

## A CALM DAY.



H, heart ! this day was made for thee ;  
 And every longing thou hast known  
 May rise from out thy depth, and see  
 The picture dear to fancy grown.

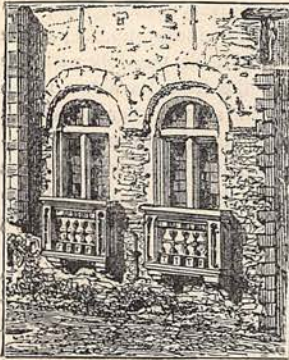
The slumbering fields, the dreamy skies,  
 Seem steeped in some mysterious calm ;  
 While silent Peace, with tranquil eyes,  
 Scatters her sweet invisible balm.

How blest this calm through life to feel,  
 Not dull and stagnant in my breast,  
 But as those deep, cool waters steal  
 Through wells that always seem at rest !

And, oh ! like wells too, how I long  
 My heart could all its springs outpour :  
 A deep, clear fount of pleasing song,  
 To flow yet leave it brimming o'er.

WILFRED WOOLLAM.

## A WEEK IN THE LOW COUNTRIES.



HE guarantors of Belgian neutrality must keep their eye upon the treaties by which the five great Powers have fenced round King Leopold's dominions ; for an invasion of that prosperous little kingdom is taking place this summer—an invasion from north and south, and east and west, which in its way will be as

formidable even as that to which Paris so willingly opened its gates in the Exhibition year.

The jubilee of the foundation of Belgian independence is, of course, primarily a domestic festival. The Belgians themselves—as they have profited most by the peaceful and orderly *régime* which was inaugurated in October, 1830—will be the most interested in the cavalcades, the banquetings, the speech-makings, and the rejoicings of all kinds of which so attractive a programme has been drawn up for these summer months. But Belgium's neighbours will claim their right to be at least interested spectators of the proceedings. In the group which stood around the cradle of the young kingdom in 1830 there were five great Powers, of whom England and France were especially sympathising on-lookers. We English, therefore, may assert our right to participate in the festivities at Brussels on the ground that we are "friends of the family." There is some pretext, then, for an English invasion of the fifty years old kingdom this year, and so long as it be a pacific—and let us add also a pecuniary—invasion the Belgians will have but little reason to proclaim that we are violating our engagements as guarantors of the neutrality of their courteous soil.

It is not to the capital city that the festivities are to be confined, but over the entire kingdom rejoicings will be heard and commemoration fêtes held ; and it would be a pity if for want of information an intending visitor should make Brussels his only stopping-place in a country so rich in interest as Belgium. Believing

a few hints on this subject may be useful to the many whose steps will wend thither this year, it is our intention to slightly sketch a route that may be easily managed, both in regard to time and pocket, while it includes the most attractive places in the country.

Starting from London, the port of debarkation may be Ostend, the passage thither being accomplished in twelve hours in one of the General Steam Navigation Company's boats, which are comfortable, while the fares are low.

Ostend itself contains little or nothing worth a lengthened stay, except in the season, which is pretty well confined to July and August. At that time of the year the town is filled with visitors from all parts of the Continent and bears a very bright appearance, the high sea-wall, which forms a capital promenade, being crowded with gay people. Out of the season, however, there is a melancholy and dejected air about the place of which one is glad to be rid, and if the boat arrives during the morning all that is interesting may be seen in a couple of hours. Supposing such to be the case, the traveller will take one of the morning trains for Bruges, soon arriving there, as the journey occupies but half an hour. The country *en route* gives a very fair idea of the plodding industry which characterises the people, the land being brought to its present state by purely artificial means—flat and far-stretching tracts of what once was bare sand being converted into prosperous-looking farms. The general prospect is monotonous, the only variations being occasional canals and long rows of trees, indicating some highway fading away into dim perspective.

