

THE PEOPLE OF BELGIUM.

BY THE EDITOR.

BELGIUM is the borderland between the Teuton and the Gaul. The population is mixed. The northern provinces are Flemish and the southern districts are inhabited by the Walloons, who are neither Teutons nor Gauls, but a remnant of a more primitive population which held the country before the arrival of the Celts.

The Flemish are a Teutonic race and speak a dialect belonging to the Germanic languages, one almost identical with the Dutch. It holds a middle position between English and Low German, which is on the verge of extinction, and in fact the Dutch and the Flemish have preserved more faithfully than any other Teutonic tribes the traditional language of northern Germany as it was spoken centuries ago before the rise of High German.

Low German was spoken all over northern Germany until the Reformation, but then the literary language, which was High German, began to crowd Low German out of the pulpit and also out of the school. The language of Luther's translation of the Bible, a literary dialect which was the official intertribal language of Germany, became generally recognized and gradually replaced the popular dialects of Low German speech. The process of this change has been slow but irresistible. Some of the present generation in such northern cities as Bremen and Hamburg may still remember having talked in their childhood to the servants in the house in Low German, while in school the accepted language was High German. In this sense we may say that both the Flemish and the Dutch have remained better Germans than the Prussians, Hanoverians and other northern Germans. It would be difficult to-day for a German whose knowledge is limited to High German to understand either Flemish or Dutch.

The Walloons have lost their original prehistoric language, echoes of which are probably preserved only in some ancient names.

They speak a language which is commonly regarded as a French dialect because it is nearest to the French and originated under Roman influence at the same time and in the same way that French developed among the Gauls under the influence first of the Roman and then of the Teuton invaders, the Franks, the Burgundians and the Visigoths. Nevertheless the difference between the Walloon language and French is probably greater than the difference between Flemish and German, and a Frenchman would be greatly disappointed if he should try to make himself intelligible to the common people in the Walloon districts of Belgium.

The district of the Walloon population is centered about Liège, but formerly extended into Germany, so as to embrace the ancient capital of Charlemagne, Aix-la-Chapelle. The German portion of the Walloon district, however, has been so entirely Germanized that the last traces of the Walloon language have disappeared.

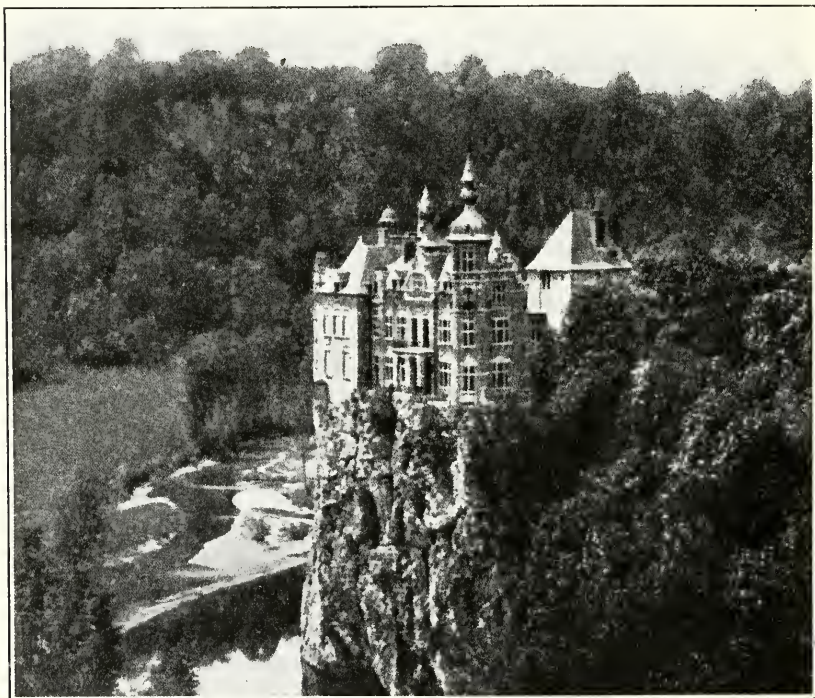
The type of the Walloon is quite pronounced. They differ from the surrounding people as much as do other remnants of prehistoric races, for instance the Basques. Such little islands of a more primitive population exist in other places in Europe, but in Germany they have been so thoroughly assimilated that there is only the tradition left of their separate existence. For instance in Halle the Hallores are a remnant of the primitive population of the place, who even to-day possess certain privileges, a circumstance which recalls the fact that they were spared by the conquerors to attend to the salt-works at a time when the invaders did not know how to obtain the salt. Even to-day the Hallores in Halle are distinguished by a special dress and are subject to special regulations which, however, although originally imposed upon them, have come to be regarded as a privilege and an honor. On New Year's day the Hallores furnish the Duke of Saxony, to whom they were subject in primitive times, with a tax of eggs and bread, and to this day they send a deputation to the successor of the Duke of Saxony, now King of Prussia and Emperor of the Germans, to carry in person this old tax levied upon their little community.

