "the Flemish and Brabantine cities were mere dens of thieves and beggars."

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The Spaniards ruled over Belgium, which was now called the "Spanish Netherlands," till a daughter of Philip's, Isabella by name, married an Austrian Archduke called Albert. They received Belgium as a wedding-gift. The bride's father, the tyrant Philip, died about that time, and Albert and Isabella went to Brussels, where the people, in spite of the miserable state of their country, had a fine time of it with banquets, processions, and fireworks.

But two more changes were at hand. When Albert died Belgium went back to Spain; and once again, after long wars, during one of which Brussels was nearly all destroyed by fire, it was handed over to Austria. This was in the year 1714; and after that it was called the "Austrian Netherlands."

Thus, you see, the Belgians were constantly being passed from one set of masters to another, like a race of slaves. They had not stuck to the brave Dutch, and fought on till they were free, and so never could tell who were to be their next rulers.

This could not be good for the character of any people. However, they were, on the whole, happy under the House of Hapsburg till an Emperor called Joseph II. came to the Austrian throne. He was a good man, and wise in many ways, but he made the mistake of trying to bring in new laws and customs which the people did not like. Belgium had been sunk, ever since the time of Philip II., in poverty and ignorance. All the people wished for was to be let alone, to amuse themselves, and to have peace. But Joseph II. wanted to raise them up, and, most of all, to spread knowledge and education among them.

[75]

The Austrian Netherlands—that is, Belgium—were more Catholic than ever, and all the Bishops and priests were up in arms against the reforms proposed by Joseph; and there was a revolution, which had not finished when he died. It came to an end, however, soon after his death, when the Catholics got all they wanted, though the Austrians remained in power. But the country had become restless. Its restlessness was increased by the French Revolution, which was now in full progress; and all was ripe for another change of rulers, which soon came.

The French Republicans, who beheaded their own King and his Queen (who was, by-the-by, a

sister of Joseph II.), invaded Belgium, driving out the Austrians, and made it a part of France.

One thing the French did was very popular with the Belgians. It was this: there was a treaty, called the Treaty of Münster, made as long before as the year 1648, which declared that the Dutch were to have control of the Scheldt, and ever since then that splendid river, on which Antwerp stands, had been closed, so that the trade of Antwerp, the great Belgian seaport, had been entirely ruined. The French now declared the Scheldt a free river, to be used by all nations. This was tidings of great joy to the Belgians; but England would not allow the Treaty of Münster to be torn up in this way, and a war began between England and France, which lasted till the fall of Napoleon in 1814. [76]

During all that war Belgium was ruled by the French. When Napoleon gave up his throne, and was sent to the Island of Elba, the Great Powers met to settle Europe, which he had turned upside down. One of the things they had to decide was what should be done with the Austrian Netherlands, and the plan they arranged seemed a very good one.

Austria did not want Belgium, and the plan was to make that country, the Principality of Liège, and Holland, into one state, and call it the "Kingdom of the Netherlands." It was to be ruled over by one of the Orange family, a descendant of William the Silent.

And there was something more. The William of Orange who was to be King of the Netherlands had a son, and the English arranged that this son should marry our Princess Charlotte, who was heir to the throne of England; and so all the coasts of the Netherlands opposite England, with Antwerp and the Scheldt, were to be in the hands of a friendly nation allied by marriage to the English Royal Family. The proposed marriage was publicly announced in March, 1814, but it never took place. The Princess Charlotte married a German, called Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, and the young Prince of Orange married a Russian Grand Duchess. [77]

The Kingdom of the Netherlands, however, was set up; and at the Battle of Waterloo, which was fought in June, 1815, after Napoleon escaped from Elba, a force of Netherlanders, some of them Dutch and some of them Belgians, fought under the Duke of Wellington, when he gained the great victory which brought peace to Europe.

And now it was supposed that the Belgians would settle quietly down, and form one people with the Dutch, who spoke a language so like their own Flemish, and who came of the same race. But not a bit of it. The Dutch were mostly Protestants, and almost all the Belgians were Catholics. There were disputes about questions of religion from the very first. Disagreements followed on one subject after another; and, to make a long story short, in fifteen years there was a revolution in the Belgian provinces of the new kingdom.

The Belgians proclaimed their wish to make a kingdom of their own, and once more the Great Powers met to consider what was to be done with them this time. The meeting was in London, where five very shrewd and wily gentlemen, from England, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia, sat and talked to each other for week after week about what they should do with this broken kingdom, which was, as it were, thrown on their hands. They were far too polite to quarrel openly; but Russia, Prussia, and Austria would have liked to force the Belgians to keep to what had been arranged in 1814, while England and France were on the side of the Belgians. On one thing, and one thing only, they all agreed, and that was not to have another European war. [78]

In the long run England and France managed to persuade the others that the best thing was to let the Belgians have their own way, and choose a King for themselves. They first set their affections on a son of Louis Philippe, the King of France, and asked him to be their King. But England would not hear of this, so his father told him to refuse. Then the Belgians were advised to choose that Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg who had married Princess Charlotte. She was now dead, and he had been living in England ever since. They took this advice, and in 1831 he accepted the offer they made him, and was crowned at Brussels as Leopold I., King of the Belgians.