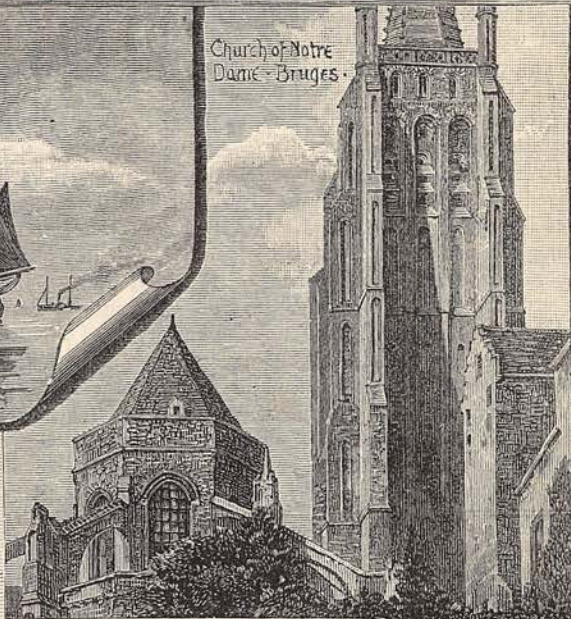
Bruges at last appears in view, and very pretty it looks with its towers nestling within the city, its canals, trees, and whirling windmills ; nor is the charm broken by a nearer approach, for jangling merrily away you may catch the notes struck out from the world-famed belfry.

Morning is the best time to set out, for then there is a certainty of finding all the churches open, as they close from twelve till four. The cathedral is a big brick structure abounding in interest, though it barely claims priority over the adjacent church of Notre Dame, with its rich contents of paintings and treasures, and magnificent tombs of Charles the Bold and the Emperor Maximilian's wife.