The Walloons differ more in their appearance from the surrounding population than do the Hallores in Halle. The latter have changed completely into Germans, but the Walloons are still a peculiar people endowed with certain prehistoric qualities very different from both the Gauls and the Teutons. They are rather undersized, but of vigorous and muscular stature. During the Middle Ages they were frequently compared in vigor to a bull and a boar. At the same time they are known to be irascible



A MARKET TEAM IN FLANDERS.
From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art.*

and indomitable in fight, whether in battle or in brawls. Strangers are rather unwelcome among them, and in former centuries this caused travelers and merchants to give a wide berth to their country. The quarrels with their dukes or superiors have become notorious in history, and it would lead us too far here to enter into details. It seems that even in the United States the Belgians who come from Walloon districts are known to be a restless element among striking miners.



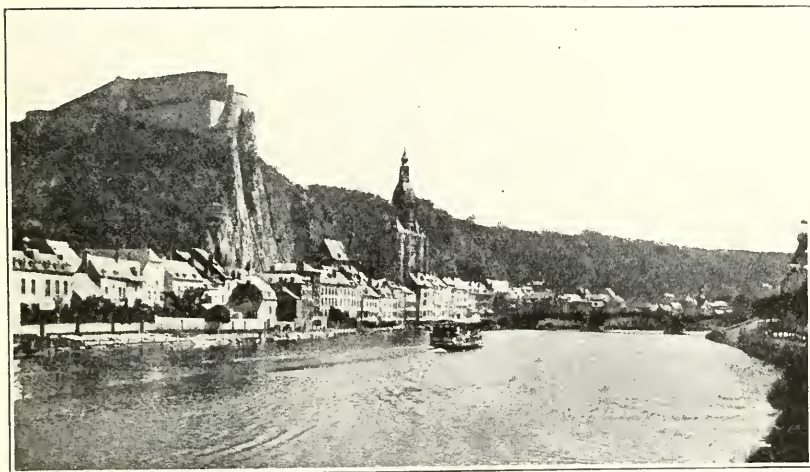
CHATEAU OF WALZIN AT DINANT.

From Boulger, *Belgian Life in Town and Country*.

It is noticeable that Walloons have rarely become leaders in national or popular affairs. They have been satisfied to be led either by the Flemish or by the French and would submit so long as their personal wants were satisfied and their rights not interfered with. There are traces of Walloon literature, but these have become very little known outside of their own country. The country affords rich soil to folklorists and is a veritable treasure-trove of ancient and prehistoric traditions. In fact, critics of their country-

life go so far as to reproach them with still cherishing superstitions which are taken quite seriously among the common people. The name Walloon is apparently the same as Welsh, and was given them by their Germanic neighbors who called by that name all the Celtic or non-Teutonic population with whom they came in contact. So, for instance, the French and the Italians are called Welsh by the Germans, and the people of Wales were given the same name by their Saxon conquerors. What the name originally means is doubtful. It is commonly believed that it originated in Belgium. The French called those tribes Walloons or Welsh, which were known to the Romans as *Volcae*.

In the valley of the Upper Rhone the country was called Wallis



VIEW OF DINANT AND THE VALLEY OF THE MEUSE.

From Boulger, *Belgian Life in Town and Country*.

(Valais) which means vale, from the Latin *valles*, but the similarity of sound between Wallis and Welsh seems to be accidental. Otherwise it would suggest another possible origin of the word Welsh as the inhabitants of Valais.

The word Welsh appears in the Old and Middle High German where it is spelled *Walh* or *Walah*. The word is still preserved in the English name "Cornwall," which means a district inhabited by what we may call the Cornwelsh people; and a trace of the name can also be seen in the word "walnut," the nuts known by this name having originally been introduced from Italy, a "Welsh" country. If the word is derived from the name *Volcae* it may be an ordinary Celtic word whose meaning has been hopelessly lost.

