

LIFE IN BELGIUM

Part of an Address delivered at a concert in aid of Belgian Relief Fund, by Rev. D. JAMIESON, M.A., Anglican Minister, Oamaru.

Through the present war a great interest in Belgium has sprung up among us. This is a very good thing in every way. Though Belgium be but a small country it has had a vast influence upon the commerce and the art of Europe in the days that are gone. I should like to tell you about this in a more exhaustive manner than is possible in the few minutes allotted to me to-night. I shall content myself by stating a few things about the country which would first strike a British youth going straight from an English High School to a Belgian city. The distance is not great from Harwich or London, and yet one finds a form of life in Belgium very different from England. It is easier being a stranger in Belgium than in England or Scotland. The Belgians are open and frank in their manners, and they receive a stranger with open arms. I remember when I first arrived in Antwerp, a Belgian gentleman with whom I had some business to do, threw his arms round me and declared the people would do all they could to make me happy. He was as good as his word, and many a delightful day did I spend among them, days whose memories will always be among the most pleasant and sacred things in my life.

In the North of Scotland I had been taught through my boyhood, to look upon Belgium as a decadent country, because of the influence of the priests there. All countries, I was taught, that were under the influence of the Roman Catholic priests, were going back in the civilisation of this world, and going straight to hell in the world to come. This was the cheery creed I was furnished with by those who in their pulpits indulge in what the great James Martineau calls 'Scotch ravings' about 'Babylon' and the 'Scarlet Lady.' What a glad surprise was in store for me! I found the priest's influence the highest and the holiest in the land, and whatever was noble, brave, worthy, in the life of the people was directly traceable to his work.

One of the first things which would strike a youth going from England to Belgium would be the dog-labor. Dogs are not allowed to be idle there. They are made to work, pulling light carts with vegetables, loaves, butcher meat, and the like. Yet they are not discontented. I never saw such happy dogs anywhere as in Belgium. One used to pass my window yoked to his cart every morning in charge of an old woman. He was a fine large dog, and his deep joyous bark could be heard a mile away. Why was he so happy I wonder? Was it because he was made to fall in with the law which the Maker of him and us has put us under, that in idleness there is misery? If that dog had not been drawing his cart with its steaming coffee for hard-working men, in all probability, he would have been fighting with his kind.

The sounds one hears, like the sights, are at first unfamiliar to an English youth. Two languages go on side by side, in the cities and towns. Flemish is spoken by servants and working classes: French is the language of the educated people. A lady speaks to her servants in Flemish, but she speaks French to her friends in the drawing-room. People going to Antwerp or Brussels in the interests of their education do not care to learn Flemish as a rule. There is no literature in the language to make it worth a foreigner's while to learn it. French is the mode of instruction, and polite intercourse all through Belgium. The memory of its sweet tones is to me like music. On the streets of Brussels, in the shadow of its stately buildings, amid the gay and sunny life of the people, my Scotch lugubriousness was most incongruous and from the soul of me I used to cry fervently—'O, for a man to arise in me that the man I am might cease to be.' In Antwerp, where I lived, the hospital is a building which is sure to attract more than ordinary attention. It is enormously large, capable of containing thousands of patients. In Belgium very little nursing was done in the homes of the

people. Whenever anyone was taken ill the hospital was sought at once. The plan was a good one both for the sick and their friends. And what nursing the sick got in Antwerp Hospital! I have seen a good deal of sick-nursing in my time, but never anything to compare with the work of the Sisters of Mercy in Antwerp. I had a very dear and sainted friend in Antwerp, a Church of England clergyman, whose ministry I attended. He used to ask me to take a walk through the hospital sometimes and see if there were any stranded British sailors there, who might want to say something, but did not know the language of the place. One day I was speaking to the mate of an English vessel, who had been brought in suffering from small pox. He was in a sore plight indeed. As I took the directions he gave me as to what he wanted done, a nurse came along with some delicacy for him. She was young and beautiful in the extreme. Before placing the plate beside the sailor, she fell on her knees, and in the most chaste and beautiful French, prayed for the health of the man's body, and salvation to his soul. That scene will never fade from my memory, and if, through the long years between now and then I have ever been tempted to doubt the existence of angels, a glance back at that lovely form praying for the British sailor makes me believe that God has His angels in the world still.

It was in Belgium that I learnt what worship really means. I had been brought up with the idea that religion is a thing of doctrines, and was considered fairly smart in arguing about them. The idea of worship and its expression in the Sacraments had never formed any part of my religious education. Indeed, worship was always belittled in the interests of what people called the 'Word.' In Belgium I got a revelation. There I was taught that the highest activity of the soul is worship, and the true basis of religious life is the Sacraments of the Church, and not the quibbles of man and their miserable and endless definitions of doctrine. I stood one morning in the great Antwerp Cathedral. A peasant woman came in carrying a bundle on her way to market. She was evidently in trouble, but taking no notice of a stranger, she knelt before an image of the Virgin Mary, and engaged for some time in silent prayer. When she rose from her knees her face was brighter and I have no doubt her heart was lighter, too. I had been taught to regard this as idolatry, now I saw it was a meet and touching mode of approach to communion with the Living God.

It is the teaching and influence of the priests urging their people to a life of worship that have made the Belgians able to resist German Protestantism in its most aggressive and truculent form to-day. I would commend the consideration of this to those societies whose strength seems to be given to traduce the Roman Catholic Church. This will do them no harm, but good, and if it change their attitude as it did mine, they will find that it is a healthier thing to admire what is good in any system rather than to be always looking for some evil. At any rate the Church's work in Belgium will stand this test to-day. 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'

BAYEAUX CATHEDRAL AND ITS TAPESTRIES

Bayeux Cathedral is considered by some authorities to be the most magnificent of all the Cathedrals of Lower Normandy. It is impossible to convey an idea of the beauty of the interior. There are said to be 2976 capitals, all differently sculptured. The carvings at the door of the south transept represent scenes from the life and death of Thomas A'Beckett, while a painting in the north transept depicts his martyrdom. The windows near the organ contain some of the celebrated fifteenth century glass, the gorgeous coloring and the masterly drawing which distinguishes that period being especially noticeable here.

The painting of the frescoes, the hammered metal work surrounding the choir, and the rich carving of the stalls all leave an impression of unparalleled mag-