

BELGIAN HISTORY AND THE NEUTRALITY QUESTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

BELGIUM, in industry and art, is for its size one of the greatest countries in the world, and it is the Flemish portion of the population that has been and still is leading in these noble pursuits. Historians of the country point with pride to the old Flemish school patronized by the wealthy burghers, and from the long list of great artists we will mention the following names: the brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, and Quentin Matsys, all of whom lived before the Reformation, the last one being a contemporary of Luther; and Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck and David Teniers, the stars of Flemish art after the Reformation; but the greatest among them is Peter Paul Rubens.

After Charlemagne the country was divided into a number of feudal principalities among which Flanders was the most prominent, so as to enable the counts of Flanders to acquire the territories of their weaker neighbors. Before the time of the Reformation Holland and Belgium developed together, as they formed practically one country, known as the Netherlands. The line of the counts of Flanders died out in 1384, the last one of them leaving a daughter who was married to Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Times were favorable; commerce and trade developed; and the dukes patronized artists; all of which resulted in the first golden age of Flemish art. But in time new conditions arose; Mary of Burgundy, the daughter of Charles the Bold, married Maximilian of Hapsburg, later on Emperor, who in 1477 inherited the Netherlands; and when Maximilian's grandson, Emperor Charles V, retired into a monastery in 1556, he divided his extended possessions into two parts. His German lands (now the Austrian empire) fell to his brother, Ferdinand I, who also became emperor, while Spain, with the Netherlands, was given to his son, Philip II of Spain, a Spaniard by education and inclination. This distribution practically meant that the

Netherlands became subject to Spain, and Philip's many encroachments upon the independence of the citizens brought about the Dutch revolution; for he expected his Dutch subjects to obey him with the same submission as he had become accustomed to in Spain. The Netherlands had, for the most part, adopted the Reformation, and Philip II proposed to force them back into submission to Rome. The result was a protracted war in which the Spaniards failed to subject the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands. These concluded an alliance in 1579, fighting with perseverance and



FLEMISH PEASANTS.

By David Teniers.

courage against their oppressors; and in 1581 they declared their independence from Spain under William of Orange who, in 1584, fell a victim to the dagger of an assassin. His last thoughts were with the people to whom he had devoted his life, and a well-known portrait of him preserved in The Hague has inscribed over it his last words:

"Mon Dieu, ayes pitié de mon âme,
Mon Dieu, ayes pitié de ce pauvre peuple!"

William's son, Maurice, although only seventeen years of age, continued the work of his father with energy and ability, and the

seven provinces, now called the kingdom of Holland, maintained their independence.

The two men, William of Orange and Philip II of Spain, repre-



WILLIAM OF ORANGE.

sent the division which took place between Holland and Belgium. Though the countries were reunited again in 1814, the two peoples had become so alienated from each other that they could not be truly

formed into one nation. Belgium remained influenced by France, and its population was either severely Roman Catholic, or, as is quite common in purely Catholic countries, became positively irreligious. A middle party of moderate views scarcely existed. At the same time French manners, French amusements and French luxury have become the standard of life, and Brussels prides itself in being a second Paris.

When the Hapsburg line of Spain died out a European war ensued, known as the War of the Spanish Succession, and at the end of it Belgium, then called the Spanish Netherlands, fell again to Austria according to the conditions of the peace of Utrecht; and with the exception of several years of French conquest (1745-1748), it remained Austrian until the French Revolution involved Belgium and resulted in its incorporation, in 1794, into the French republic. It remained French under Napoleon, but after Napoleon's fall in 1815, it again became a part of the Netherlands under King William I of the Orange family, a lineal descendant of William, the first stadtholder.