There is a peculiar condition in Belgium with regard to the official language, which is quite unusual. French has been adopted by the government for the reason that since the Middle Ages it has been the language of diplomacy and fashion. The first civilization reached the inhabitants of Belgium from Rome through the Romanized country of France, although French is not the language of any one of the tribes that made up Belgium. It is neither Flemish nor Walloon, but it is more foreign to the people than even the German language would be. Although it has taken a firm hold on the country, in having become the language of intercourse among



GREAT ROCK OF DINANT ON THE MEUSE.

From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art*.

the Flemish and the Walloons and also between them and strangers, it is not used generally as is usually assumed by foreigners. It touches the international relations of the population, but not so much the home life of the people as it exists in the old native families. An extract from a book written by Demetrius C. Boulger, a writer who has made a special study of Belgium, will give us a fair and interesting insight into the nature of popular life in that country. We learn here some astonishing facts as to the insistence of the Flemings on their own language and the struggle they have entered upon to retain their popular speech. Although written in

1904 the facts still stand, with the exception only that the numbers of the population have increased; the proportions given in the statistics, however, remain approximately the same.

The passage in Mr. Boulger's book, *Belgian Life in Town and Country*, reads as follows:

"The Flemish movement began at Ghent in a modest way about the year 1836. Half a dozen literary and scientific men founded there a Flemish review called *Belgisch Museum*, and, meeting with considerable success, they soon afterwards formed a club, taking as their motto, *De taal is gansch het volk* ("The language is the whole people").



A MILKWOMAN OF BRUSSELS.

From Boulger, *Belgian Life in Town and Country*.

"In 1844, Jan Frans Willems, the leader of the movement, summoned a congress, not, it is true, for a political purpose, but merely to exhort the Government to preserve the literary treasures of Flanders by the publication of its ancient texts. Assent was given to this request, but the necessary funds were not voted for ten years, which proved that the Government regarded the Flemish movement with distrust and even dislike. Willems died soon after the first congress, but the congresses went on, and were sometimes held in Holland as well as in Belgium.

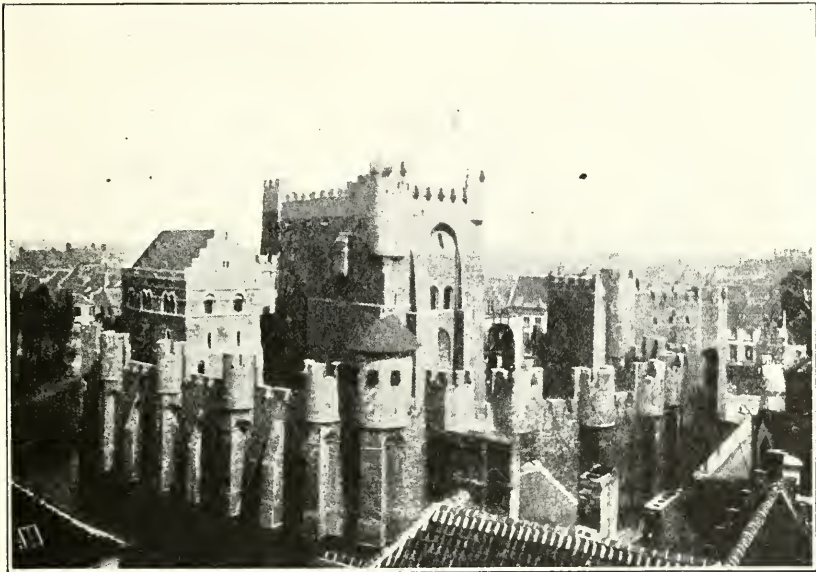
"The work of Willems was continued in a more efficacious man-



A FLEMISH MILKWOMAN.
From Boulger, *Belgium of the Belgians*.

ner by Henri Conscience, whose romances stimulated Flemish pride and aspirations and recalled the great days of Flanders. His "Lion of Flanders" (*Leeuw van Vlaanderen*) became not merely the most popular book of the day, but it idealized for all time the thoughts and longings of the Flemish race. It has without much exaggeration been called the Flemish Bible.

