

wreaths on their heads, six of them carrying a richly adorned image of the Virgin, dressed in gold brocade; a troop of children, all in white and crowned with flowers; young men bearing banners, gilt shrines, and jewelled reliquaries; and a long procession of citizens, and bands of music playing martial airs in the intervals of the chanting of the priests and choir boys, while the continuous clamour of the bells rang through the air. The principal feature was a gorgeous canopy borne by four leading citizens over the "Host," which was enclosed in a jewelled pyx and carried by a splendidly appressed priest. Thurifers swung their censers; young girls strewed flowers, fern leaves, and palm branches before the sacred shrine; and the multitude of spectators fell down on their knees as the Real Presence of the Redeemer, as they imagined, passed by. Although some scowls were directed toward me as I stood erect, no one molested me. Candles were placed in the windows, and the houses were decorated with festoons and evergreens and wreaths of gilt ivy, as the pageant swept through the narrow streets, among mouldering monuments, and over an ancient bridge, in the placid waters beneath which the lilies floated, and stately swans dressed their snowy plumage, and an ivy-covered, ruined wall was reflected. It seemed more like an illuminated picture out of a mediæval missal than like an actual experience. I felt like rubbing my eyes to see whether I was dreaming or whether this strange pageant was a reality.

I then wandered into the Grand Place, a large square, at one side of which rose the celebrated Belfry of Bruges, of which Longfellow sings so pleasantly. I inquired for the Fleur-de-Blé at which he lodged, but found that it had been demolished. I lunched, therefore, at a little table in front of a café, and feasted my eyes meanwhile on the stately tower and listened to the musical chimes, pronounced the sweetest in Belgium; and mused upon the vanished splendours of the mouldering town. Near by was the beautifully carved Gothic Hôtel de Ville, where the Counts of Flanders, on their accession to the throne, used to fling largess to the people and swear to maintain the rights of the city. Longfellow thus recalls the associations of the scene:—

In the market-place of Bruges stands the belfry old and brown,
Thrice consumed, and thrice rebuilt, still it watches o'er the town.

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