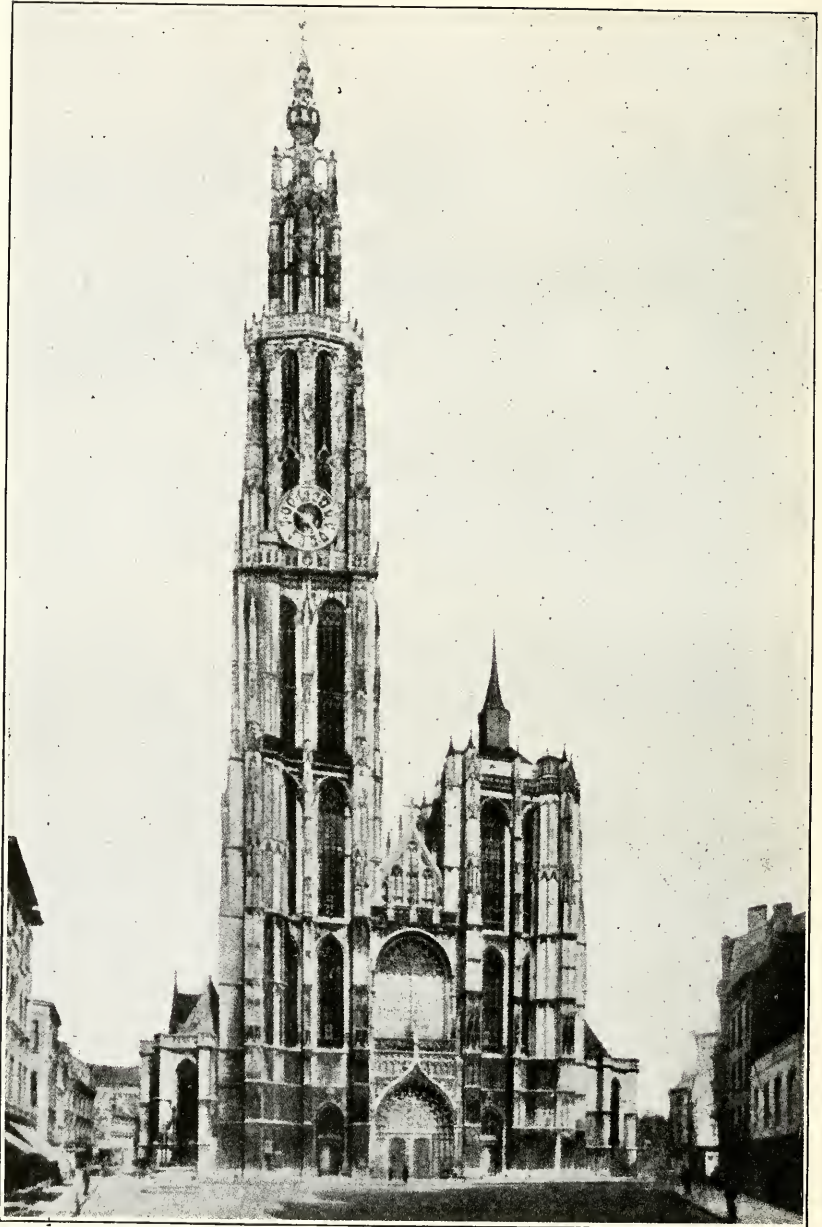
But, as stated above, the two countries, Belgium and Holland, had become estranged, and it was difficult for the two portions of the population to live together in peace. The discontent in Belgium resulted finally, in 1830, in a rebellion which, supported by France and England, led to a separation and the establishment of a new constitutional monarchy, called Belgium. Luxemburg, however, was excluded and remained an independent duchy, connected with the kingdom of Holland in personal union, and a part of the German confederacy.

A national congress elected first a French prince, the Duke of Nemours, but his father, King Louis Philippe of France, declined the offer on his son's behalf, and England recommended the uncle of the Prince Consort—his father's younger brother—Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who accepted the candidacy and was elected June 4, 1831, with 152 out of 196 votes.

King Leopold I married Princess Louise of Orleans, the daughter of Louis Philippe, and governed his new kingdom with wisdom and success. His son, Leopold II, followed him after his death, in 1865, and, Leopold II dying without a legitimate heir to the throne, his brother's son, Albert, succeeded him.

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One condition of the establishment of Belgium, made by England, was the declaration of her neutrality, which was guaran-

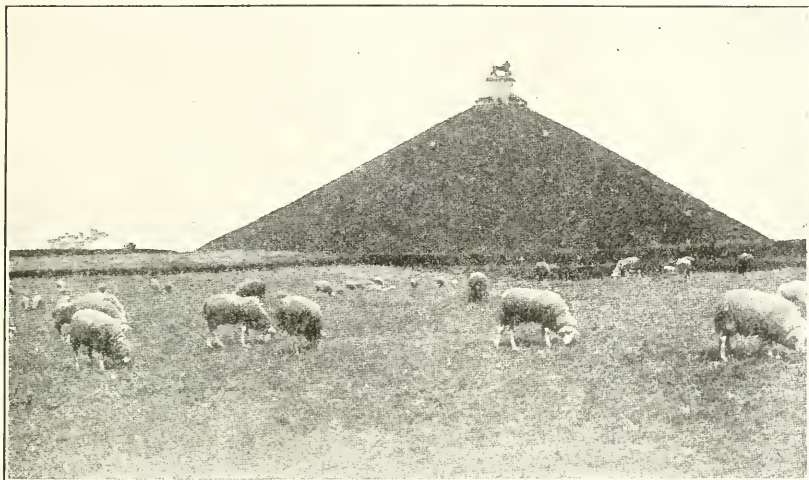


CATHEDRAL OF ANTWERP.