"The efforts of Conscience were well seconded by those of the poet Ledeganck, whose ballads were sung or recited from one end of Flanders to the other. There were many other writers in the

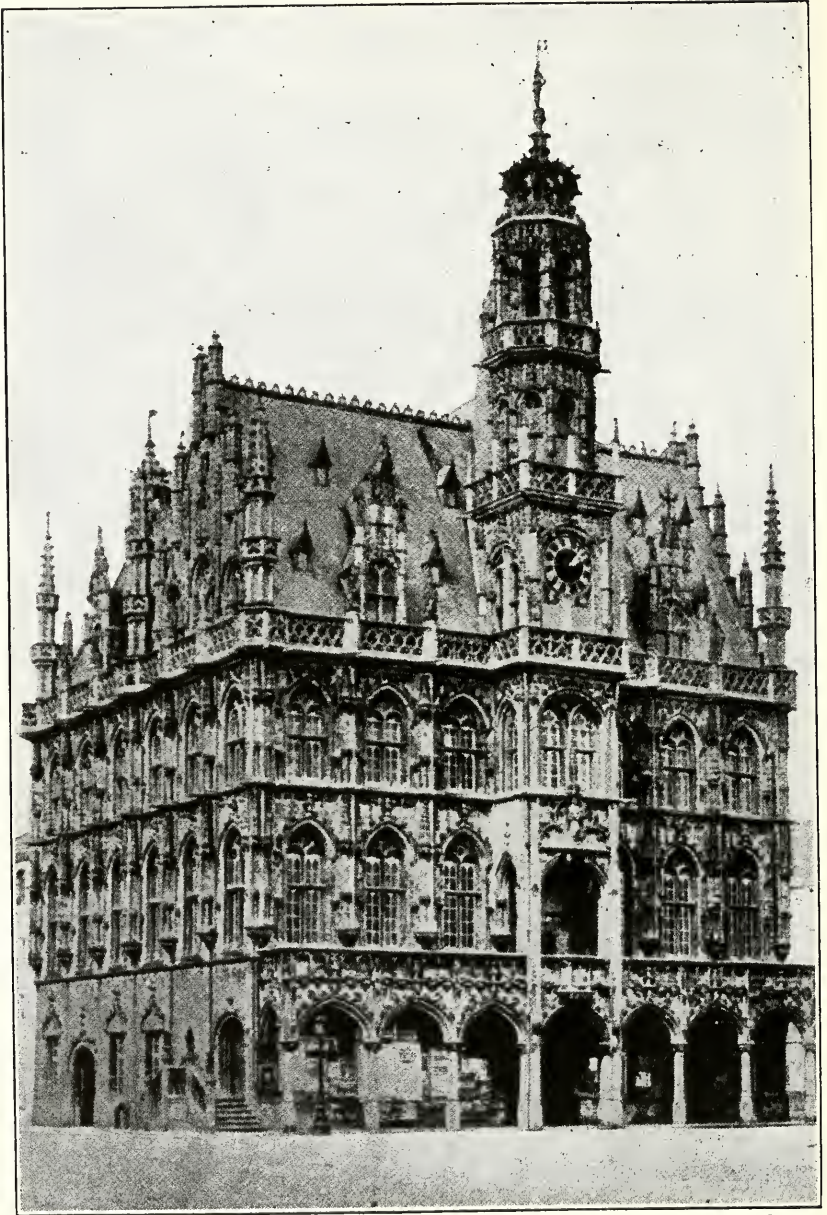


CASTLE OF THE COUNTS OF FLANDERS AT GHENT.

From Boulger, *Belgium of the Belgians*.

same field, and the Flemish agitation was illustrated by the one genuine literary movement that has occurred in modern Belgium. There were thus two marked and opposing tendencies in the country.

