

WHERE AND WHAT IS BELGIUM?

By G. H. LOCKE

BELGIUM is a wedge of territory separating France on the south from Germany on the east. The western boundary is a short strip of coast 42 miles long bordering on the North Sea. To the north lies Holland, the only neighbor of like size, with whom Belgium was associated in the Middle Ages as the famous "Low Countries" of Europe.

The history of this little country has been a varied one. It began its career as a separate nation in 1830, after a short War of Separation to break away from Holland, with whom it had been reunited by the Congress of Vienna, when in 1815 that august body was re-making the map of Europe.

Bound to be Frugal.

The area of 11,373 square miles, with a population of 7,579,000, shows a densely peopled country. To make some comparison with Canada, take eight counties of Ontario: York, Simcoe, Durham, Victoria, Peterboro, Northumberland, Ontario, and Hastings, roughly a square with a side equal to the distance from Toronto to Belleville, and this small section of Ontario represents Belgium. In its place the population of Canada, and we have the corresponding conditions reproduced.

It follows that such a vast population living in such narrow confines must be a frugal people, accustomed to self-denial, skilled in the art of economical living, and masters of the science of extensive industry. Yet, with all their density of population, they are a people who had so ordered their relations with one another, and with their government, that happiness and contentment seemed to dwell with them as with few other peoples; and this in spite of diverse sentiment and diverse tongues.

There are two distinct races in Belgium, the Walloons in the east, and the Flemings in the west. The former speak French and show traces of Spanish blood, while the latter are more akin to the

Germans. Their language is Flemish, which is very like Dutch. The river Meuse is the dividing line between the two peoples, and also marks the change in the surface of the country from the low lying coast and central region to the mountainous district of the Ardennes in the south.

This hard-working, skilful nation had made their country a garden of plenty, agriculturally, as well as famous for its manufactures. Their crops of 1913 show their clever intensive farming: 15,000,000 bushels of wheat represents 37 bushels to the acre. Barley gave a yield of 50 bushels, potatoes 312 bushels to the acre, and the other crops were proportionately high. The eastern part of the country was one vast market garden.

In southern Belgium, with its mineral wealth of coal and iron, are great iron and steel works, the most noted being the Cockerill at Liege, which was the Birmingham of Belgium, as well as the strongest fortress. Near the French frontier are Mons and Charleroi in the centre of a coal mining district.

Famous, Broken Brussels.

Brussels (700,000), the capital of the country, is famous for its manufactures of carpets, lace, bronzes, carriages, and leather goods, and also for its wonderful cathedral, begun in 1220, public buildings and art collections. To the east is Louvain (50,000), the former capital, renowned for its University, the beautiful Church of St. Pierre, and the Hotel de Ville or town hall. North of Brussels is Mechlin or Meline (70,000; almost all the towns have both a Flemish and a French name), the ecclesiastical capital, with the Cathedral of St. Rombold. This city has given its name to Mechlin lace, one of its manufactures.

In Western Belgium are Bruges, Ghent and Ypres (which the English Tommy pronounces "Wi-per"), once famous for their manufacturing and trading in the Middle Ages, when Eng-