

is founded upon the labours and the economies of the forgotten pioneers and squatters who, from prehistoric times down to the very end of the Middle Ages, were slowly manufacturing habitable and cultivable land out of tangled forests, out of muddy swamps, out of desert moors and wastes? Every square yard of soil which we employ to-day in Europe owes some of its value to these early agriculturists. And there is no country in Europe where this work was carried on with more zeal or under more difficult conditions than in the Belgian Netherlands. In the fourth century after Christ the northern part of this country, the plains of Flanders and of North Brabant, was composed of heaths and marshes and sand-dunes. By the fifteenth century this wilderness had become a land of populous cities, surrounded by a dense agricultural population. How it had been reclaimed you may see from the case of the Yser river basin, which the Belgian army is defending. The rich meadows, which the Belgians have flooded by cutting the sea-dykes, were reclaimed from the sea in the fourteenth century. The Yser dykes were almost the last of the great artificial works by which Flanders became prosperous. It is no wonder that Flemish peasants were in demand all over Europe when there was land to be reclaimed. Three districts in Germany—Schleswig-Holstein, the Alt-Mark of Brandenburg, and Silesia—are partly indebted to the Flemings for their present prosperity. But it is needless to insist that, irrespective of such migrations—and at one time they were very considerable—the agricultural development of Flanders inevitably benefited all the numerous states with which her population traded from the earliest days of Flemish history.

To-day, however, all European countries are or aspire