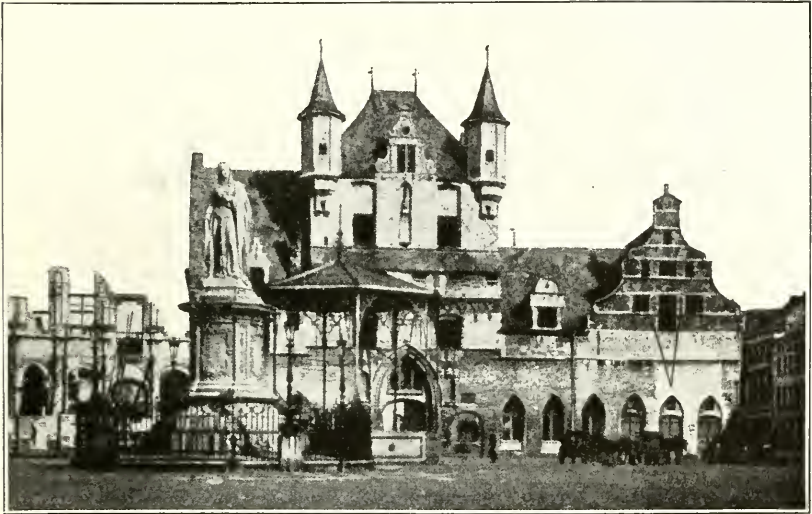
"The liberation of Belgium had been followed by the undoubted and obvious increase of French influence in official circles. All the sympathies of the Court and the Government were French, but there was no corresponding movement in the literature of the country. The Walloon intellect proved sterile. On the other hand was to be seen a remarkable ebullition, not merely of talent but of



CITY HALL OF OUDENARDE.
From Boulger, *Belgium of the Belgians*.

original genius, in the Flemish race, which had so long remained torpid and silent. This literary activity furnished proof of the vitality of the race and of the strength of its hopes, which precluded the possibility of contentment with a subordinate position. The Flemings were resolved not to be a party to their own effacement. It was not, however, until 1861 that the Flemish party succeeded in carrying in the Chamber an address to the King, expressing the hope that justice would be done to the 'well-founded demands of the Flemings.'

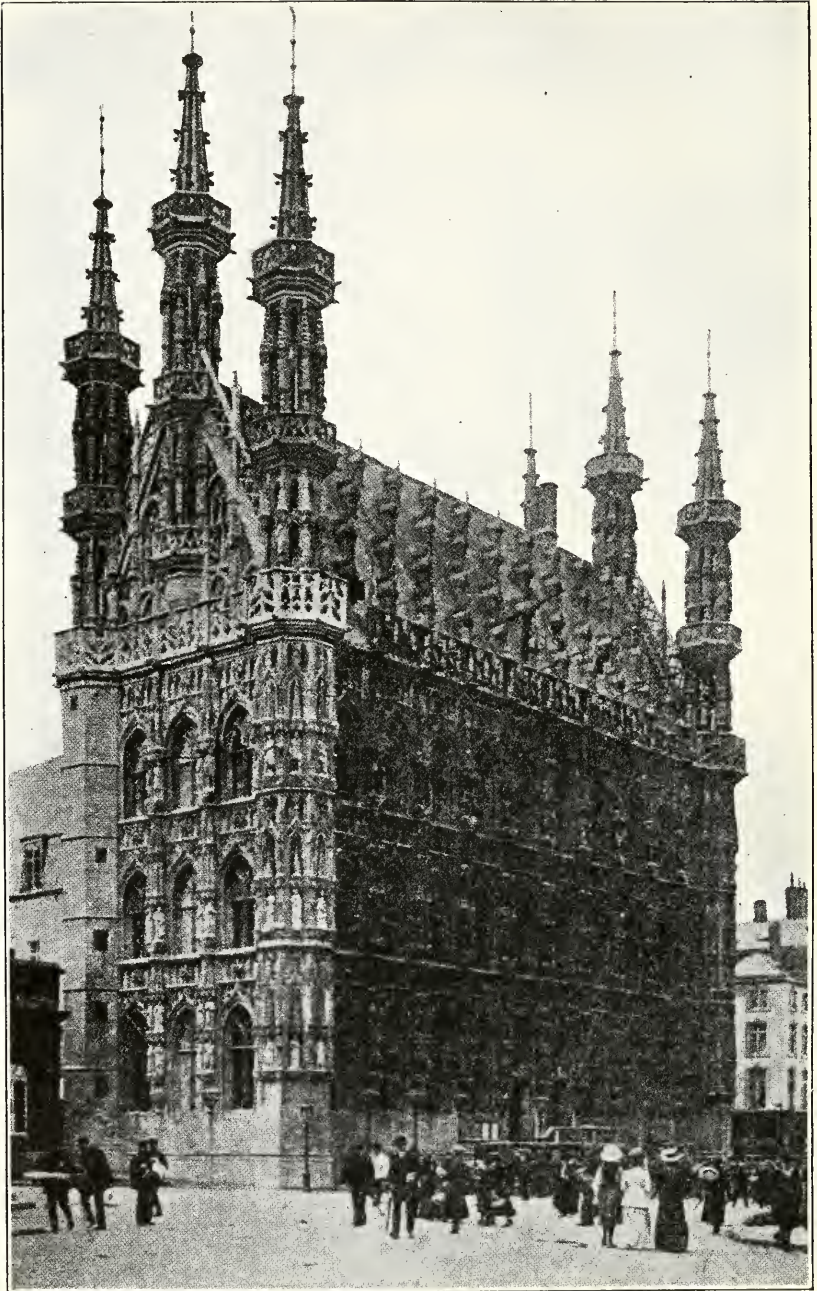
"It was soon after this event that a favorable opportunity offered itself for a demonstration calculated to stimulate public opin-