Thereafter he married a daughter of Louis Philippe, and reigned till the year 1865, when he died, and was succeeded by his son, Leopold II., who is the present King. This is how the southern provinces of the Netherlands were made into the little, independent kingdom of Belgium. [79]

Since then the trade and commerce of Belgium have grown. Antwerp has become a huge seaport; Brussels flourishes. The industries of Ghent are prosperous. Throughout the Walloon country, from the busy forges of Liège to the coal-mines round Mons, there is a hard-working and, on the whole, successful people. Even fallen Bruges has lately been struggling to rise again.

But, unfortunately, there is another side to the picture. You have often heard it said that "as the twig is bent, the tree grows." It is the same with mankind. The character and manners of grown-up people depend on how they have been trained when young. If a child is bullied, and passed from one master to another, ill-treated and frightened, it is apt to grow up timid and untruthful. The same thing may be seen in nations. To this day the lower classes in Belgium bear traces of the long period of subjection, and the race has not recovered from the time when the Spaniards turned so many famous towns into dens of thieves and beggars. They are very often cunning, timid though boastful, and full of the small tricks and servile ways which are natural in a people which once had all manliness and courage crushed out of it.

Another unlucky thing for the Belgians is that they quarrel dreadfully among themselves about public questions. In all countries there are quarrels of this sort, but in Belgium these disputes [80]

poison the whole life of the country. They are divided into Catholics and Liberals, and the best interests of the State are lost sight of in the squabbling which goes on between these two parties. By the laws of Belgium all religions are equal. There is no Established Church. The Parliament each year finds money for the Catholic clergy, for the English Protestant chaplains, and for those of any other faith, if there are enough of them to form a congregation of a certain size. But this has not brought peace. In England, as you know, only some foolish people allow their political disputes to interfere with their private friendships, or with their amusements. But in Belgium the Catholics and the Liberals never forget their differences. It is like the time when the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. There are Catholic football clubs and Liberal football clubs; the public-houses are either Catholic or Liberal; and even children are taught at school to have feelings of this sort. One day a small girl was asked out to tea with some English children. When the hour came, her mother found her crying, and asked her what was the matter. "I'm afraid," she sobbed, "to go and play with these little heretics!"



**WATERLOO: THE FARM OF LA BELLE ALLIANCE AND THE MOUND SURMOUNTED BY THE BELGIAN LION. PAGE 77.**

The great quarrel is about education. The Liberals want to make a law that all children must go to school, but the Catholics will not agree to this. The priests have so much influence, and work so hard at the elections, that, except in Brussels, Liège, and a few more places, the people are frightened to vote against them. So there has always been a Catholic Government in power for the last twenty-five years.

[81]

The Great Powers, when they allowed the Belgians to have their own way and choose a King for themselves, took Belgium under their protection, and made it a "neutral state"—that is to say, a country which may not be attacked or entered by the armies of other nations which are fighting each other, and which is not permitted to make war on other countries. This was a great blessing for the Belgians, because their country is so small and weak, and so many battles used to be fought in it that it was called "the cock-pit of Europe." But whether the people of a neutral state are ever likely to be brave and self-sacrificing is another thing.

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## CHAPTER XV

[82]

### THE BELGIAN ARMY: THE CONGO

Though Belgium is a neutral state, living under the protection of the Great Powers of Europe, the Belgians are afraid that some day, if these Powers quarrel with each other and begin to fight, armies may march into their country and turn it once more into a battle-field; or perhaps one of the Powers may wish to take a part of Belgium, or some Belgian town, such as Antwerp, and rule over it. So this little kingdom must have an army to defend itself till some powerful nation comes to help it.

The Belgian force actually under arms consists of only about 40,000 soldiers, but it can be raised to 200,000, if there is a danger of war, by calling out the "reserves," or men who have been trained, but are no longer with their regiments. In order to keep up this force of 40,000 it is necessary to find about 13,000 new men each year. But the Belgians do not like to be soldiers, and it is very difficult to persuade them to join the army. Last year only 1,000 would do so, which seems very few for a country in which there are 7,000,000 people. It has been the same for years. So there is a law called the Conscription, by which the necessary numbers are forced to serve.