From Boulger, *Belgium of the Belgians*.

ted by Prussia, Austria, France and England. This neutrality meant that in case of war Belgian territory should not be trespassed, and thus should serve as a home of peace from which European quarrels should be kept away.

This idea is perhaps based on the English notion that any European war should be kept away from the country which lies opposite to England; but the idea is a mere pious wish which was recognized even at the time it was proposed to be an illusion, quite desirable but impossible and unrealizable. Belgium has a very central position in Europe, and it is no accident that a great number of European battles have been fought on its soil, the best known



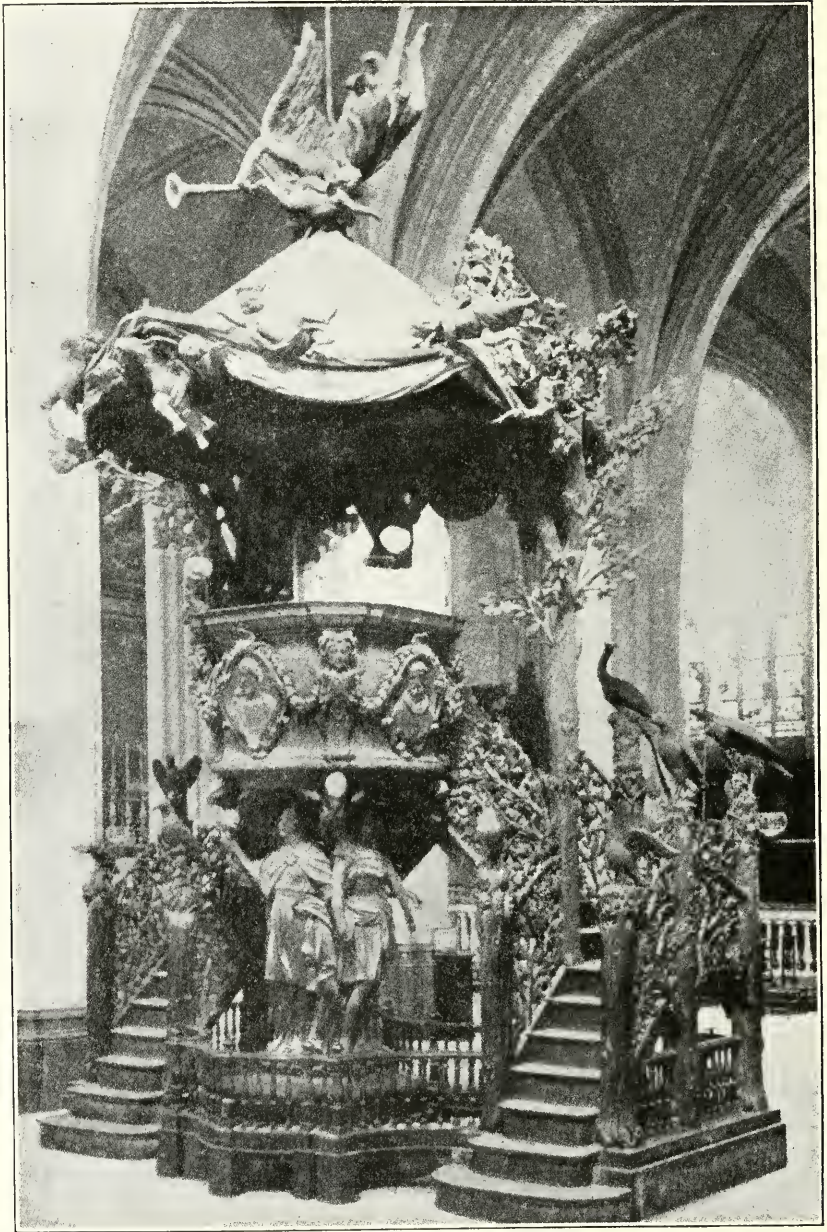
THE LION MOUND AT WATERLOO.

From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art*.

of which is Waterloo. Was it possible in these cases for the belligerents to keep out? Scarcely. The idea of Belgian neutrality was an experiment and we now know that it failed.