CLOTHWORKERS' HALL AT MALINES.

ion. A native of Flanders brought before one of the courts at Brussels refused to plead in French, and his attitude was supported and imitated by his counsel. In another case a Fleming accused of murder was tried and sentenced without his understanding a word of what passed in court. The most was made of these cases to strengthen the claims of the Netherlanders, as the Flemish party called themselves. There was an obvious need for reform, and the public realized that the concession of the Flemish demands could only be denied at the peril of disintegration.

"At last a first tangible success was obtained when a law was passed in 1873 to the effect that in criminal cases the court should



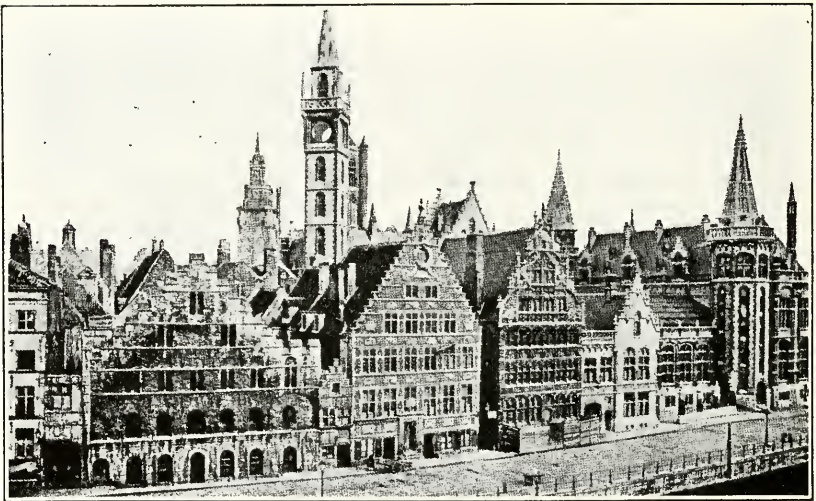
CITY HALL OF LOUVAIN.

From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art.*



German, 7028 Flemish and German, and 36,185 French, Flemish and German. The census of 1900 showed that the population had risen to 6,815,054. Of this total 3,145,000 spoke only Flemish, 2,830,000 only French, and 770,000 the two languages.

“The struggle of the languages has therefore resulted in what may be called a drawn battle. Flemish has gained the position to which the antiquity and solidity of its pretensions entitled it, but French remains the language of society, of the administration, and of the bulk of the literature of the country, while the common language of the people in the eastern and southeastern divisions is