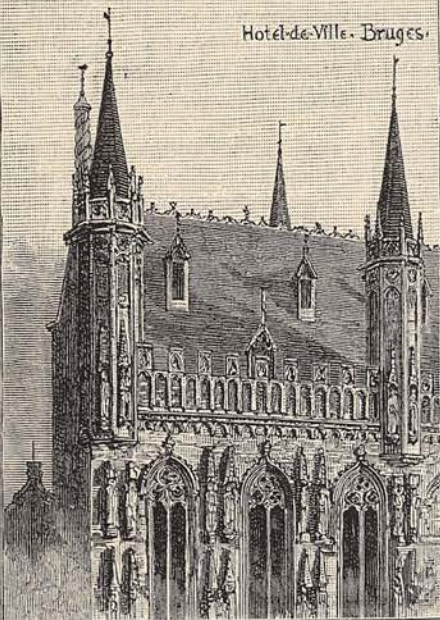
on the Scheldt



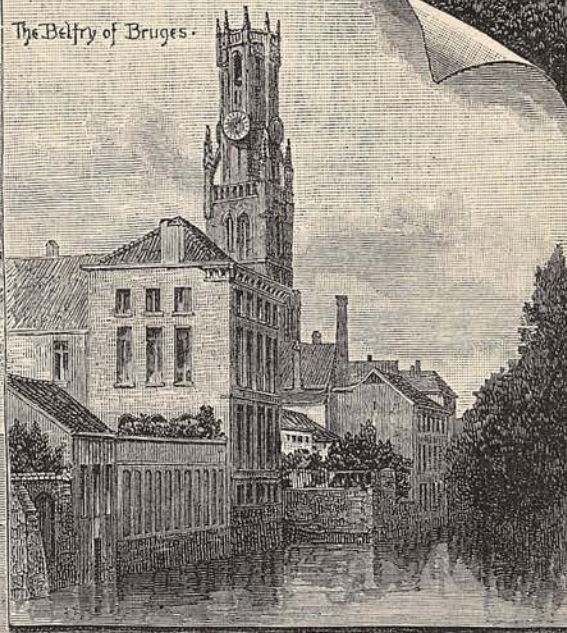
Church of Notre Dame - Bruges



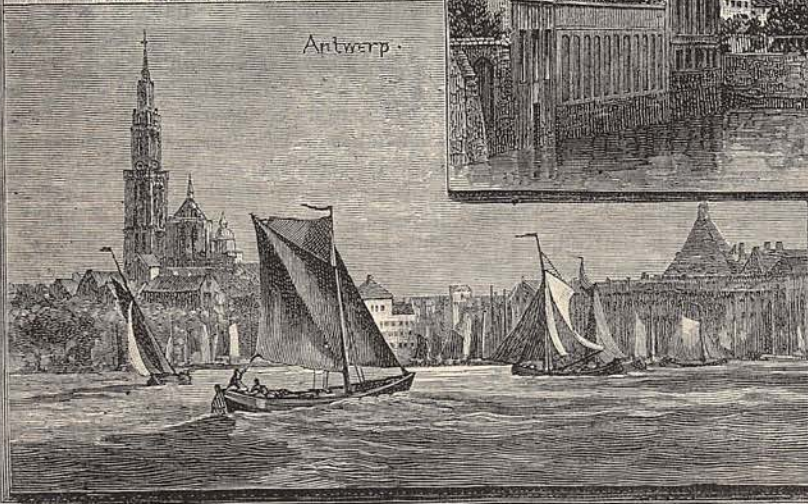
Hotel-de-Ville - Bruges



The Belfry of Bruges



Antwerp



Gable of Bruges



The adjoining street shows the curious style of domestic architecture which predominates in Flanders, but you will visit few places which will give better specimens of it than Bruges, within whose walls the modern improving architect has scarce set foot. Bruges, indeed, is no place for him, as the grass that springs untrodden in many of its streets will amply testify. Moreover, the population of the town has decreased until it now boasts scarcely a fourth of the number it once contained, and it can therefore give no commissions to architects or builders. That, in fact, constitutes the chief charm of the city, and which renders it so dear to the heart of the sentimentalist. It is a trip in itself to walk through and about its streets, catching sights of queer gables and unexpected peeps of unthought-of houses, while refreshingly sweet the belfry chimes catch the ear. It is from the building of Les Halles, the market-place, that there rises the graceful tower which contains the famous carillon, the old brick belfry itself towering nearly 300 feet. Sweet indeed is the melody that rings from these forty-eight bells; every quarter of an hour you may listen to tunes which throw their music far away. As Longfellow has said—

“Low at times, and loud at times,  
And changing like a poet's rhymes,  
Rang out the beautiful wild chimes  
From the belfry in the market  
Of the ancient town of Bruges.”

But the ambitious tourist will not rest content with their music; he will climb the flight of high wooden stairs, and view the panorama from the summit of the tower. An old cobbler who plies his trade high up amongst the chimes and the jackdaws that fly round the belfry will point out the many villages and towers in the prospect. Far and wide, and as distant as the eye can reach, you gaze, until the landscape melts into a broad band of blue—

“Thick with towns and hamlets studded, and with streams and vapours  
grey,  
Like a shield embossed with silver, round and vast the landscape  
lay.”

The city itself lies right beneath, while perhaps, as you are bending over the parapet, a troop of cavalry will be seen parading below, mere toys in size, and above the clatter of hoofs and noise peal out the beautiful chimes.

The corner shop, called “Au Lion de Flandre,” in the market-place will awaken English recollections, for here Charles II. of England is said to have lived when exiled from his own kingdom.

From the market-place the distance is but trifling to the Hôtel de Ville, a charming building, prettily situated in the shady Place du Bourg, where Bruges idlers (of whom there are no small number) while away the hours. Attached to the Hôtel de Ville is the small but exquisite Chapelle du Sang de Dieu, containing a richly jewelled and enamelled shrine, in which some of the blood of our Saviour is said to rest, having been brought from Jerusalem by a Count of Flanders.

At the Hospice de St. Jean, near the Church of Notre Dame, many treasures are stored, the most

notable of which is the shrine of St. Ursula, exquisitely adorned with paintings by Memling; other beautiful specimens by the same master are contained in the building, to which a legend attaches, more pleasing than correct, that they were given by Memling in return for hospitality received by him.

