

THE SNOWFLAKE:

MIRAMIC III, LIBRARY, 1879
A FEW HOURS IN BELGIUM

It was on a wet, misty, disagreeable day that the writer first caught sight of the dykes and meadows of the Netherlands from the deck of the steamer carrying the Belgian mails which runs between Dover and Ostend. The country at first sight certainly appears as flat and low as it can possibly be, the most striking feature to the stranger being the long rows of trees planted at regular intervals along the roads, and which, owing to the prevailing winds from one quarter have nearly all their branches on one side. They form a picture such, as a fellow-traveller remarked, would be seen in no other country, and they are noticed long before the steamer gets to the landing place. This quay, or wharf, is formed by two long wooden jetties which run straight out into the sea between which the steamers and fishing boats commence and end their voyages. As we steamed up this narrow entrance the fishing fleet was departing on its cruise, and it seems to be the custom for the wives and sweethearts of the fishermen to navigate the boats to the end of the jetties and then leave their, by no means, better halves to shift for themselves, as they leave the boats then and return in small punts, similar to those used by Norwegian ships.

As the steamer made her way past them she caused a temporary swell and roughness in the water, making the punts roll and jump in rather an uncomfortable manner, and drawing down upon our heads the somewhat noisy anger of the fishwives. The fishing population speak the Flemish dialect, evidently a mingling of English, French, and Dutch, and judging by the sound of it when spoken, these languages do not seem to blend well together.

Our steamer soon reaches the wharf, and now comes the tug of war. Gentlemen who have been boasting, during the voyage of their knowledge of foreign languages, soon find out that schoolboy French may do well enough amongst themselves, but that it won't do for the natives, and their efforts to make themselves understood are the cause of much amusement to every one but themselves. An incident of rather amusing tendency illustrating the difficulties of foreign languages to many of the travelling English public, may be worth quoting. A gentleman was seeking some information from one of the gens d'armes (or policemen) stationed at a artisan museum, and was murdering the French language in a fearful manner, in endeavoring to make himself understood, when the official quickly turned to him and said, "I think, sir, you had better speak English." This was rather sharp of the Frenchman, and must have been awfully mortifying to the traveller.

Our luggage is soon passed by the obliging and polite custom-house officers who by the way are a pleasing contrast to their English brethren at Dover, in the way of good good-humored kindness to strangers, and we proceed at once to the railway station which adjoins the wharf. Here permit me to suggest to intending travellers on the continent, to take as little luggage with them as possible, and if they can manage, as the writer did, to take no more than they can carry, so much the better, as it will save them a vast amount of trouble. Ostend, which is a small, straggling town, used a good deal as a watering place in the summer time, is uninteresting to the general body of travellers,

and as a rule tourists at once proceed to the railway station and on immediately to Brussels, some however turning aside to view the quaint and busy old town of Antwerp. The railway ride to Brussels is through an almost unending succession of rye fields here and there interspersed with flourishing and sometimes smoky manufacturing towns. Passing along you notice that almost the whole of the outdoor work in the fields is done by the women, the men lounging about with their hands in their pockets smoking big pipes. This rather uneven distribution of labor does not exist so much in the towns, but still to a certain extent it may even be observed in them. Rather less than three hours bring us to Brussels, where there are several good hotels in which English is spoken; one of the most comfortable being the hotel *de l'Europe*, situated in the Place Royal almost in the centre of the town. It was in the square in front of this hotel that a good many of the English regiments mustered, on the morning of Waterloo, and from which they marched to the battle-field.

Brussels is both an ancient and a modern town, the lower part of the city being filled with old and quaint buildings, while the upper, built on a hill is a miniature Paris, and in the opinion of many, amongst them the writer, it exceeds in beauty and compactness its original.

The most interesting building in the old town is the cathedral, and if it were only to view the wonderfully carved oak pulpit representing the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden it is well worth a visit. The stained glass windows are very fine and the decorations of the various small chapels which branch off from the main building are costly and beautiful.

Another building in the old town which strikes a traveller at once by its stately and imposing appearance is the Hotel de Ville or Town Hall which possesses one of the finest spires on the continent. Another place of interest to English travellers is the room in which the great ball was held the night before the battle of Waterloo, which is certainly beautiful but seems smaller than one would expect. Then there are fine museums, the Houses of Assembly, Palaces and many other public buildings all worth a visit, and most of them containing splendid paintings of very large size by the celebrated old Dutch masters.

But of course the great attraction of Brussels to the English speaking tourist is the field of Waterloo, which is reached by a coach leaving the town every morning, driven by an Englishman. This vehicle proceeds for nearly the whole of the distance along the road which Napoleon I. had constructed between Paris and Brussels for the purpose of getting his heavy guns along; the whole of its centre being paved with large square stones which are in as good repair as the day they were laid down. It was rather a strange circumstance that after the battle he had to escape by this road, and by it the allied troops marched to Paris.

As you drive along through the country you see large tracts of rye growing with here and there a few spots of grass on which oxen are feeding. It is imperative here for these animals to be tethered by a long rope to a stake in the ground, to prevent them straying amongst the rye, a thing which would be likely to occur, owing to the absence of fences or hedges. These latter appear to the Belgian farmer to be only a waste of good ground, as he maintains you would lose a couple of feet of soil on each side of them, on which nothing

would grow. The only marks here dividing one man's field from another's are small white stones about six inches square, placed at each corner of the lots. Of course as the grain grows up it covers them and the country seems one unbroken fertile field.