We pity Belgium for the sad fate which has befallen it, but we must consider that its central position is not only a source of danger in times of war, but an enormous advantage in times of peace. Belgium's unrivaled prosperity is due to it. Similarly, those who cultivate the fields and the slopes of Mount Vesuvius and Mount Aetna enjoy rich harvests, but must from time to time expect volcanic eruptions.

It is difficult to understand the purport of England's proposal



A PULPIT IN ANTWERP CATHEDRAL.

From Boulger, *Belgium of the Belgians*.

to make Belgium an especially neutral country with some undefinable sanctity. Is it not true that, under normal conditions, every country is neutral, and that, if other countries are at war, the neutrality of its citizens, its ships, its possessions and all that appertains to it should be respected. The special and extraordinary sanctity of Belgium's neutrality has never been defined. Would England have allowed Belgian ships free passage, while those of Holland and Denmark were inspected for contraband and dragged into British harbors? Scarcely! What, then, is the real difference between the neutrality of Belgium and that of other countries? This question would be difficult to answer if we did not know what kind of policy England has in mind. We have only to remember the explanation of the late Earl Roberts who insisted that the coast and territory opposite England must not fall into the hands of a strong power.

Belgium is a territory which, according to old tradition, England wishes to have perpetually kept in weak hands, and so England is greatly interested in seeing Belgium made inviolable. This can only mean that England wants to prevent Belgium's annexation by a strong power, be it France or Germany.

When the idea was originally concocted in the brain of an English diplomat the danger of annexation lay not in Austria or Prussia, least of all in Germany, but in France. In fact England did not even deem it necessary to make Germany (then the German confederacy) an accessory to the treaty and, as stated above, had it ratified by the two great German states, Prussia and Austria. If the German Emperor had been a quibbler on points of legality he would have ordered Bavarian, Swabian, Hessian or Hanoverian troops to force the passage through Belgium, and all the virulent accusation of England would have lost its force; Prussia had signed the treaty, but not Germany, and the truth is that every declaration of war is a breach of neutrality, and the neutrality of a country which is practically a vassal state of England is, for that reason, not more sacred than that of any other country.

The Franco-German frontier is comparatively short, and on both sides excellently protected. The French knew very well that both Metz and Strasburg were formidable fortresses, very difficult to take, and that, even if they were taken, the possession of Alsace-Lorraine would open the way not to Berlin but only into Southern Germany. Therefore the French naturally deemed it desirable to break through Belgium into Germany. For diplomatic reasons they would, of course, prefer the Germans to be guilty of the

breach of neutrality, but if the Germans had not done it they would have done it themselves, because, for strategical reasons, they deemed the widening of the theater of war and the possession of the direct route from Paris to Berlin indispensable for their success.

If the Germans had been assured that Belgium's neutrality would have been respected by the other powers they would have had the great advantage of having to protect only their short and well-defended frontier. They would have been able to concentrate the force of their army against Russia and keep on the defensive in Alsace-Lorraine. The neutrality of Belgium, provided it had been assured, would actually have been of great advantage to



LACE MAKERS OF BRUGES.

From Griffis, *Belgium the Land of Art*.

Germany. Why then did she not keep it, but instead break it deliberately and ruthlessly?

The answer and explanation is this. The neutrality of Belgium was not assured. The Germans claim to have reliable information that the French had planned to invade Germany through Belgium. I need not here repeat the well-known statement that French officers were in Belgium before the beginning of the war; and there were numerous indications that the French intended to surprise the Germans after the war had started, by an outflanking movement whereby they would be attacked in the rear. This would have been fatal, and any one who knows something about war knows that the mere possibility (and in this case it was a great probability,

amounting to a practical certainty) could not be overlooked or ignored, or left till a time when the emergency would present itself as an accomplished fact, but has to be counted upon and prevented before it can materialize.

That interesting novel, *La fin de l'empire allemande*, by Major de Civrieux (reviewed in the March number of *The Open Court*, p. 190) sets very plainly before our minds French ideas on this subject. It is a very cheap attitude, that of accusing the Germans on moral grounds for the breach of Belgian neutrality; but if they had allowed themselves to be duped, and if the theater of war had, by a French outflanking movement through Belgium, with or without Belgian consent, placed the French army into the Rhinelands, the allies would simply have laughed at German carelessness.