To complete his survey of Bruges the traveller should hire a *fiacre*, which can be had at a fare unknown in London, and drive through the town and environs. He will pass over many bridges, to the great number of which the city owes its name, and by many canals, getting occasional peeps through open doors, in the humbler portions of the city, of girls manufacturing lace. If he takes interest in such matters he will take note of the fact that Bruges is traditionally famous (and it is said deservedly) for its pretty girls; but on that subject we offer no opinion. Get the driver to take you along one of the chief canals on the outskirts, and past the city gates which span the high roads. Many of them—as the Porte St. Croix—are of ancient date and mediæval appearance, but their use has ceased, and decay proceeds unchecked.

But he who would spend a week in the Low Countries must be a rapid traveller, and so before the day is out we take a parting glance at the quaint old Flemish city and speed towards Ghent. From the first view that famous city makes a favourable impression upon the traveller. Here, as in Bruges, in every direction there abound memorials of the wealthiness of its former inhabitants. Not that Ghent is now an unprosperous place, for, on the contrary, it still maintains a proud position among Belgian cities, and it has been somewhat fancifully called the Manchester of Belgium. Houses of the Spanish era, that kings, nobles, or ambassadors once occupied, where State plots were hatched and resolutions made for the defence of national liberties, are to be met with in all directions.

The town belfry, containing a fine peal of bells, is a conspicuous building, rearing itself high aloft in the centre of the city. It is surmounted by a gilt dragon, which has a history in itself, for originally veering round atop of a Constantinople church, it was brought thence by the famous Baldwin, Count of Flanders, to Bruges, which in its turn surrendered it to Ghent, the citizens of which place captured it in one of the many wars that broke out between the rival cities. Facing the belfry stands the Hôtel de Ville, a building of several dates. The Gothic portion presents some beautifully intricate carving, part of which has of late years undergone exceptionally good and properly named renovation. A genuine Flamand leads the way inside, speaking Low Dutch far more fluently than French, and after conducting through salons of historic fame, ends the tour at a dingy suite of rooms, takes from his girdle a key of mysterious design, which he rubs with his leathern apron, inquiring if it is not “beautiful, master?” and then unlocks a door, through which the visitor is ushered into a small suite of rooms which by courtesy is named a museum. Stored here in gross confusion and exposure are many

remains of a bygone age—ancient pottery, stained glass, banners, coins, and arms, some of great portability, and offering a very strong temptation to light consciences.

As a matter of course a visit must be paid to the cathedral—a massive and bold-looking structure. From a bewildering number of chapels and paintings single out the famous masterpiece of the brothers Van Eyck—the “Adoration of the Immaculate Lamb”—a picture which for colour and drawing is hardly to be equalled even in Belgium. The four great copper candlesticks which stand in the choir are said to have originally belonged to St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, and to have been purchased through Oliver Cromwell.

To pass from the cathedral to the *Marché du Vendredi* is a veritable passage “from grave to gay.” You should go in the morning, while the space is thronged with market people, for here in a few minutes may be seen more Flemish specimens of man and woman-kind than in a day’s traversing in the ordinary streets. Men with blouses and flopping sabots; short-skirted women with long, black, and hooded cloaks; dogs of breed infinitive, drawing carts singly, in couples, and threes; pedlars and peasants shouting and bargaining—all these enter into the composition of the lively picture which the great Ghent market presents. The fine bronze statue in the centre of the market represents Jacques van Artevelde, the famous demagogue brewer, who in the fourteenth century ruled as absolutely in Ghent as ever monarch did. It was here that Roland, the famous old bell, hung, which in times of danger was sounded to summon the various guilds to arms. Often was its ominous war-note uttered, till at last, in the memorable struggles between the citizens and Charles V., ending in the utter collapse of the former, the bell was commanded to be unhung and destroyed, and so silenced for ever. Space precludes mention of one-half the remaining sights, for listless wandering will bring you across and into all kinds of queer places and novel surroundings; but let nothing hinder you visiting the *Beguinage*, a scattered and extraordinary place, where, living separately, a shifting population of 600 nuns live together.

Within the ancient palace of the Counts of Flanders, of which all that now remains is the castellated gateway called the *Oudeburg* (and which all patriotic Englishmen will not fail to visit), Queen Eleanor gave birth to John of Gaunt (or Ghent), the father in after-years of Henry IV. of England.

