

GLIMPSSES OF BELGIUM

LECTURE BY BISHOP CLEARY.

Glimpses of Belgium, the land of brooding rivers, wooded uplands and classical architecture, were interestingly depicted by Bishop Cleary in photograph and word picture in the Leys Institute on the evening of Thursday, August 27 (says the *Auckland Herald*). Originally his Lordship had chosen an entirely different subject, but he had adapted his theme to topical interest, with the result that the announcement of a discourse upon 'Gallant Belgium' packed the lecture hall of the institute long before the advertised time of commencement.

'The eyes of the world are at the present time glued on that panorama of war which has its centre in unhappy Belgium,' observed the lecturer, by way of preface. Proceeding, he pointed out that armies comprising no fewer than thirteen million had been assembled in connection with the war—the mightiest force for field purposes and reserve that had ever trodden the earth. When Bismarck lay dying he left his legacy of good advice to Germany—never to develop a quarrel at the same time with Russia on the eastern frontier and France on the west. The German war lords had ruled otherwise, however, but they had made a miscalculation with regard to the effect of the internal difficulties of Great Britain. 'The Irishmen have stood shoulder to shoulder to guard the flag of the Empire. Long may they so stand,' declared the Bishop to a hearty round of applause.

Germany's Miscalculations.

It also seemed to those who held the destinies of Germany that Italy would march to the war on their side, but here again they made a miscalculation, and as one who had resided in Italy for many years, he knew how bitter was the feeling against Austria, so long the oppressor. Such a thing as a war alliance could not be carried into practical politics. The lecturer also commented upon the error of Germany in regard to the internal troubles of Russia and France, but declared that the biggest miscalculation of all was when she reckoned that she would have practically a free passage through Belgium, by means of which she could turn the great ring of eastern fortresses in France, swoop down upon Paris to smash the French army before it had time to mobilise, and then, rushing back to meet the enemy on the west—moving, metaphorically, at the pace of a snail—strike it down and dictate terms of peace to Europe. Little did they know that Belgium was ready to stop them on the banks of the Meuse, to give Russia time to mobilise and France and England to form a position, which we hoped would enable them to strike such a blow as would bring back peace to Europe.

Proceeding, Bishop Cleary dwelt upon the geological and commercial features of Belgium. He pointed out that although only a little over half the size of Auckland province, there was a population of seven and a-half million people, or 658 persons to the square mile. It was a country packed with historical memories, and rich in art and architecture. In this curious, unhappy land oil and water mingled freely and made a very good mixture indeed. In other words, two distinct peoples, speaking different languages, were blended into one of the most contented, happy, and prosperous people in the world. The Flemings, of German descent, inhabited the northern half of the country and followed the calling of agriculture: while in the south the Walloons, of Celtic origin, and speaking French, were engaged in manufacturing. For a long time the country was subject to Austria, France, and, last of all, Holland, until, in 1830, in a brief and rapid revolution, they threw off the yoke of Holland and became a free people.

England's Guarantee.

Henceforward the independence and neutrality of Belgium were guaranteed by the British flag, and Imperial honor demanded that that guarantee was a

serious one and should be sacredly kept, even at the point of the sword. Moreover, Imperial safety demanded that a hostile nation such as Germany should not be able to have seaports on the western coast of Belgium which might be turned into naval strongholds from which Germany might harry British commerce and make those rapid raids against which the best equipped navy was not a sure and certain safeguard.

In well-turned phrases, and aided by many beautiful views, the lecturer described the natural beauty of Belgium, the Mecca of the tourist. He dwelt upon the quaint old-world atmosphere of the low-lying land to the north, where rivers had been steeply banked to avert the danger of flooding the countryside, and over the brow of which the traveller by the river obtains glimpses of old windmills and church steeples. Depicting the interesting features of Antwerp, the lecturer dwelt at some length upon the architectural beauty of the old city, incidentally, in illustration of the enthusiasm of pride of citizens, mentioning that there was a picturesque saying that the world is a gold ring of which Antwerp is the diamond. Napoleon recognised the value of Antwerp as a military position, and, spending two and a-half million pounds, an enormous sum for those days, upon fortifications, described it in his own expressive language as a pistol pointed at the heart of England. But the pistol misfired.

Antwerp's Resources.

The fortresses of Antwerp were enormously strong, consisting of 15 forts supported by great outworks, and provisioned for a year. It is estimated that it would take an army of 300,000 men nearly a year to reduce it. The Germans had recognised that Antwerp belonged to Belgium, and had sheered off to the left. With happy descriptive touches, Bishop Cleary introduced the audience to many a quaint characteristic of the Belgium stronghold, and the slides admirably showing the venerable Gothic piles for which the city is famous were enthusiastically appreciated. Proceeding to Brussels, via Mechlin, he described the wonderful level roads bordered by the eternal poplar tree, by means of which the German army had been able to sweep westward with remarkable rapidity over flat and fenceless country, and, arriving at the capital, alluded to the famous Palace of Justice, one of the glories of Belgium. The audience was given peeps of the ancient industries of the town, celebrated for its hand-made laces and carpets, and, in passing, the Bishop referred to amusingly rigid principles upon which the inhabitants of the city fought the Hollanders in the struggle for freedom, mentioning that meal and sleeping hours were recognised by both sides with business-like punctuality. Proceeding to Liege, nestling in the valley of the Meuse, the lecturer's tribute to the gallantry of the garrison was heartily applauded, and passing thence through Visé and on to Namur, reputed to be even stronger than Liege, Dinant and Givet, the picture spots of the Meuse were graphically illustrated.

In the course of the lecture the Bishop made interesting references to his personal experiences of the German and French troops. A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to his Lordship, and the National Anthems of the Allies were played at the conclusion of the proceedings.

Mr. W. Cecil Leys (editor *Auckland Star*), who presided, paid a tribute to the lecturer's versatility in so readily adapting his discourse to topical interest. His original subject was the vanished civilisations of Central and South America, in preparing which subject he had been at a considerable amount of trouble, but in view of the outbreak of the war, he had volunteered to change his theme.

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