If the English were at all desirous of attacking Germany they had still stronger reasons for selecting Belgium as a basis for an attack of Germany, for the German frontier in the region of Metz and Mühlhausen is too far away from their base of supplies, and the obstacles offered by the Vosges mountains are too formidable.

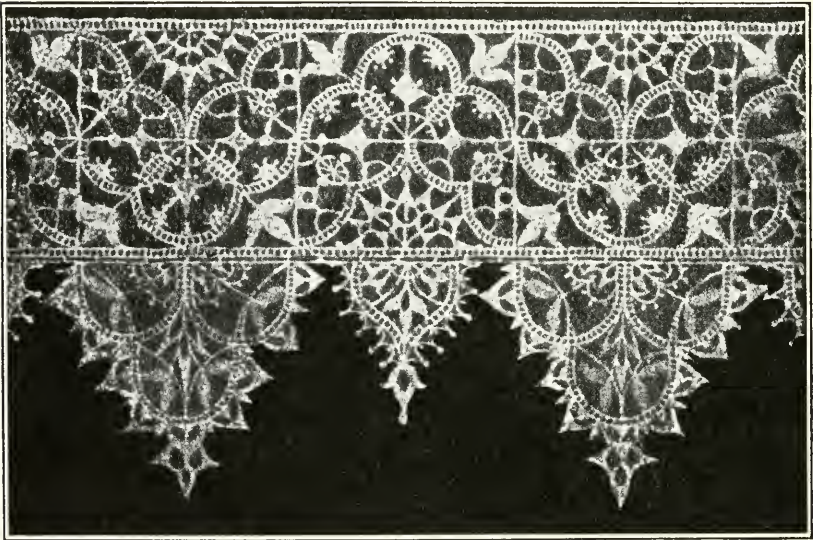
The Germans did not want to attack England. They were enjoying a peaceful prosperity. Their industries were expanding in an unprecedented manner. But General Bernhardt warned the Germans of the English danger, exhorting them to be prepared for war and prophesying that war must come simply because their natural growth led them to encroach upon British interests. The German prophet of the war did not preach war, nor did he incite to war; he raised a warning voice, pointed out a great danger, and exhorted Germany to be prepared for it.

If the Germans had intended to attack England they would have accepted the French and Russian proposition to join with them in a general protest against England on account of the Boer war. Kaiser Wilhelm sympathized with the Boers, but he did not go so far as to assume a hostile attitude toward the English or start a war in behalf of his South African friends. Bernhardt would perhaps have accepted the proposition of the French and the Russians, but his views were not approved and he was a voice crying in the wilderness. His book was almost unnoticed in Germany.

In the crisis of 1914 Germany would gladly have been satisfied to let Belgium enjoy her privilege of neutrality if she could only have been assured that her enemies themselves would respect it; but all military arrangements pointed the other way and convinced the German General Staff that they had to expect a French or even a Franco-Belgian invasion. If Belgium really meant to be neutral

there was no need of a large Belgian army. But it is well known that Belgium's army was of unusual strength for the size of the country, more than three times greater numerically than the entire English army, and it has, in consequence, played quite a considerable part in the present war.

The Belgian policy did not adhere to a neutral course, and we do not blame the Belgian kings for it, for the rôle of neutrality imposed upon the country by English interests was too difficult and too delicate to be carried out. The acquisition of the Congo state was its first great infringement, and in more recent times King Albert attempted a confederacy among the five small northern



BRABANT LACE OF THE YEAR 1596.

powers (Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden) which clearly implied a violation of Belgian neutrality. England knew that the old treaty of 1839 had lost its significance. Gladstone acknowledged this openly, and made a new treaty during the war of 1870-71, to last for a year, to guard Belgian neutrality. But even this was of doubtful value, for necessity knows no restriction, and when Napoleon III saw his cause on French territory lost he tried to break through Belgium and would have ventured an attack on the Rhenish provinces had the German army not cut off the French army at Sedan, close to the Belgian frontier, and compelled the entire French force to surrender.