From Ghent the journey is through scenery more nearly approaching the picturesque than that already passed, but it is not yet beautiful, and the ride to Brussels only begins to be interesting when the royal suburb of *Lacken* is reached, and then town and country begin to blend, and in a few minutes more the train glides into Brussels.

The various sights in Brussels are situate within a comparatively small area, but there are so many of them that the traveller who wants to see them all must begin early.

He should first visit St. Gudule’s (miscalled the cathedral, for there is no episcopal seat in Brussels) and the other ecclesiastical edifices, bearing in mind the fact already alluded to that the churches, with but few exceptions, throughout Belgium are invariably closed between noon and four. St. Gudule’s, however, stands almost alone amongst the churches of Brussels, which are far less interesting than those of Bruges, Ghent, or Antwerp. It has a singularly massive exterior, and the interior is remarkable for a chaste beauty of a very characteristic kind.

With the sun shining through the richest of stained glass, and throwing numberless lights on pillar and moulding, while the chancel remains in shadow, the scene is most impressive, and cannot fail to contrast strongly with many of the gaudily-decked churches met with elsewhere. Then there is the famous *Hôtel de Ville*, with its spire crowned by the gilded statue of St. Michael flashing in the light. In the *Grande Place* the history of Brussels is well-nigh written. In long-past days many of the houses belonged to and formed the head-quarters of the numerous trade guilds, and they still retain their rich and well-to-do appearance. In the centre of the square stands a fine monument in memory of Counts Egmont and Horn, two noblemen whose names will always be cherished in the Low Countries, and who will surely not be forgotten in the patriotic festival this summer. On this spot, for resisting the Court of Spain’s aggressive and tyrannical policy, both lost their lives, the Duke of Alva and groups of courtiers calmly witnessing the execution from a facing window.

In the course of your wanderings endeavour to pay a visit to the singular collection of pictures at the *Wiertz Museum*, all of which were painted by the artist (*Wiertz*) of that name. They comprise the most fantastic subjects, treated in the weirdest and most eccentric way; and the collection will leave strong, if not altogether pleasant, impressions on the memory.

No one will visit Brussels without making the pilgrimage to *Waterloo*, especially as it can be so easily accomplished nowadays. For those who prefer the old-fashioned way of getting across the country there is a daily coach to *Waterloo*. But the journey can be done more quickly and cheaply by rail, only it must be remembered that the ticket should be taken for *Braine l’Alleud*, and not *Waterloo*, as the former is considerably nearer the battle-field.

