

despotism. But such as it was, it gave some dignity and meaning to Belgian history in the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The Flemish provinces were always prepared to take up arms in defence of local liberties. And we have seen of late the proof that, when the provinces were united under a government of their own choosing, this local patriotism was rapidly transmuted into a nobler sentiment of nationalism.

But there are other aspects of Flemish idealism which are better known, and to which Europe is more profoundly indebted. It is almost a commonplace with German writers on political science that the small states of the modern world are unlikely to do much for artistic or intellectual progress. It is a strange view to be held by the countrymen of Schiller and of Goethe. It is contradicted more emphatically by the history of Belgium than by that of Weimar. Weimar was for a single generation the focus of a great literary movement. The Flemings and the Walloons have been not once but several times conspicuous as the pioneers of religious revivals and of new artistic forms.

No doubt there was much spiritual indolence among the patricians of the Flemish cities, these 'rich men, furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations', who were the patrons of Rubens and of Teniers, who lavished their money upon sumptuous mansions, on costly furniture and tapestries, who often spent more on their town-halls than their churches. But there was another temperament, the very antithesis of this complacent satisfaction in the best of all possible worlds, which meets us at every stage of Flemish history; a mystical temperament, which rebelled against the commonplace and the worship of material splendour, which found satisfaction in painful enterprises, in seclusion