[83]

This is how they manage the conscription: in February of each year all the boys who become nineteen in that year must go and draw lots to decide which of them are to enter the army.

The drawing generally takes place in the *Hotel de Ville* of the chief town in the part of the

country to which the boys belong. On the appointed day all the families in which there are sons liable to serve flock into the town, and a great crowd gathers outside the building. The lads who are to draw lots go in, and find some officials waiting for them. Each boy has to put his hand into the ballot-box and draw out a paper on which there is a number. Suppose there are 150 boys, and 50 are wanted for the army, then those who draw the 50 lowest numbers are those who have to serve. Each boy draws out his paper, and gives it to an official, who calls out the number. If it is a number above 50, he is free, and runs out shouting with joy; but if it is one of the lower numbers, he goes out sadly to tell his family that he has drawn a "bad" number.

While the drawing goes on, the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and their friends, wait outside in the greatest anxiety. There are cheers and joyful greetings when a boy with a "good" number comes out, and groans of pity for those who have been unlucky. And when the drawing is done, and everyone knows his fate, they all go off to the public-houses. Those who have drawn lucky numbers get drunk from joy, while those who have to serve in the army try to forget their sorrow in drinking. Very often their families and friends do the same, and so it comes to pass that every February there are horrible scenes—men and women, boys and girls, reeling about the streets, shouting, singing, quarrelling, and behaving in the most disgraceful way. It is quite different from Germany, where every boy knows he must be trained to defend his country, and where almost everyone is proud of being a soldier.

[84]

If, however, the father of a boy who has drawn an unlucky number is rich enough to pay for another to take his place, he may do so. This system is called the *Remplacement*, and almost every father buys his son off if he can afford it. Many Belgians think this system unfair, and the officers of the army do not like it. Perhaps, before very long, there may be a change, and a new law made by which all boys will have to serve for a certain time. The Catholics have always been in favour of the *Remplacement*, while the Liberals have been against it. But it is said that the King wishes to abolish it, and try some new plan. So very likely the Catholics will give in, and there will be no more drawing of lots and buying off, but a system of universal service, which will be a very good thing for Belgium.

Though the trade of Belgium is very large indeed for the size of the country, the Belgians have no navy, and not many merchant-ships. But they have lately plunged into an adventure which may force them to have merchant-ships and men-of-war to defend them; for this small country has taken possession of a huge part of Central Africa, ever so many times bigger than Belgium itself.

[85]

About twenty-five years ago Leopold II., the present King of the Belgians, was made ruler over this part of Africa, which is called the Congo State, because of a magnificent river, the Congo, which flows through it. It was the Great Powers of Europe who made him ruler, and they made him promise that he would abolish slavery, allow all nations to trade freely there, and do all he could to civilize the natives. But after some time ugly stories began to reach Europe about what was being done by King Leopold's servants in that distant part of the world. The Congo is a country full of rich products, and it was said that the King was breaking his promises: that he was making heaps of money by forcing the natives to work as slaves, that all their lands were taken from them, that people were cruelly tortured, that whole villages were destroyed, that the soldiers hired by King Leopold were cannibals, and that he would not allow free trading.

There is no doubt whatever that the King was making a great deal of money, and that many shameful and wicked things were done in the Congo. The King never went there himself, but both he and his friends, who were also making money, said that the English (for it was the English who found most fault with him) were jealous, and that everything was going well. Nevertheless bad news kept arriving from the Congo, and many of the Belgians themselves became as angry as the English, and said something must be done to stop what was going on. At last the Belgian Parliament resolved that the only way to save the Congo was to make it a Belgian colony, and try if they could not govern it better than King Leopold.

[86]

So in the year 1908, after long debates and much curious bargaining between the King and his people, the Congo State became a Belgian colony. It remains to be seen whether they can govern it wisely, for as yet they have no experience in such matters. Few Belgians like to speak about the Congo. They shake their heads, and say it will cost a great deal of money, and bring danger to their country.

The scene when a ship sails from Antwerp for the Congo is unlike anything you will see at home. When a ship leaves an English port for India or the Colonies, the travellers go on board without any fuss, with perhaps a few private friends to see them off. But when a liner starts for the Congo, there is much excitement. A crowd assembles; flags fly; a band plays the Belgian National Anthem; hawkers go about selling photographs of *le départ pour le Congo*; and a steam-tug, decorated with flags, and with a band of music playing, accompanies the liner some distance down the Scheldt. The Belgians, you see, are so fond of hoisting flags and hearing bands of music on every possible occasion that they can't help doing it even when there is really nothing to get excited about.

[87]

And now, having taken this peep at Belgium, we shall leave these adventurers sailing away to their Congo, and, hoping they will find wisdom to steer wisely (in more ways than one) and so avoid shipwreck, wish them *bon voyage*.

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