There are few traces of the battle remaining. The old chateau Hougomont remains as it was, except where enterprising tourists have chipped off pieces from its walls as relics. Both at this place and the new inn which has been built the stranger may buy old bayonets, swords, muskets, etc., covered with rust and mould, said to have been dug from the field, but which most probably have been planted there a short time ago by the natives, a proceeding rather common in the neighborhood of battle fields on the continent.

In the small church in the village there are several monuments and tablets erected to the memory of officers and men who fell in the engagement. Here you obtain a guide who makes you tramp over all the places of vantage, occupied by the British troops on that memorable day, now in full cultivation, describing where the different regiments were stationed, and telling many quaint stories of visitors and survivors who many years ago had revisited the field, one officer taking his dinner off a table on which after the battle he had been placed and had his leg amputated. The Belgian government has raised a mountain on the field, surmounted by the figure of a lion; from the top of which you obtain a splendid view of the country, and even to those unacquainted with military matters the position occupied by Wellington seems almost impregnable. One feels inclined to linger round this beautiful spot on such a lovely day, but we are reminded that the time is going on and that we have a long drive before us, so we regain our coach and proceed towards Brussels, on the outskirts of the town passing through the Bois de Cambre which serves the same purpose to this city as the Bois de Boulogne serves to Paris, namely a place of recreation for the inhabitants.

The next morning we left Brussels for Cologne in Germany, stopping for a couple of hours on the way at one of the smaller Dutch towns, where you observe the same quiet, cool and easy-going manner of living, or putting in the time, which prevails to a great extent all over the Netherlands. After a walk through the quiet streets, and a glance at the cathedral, every continental town appearing to possess one, rich with statuary and decorations, we regain the station amongst a crowd of tall, broad shouldered handsome countrywomen, and smart little dapper men with wide trousers, short jackets, and prodigious pipes. We take our places in the train in an unmistakable odour of stale tobacco which it is impossible in continental travelling to avoid, and travel for a short time, through more beautiful and hilly scenery than we have yet seen. The train suddenly pulls up, the door is flung open, a tall German custom house official of rude manner and gruff voice enters the carriage and upsets our luggage, and we realize the fact that Belgium, its people and the pleasant sounding French language, is a thing of the past and are awake to the reality that we are in the "Faterland." Hoping dear reader that our few hours, short and enjoyable to us, have not been long to you, we remain your fellow countrymen,

HACMATAC.

January, 1879.

LOVE IN THE THREATENINGS.

A shepherd, foreseeing a snow-storm that will drift deep in the hollows of the hill, where the silly sheep seeking refuge would find a grave, prepares shelter in a safe spot, and opens its door. Then he sends his dog after the wandering flock to frighten them into the fold. The bark of the dog behind them is a terror to the timid sheep; but it is at once the sure means of their safety and the mark of the shepherd's care. Without it the prepared fold and the open entrance might have proved of no avail. The terror which the shepherd sent into the flock gave the finishing touch to his tender care, and effect to all that had gone before. Such precisely in design and effect are the terrible things of God's Word—not one of them indicates that He is unwilling to receive sinners. They are the overflowings of Divine compassion. They are sent by the Good Shepherd to surround triflers on the brink of perdition, and compel them to come into the provided refuge ere its door be shut. The terrors of the Lord are not the salvation of men; but they have driven many to the Saviour. No part of the Bible could be wanted; a man shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.—*Amos*.

NEW PICTURES OF TRAFALGAR.

An Italian painter, the Cavaliere E. de Martino, a Neapolitan ex-naval officer, has painted four pictures of the battle of Trafalgar, which are of such surprising merit as to command the universal approval of English critics as well as of naval men. The usual course with English painters of the action has been to take the *Victory* for their centre, and the death of Nelson for their incident. The Cavaliere Martino gives what may be called a progressive view of the battle. The time of the first picture is noon, when Collingwood with the *Royal Sovereign* broke the Spanish line, and its motto Nelson's excellent exclamation, "See how that noble fellow Collingwood carries his ship into action!" The time of the second picture is between one and two o'clock, the *Victory* is ranged alongside the *Redoubtable*, the fatal shot from the Frenchman's rigging has laid Nelson low, and the motto is, "They have done for me at last, Hardy." In the third picture the time is between three and four, the incident the landing of the French 74 *Achille*, the motto the often repeated question of Nelson as he felt his life ebbing away, "Well, Hardy, how goes the day with us?" The fourth and last of the series is a scene after sunset; the incident is the taking of the *Royal Sovereign* in tow by the *Argonaute*. Impending night glooms all the sea and begins to shroud the ships. The motto is Nelson's last distinct utterance, "Thank God, I've done my duty!" The London press agrees that nothing can be finer than the conception and execution of these pictures, which taken together give the strongest impression of the glorious and terrible fight. Time brings some strange revenges, and that Englishmen should be indebted to a Neapolitan naval officer for the greatest pictorial account of their greatest victory at sea could have been thought little likely by Murat as he watched Nelson shatter the Neapolitan squadron from the *Môle* to which he went to witness the Englishman's capture.