

and self-mortification, or in visions of the good and the beautiful. The Flemings and the Walloons were intimately associated with every religious revival of the Middle Ages ; and nowhere did the urban classes give a more consistent or generous support to the founders of new religious houses. The *béguinage* for male or female recluses was a distinctive feature of the smallest Flemish towns ; these communities were founded by burghers for men and women of their own class. If any one is inclined to make light of such communities, and of the religion which they fostered, he should read the *Imitatio Christi* attributed to Thomas à Kempis. It was produced in a Dutch community, but it expresses faithfully the best religious thought of the Belgian Netherlands. Besides the recluses, we must remember the popular preachers, and the crusaders, of whom both the Flemish and the Walloon provinces were prolific. A Walloon, Godfrey of Bouillon, was the first Latin king of Jerusalem. One count of Flanders (Baldwin IX) became the first ruler of the Latin Empire of Constantinople ; another, Thierry of Alsace, made four several expeditions to the Holy Land. In the crusading movement, from its commencement almost to its close, the Flemings and the Walloons played a part which was out of all proportion to their numbers or their political importance.

For the fifteenth century, the age of the Renaissance, we have another sort of witnesses to attest the vitality of Flemish faith. The early Flemish school of painting, which reached the height of perfection in the works of the Van Eycks and of Hans Memling, is remarkable not only for rich colouring and the minute representation of detail, but still more for its profoundly religious spirit. These painters, we feel, delight in the forms and colours of the world around them ; but they are chiefly preoccu-