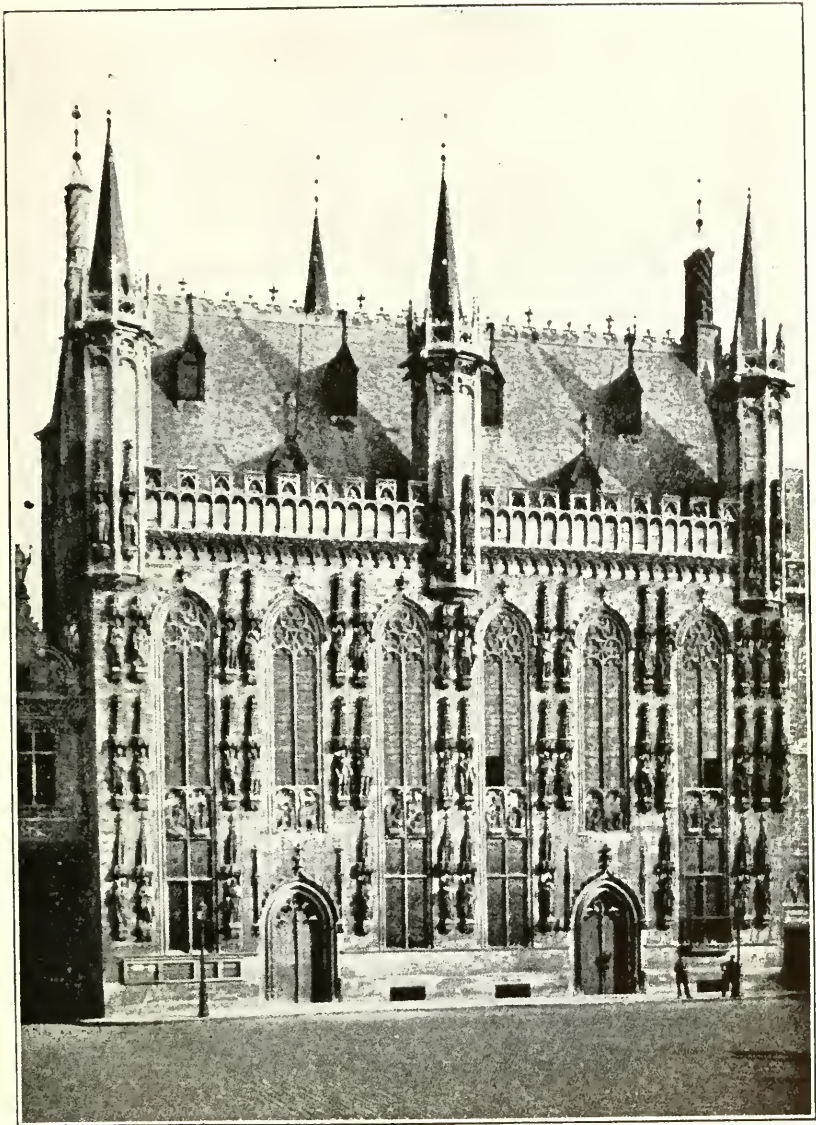
OLD GUILD-HALLS IN GHENT.

From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art*.

Walloon. There still remains to be found a solution for the political difficulties that must arise in a community so constituted, and it seems as if it can only be found in the direction of bilingualism. This result must be promoted by the stipulation that proficiency in the two tongues is requisite for public employment; but there are still nearly six millions of people in Belgium who know only one language. The Flemings have preserved their language by a rigid exclusiveness, and they have always refused to learn any other.

“The encouragement of bilingualism by the authorities is now represented to be an insidious attempt to vulgarize French in Flanders. On the other hand, the Walloons are protesting against the

waste of time and the uselessness of learning a language which is never heard in Wallonia. . . .



CITY HALL OF BRUGES.

“The great bond, however, between the two races is religious union. Bavaria, Ireland and Belgium have been called the three

most devoted children of the Church of Rome, and in Belgium to-day the Flemings are the staunchest Roman Catholics, and the real supporters of the political influence of their church."

The Flemings have always shown great love of country, and as soon as their cities began to prosper they built churches, city halls, and guild-houses in the most gorgeous style of the age. They fought for their liberties against their princes, and built belfries for the bells which were called "Rolands," as emblems of the citizens' self-government.



THE BELFRY OF BRUGES.

In the Middle Ages the trade of Europe meant an exchange of goods with the Orient, called the Levant, and the main commercial cities were Genoa and Venice, but with the discovery of America, European commerce needed a northern port which would open a passage to the western continent. So Bruges rose into prominence. Flemish citizens acquired wealth and patronized art. Flemish ladies were dressed in such costly garments that a French queen felt cheap in their presence. All the public buildings of Flanders have a history, to recount which volumes would be required.

Among the visitors to Belgium was an American poet whose lines are often recited in our public schools:

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

Longfellow sees “visions of the days departed,” he beholds Maximilian kneeling at his devotions, he sees the Flemish weavers returning from the bloody “battle of the spurs of gold”:

“And again the whiskered Spaniard all the land with terror smote;
And again the wild alarm sounded from the tocsin's throat;

“Till the bell of Ghent responded o'er lagoon and dike of sand,
‘I am Roland! I am Roland! there is victory in the land!’”

When the inland waterway of Bruges became sanded, Antwerp took its place as the chief seaport, and became a northern Venice, retaining its prominence as the chief outlet of Central Europe until through German competition Hamburg and Bremen became important, and to some extent successful, rivals.