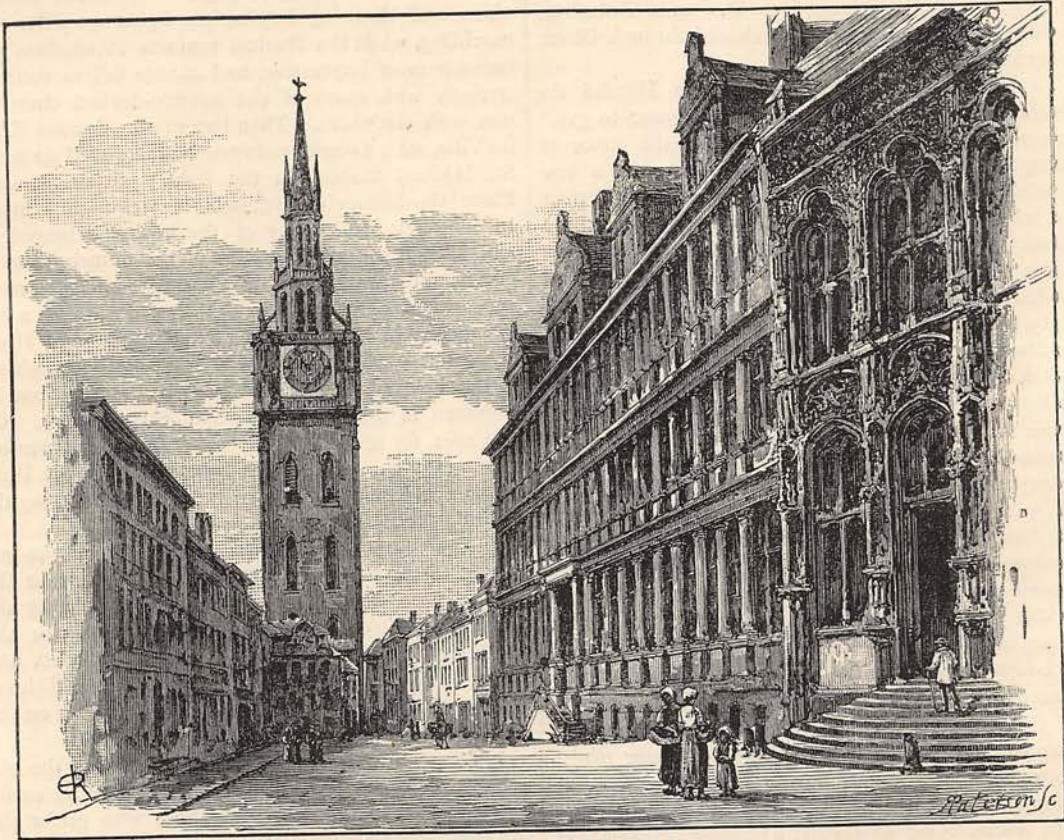
If the time can be spared, the tourist should by all means take the short railway trip to *Louvain*, the old university town, with its beautiful casket-like *Hôtel de Ville* and its ancient university. But if he forego his visit to that ancient seat of learning he will find strolling through the streets pleasurable enough, for the shops are tastefully adorned and the people elegantly dressed, and an afternoon walk will leave upon the mind many impressions like those which most of us bring with us from Paris.

But the last stopping-place in our tour has neared, and when people are restricted as to time they must make *Antwerp* the next and last stage in their

Low Country wanderings. The delightful old city makes a fit ending to the programme, for it is rich in everything that constitutes attraction, and a perfect mine of art and architecture. The indescribably lovely cathedral-tower, with sweetest of chiming bells and maze of pinnacle-work springing high aloft, will in many memories linger as *the* most beautiful thing in Belgium. No one should miss the view from the summit; the busy Scheldt, the whole city and country right and left, are all included in one vast picture. Inside there is an apparent plainness, probably

Jacques, as it is by far the finest in Antwerp, and so rich in paintings and marbles that it is almost a place of pilgrimage to artists who flock to see the burial-place and tomb of Rubens.

There is a place, however, only recently become public property, that should on no account be missed. Unique in its way, the Museum Plantin-Moretus has for three centuries been in unbroken possession of the two families, each of which has followed in the same building the printer's art, and been famous in it. There is thus brought together in a large and



THE HÔTEL DE VILLE, AND BELFRY, GHENT.

arising from comparison with the ornate exterior; but there is no real diminishing in the least, for at some times we know of nothing more beautiful than the appearance of the edifice—during the chanting of the vesper service, with a few of the many side chapels of the church illuminated, throwing out boldly the outlines of the rows of pillars that form the triple aisles in the vast building, while the farther parts rest in deep gloom. At the chancel side hangs Rubens' wonderful masterpiece, "The Descent from the Cross," about which so much has been written; while all round are paintings of more or less merit, especially the "Stations of the Cross," a set of modern paintings, and a head of Christ by Da Vinci. Next to the cathedral, the church that is most worth seeing is that of St.

richly fitted mansion a collection of every style of printing, including engraving in part, from the time of its invention downwards, arranged and kept with the greatest care and taste. With it is also preserved a choice collection of manuscripts and autograph letters.

But we must leave the busy Antwerp streets, take farewell peeps at already favourite places, and give the final tug to the portmanteau-strap; for the Great Eastern Company's boat is smoking away alongside the quay, waiting to convey passengers home, *via* Harwich. The chains clank, the fruit and cake vendors clear away, and we say good-bye to this charming city, as, gazing on the lovely cathedral-spire, we steam away, keeping it in view for many miles on the journey down the sluggish Scheldt.