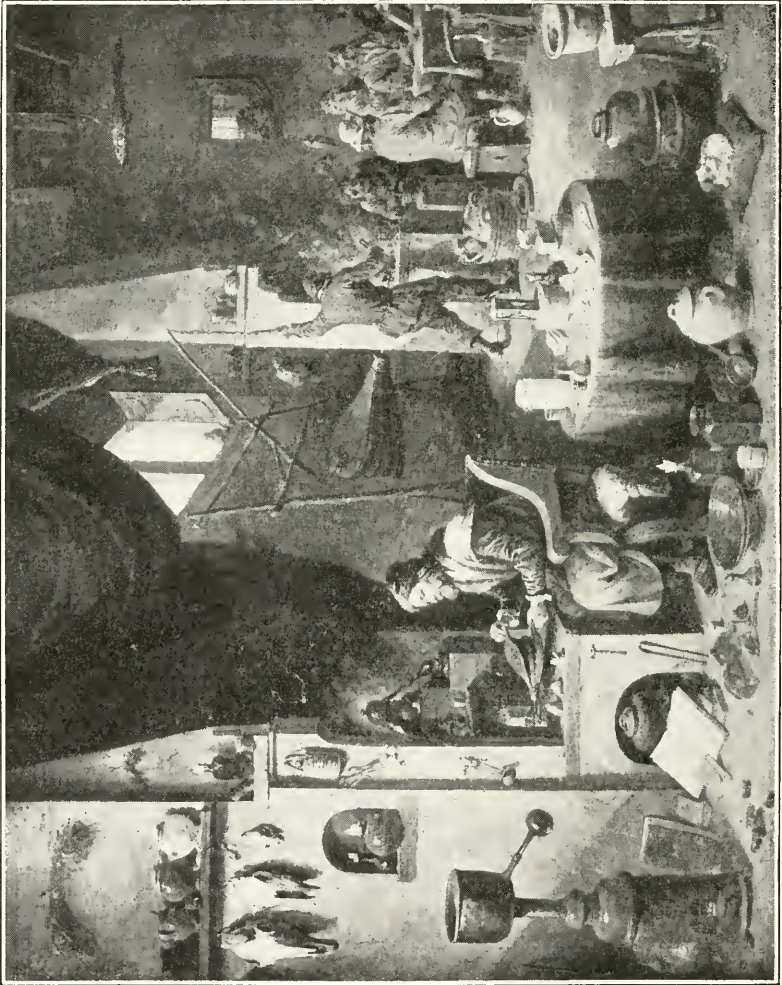
The documents of a secret understanding between England and Belgium, involving also France, are a sufficient proof that neither England nor Belgium thought seriously of the neutrality treaty of 1839, and this remains true in spite of the declaration by Sir Edward Grey and the Belgian government that the Brussels documents were of a purely informal character. It is unfortunate for England that they fell into German hands; the cleverest excuses and explanations will not annihilate their existence nor minimize their significance. Whether we call this kind of "*conversation*" informal, or Platonic, or even pacifistic, the Germans cannot be blamed for regarding them as positive proof of a conspiracy between England, Belgium and France, against Germany.

The German General Staff did not yet know of the Brussels documents; there were other reasons why an attack through Belgium was considered necessary. It is noticeable that the Belgian fortifications face Germany, not France. On the German frontier of Belgium there were two fortified Belgian camps, one on either side of the fortress Huy; none lie on the French frontier, which suggests that the French were regarded as allies. The fortified camps are enclosed by a belt of forts, and they are a continuation of the French forts along the river Meuse, erected against Germany on the Franco-German frontier. The three great fortresses, Antwerp, Liège and Namur, were kept up to date without regard to cost, and French officers were consulted as to the best methods of installing modern improvements.

Under these circumstances the German Chancellor had a perfect right to regard the old treaty of Belgian neutrality, over eighty years old, as "a scrap of paper." It was concluded under decidedly different conditions, before Belgium had developed into a military, and indeed a belligerent state, unfriendly, yes obviously hostile, to Germany. It must be a very partial judgment that would not at least give Germany the benefit of the doubt, and the Brussels documents discovered later on, together with the evidence furnished by the letters of the Belgian ministers, justify the German procedure.

Sir Edward Grey explains that the Brussels documents refer to a very harmless conversation "discussing the help which England should send Belgium *only in case of a breach of Belgian neutrality* by other powers." Would Sir Edward also have protected Belgium against France? If so, is it not strange that French ports had been selected for the landing of English troops?—a fact which proves that France was implicated. A previous plan had been to land troops in Antwerp, but this was abandoned because of the

erection, by the Dutch, of fortifications at the mouth of the Schelde; and it now became clear why the proposition of the Dutch to fortify the Schelde river, commanding the entrance to Antwerp from the sea, called forth so much violent opposition in London and Paris.



THE ALCHEMIST. By David Teniers.

If the English policy was so pacific, as stated by Sir Edward, it is strange that these harmless "conversations" were treated with such confidential secrecy. It would have been better to make such pacific discussions public, because they might then have had an influence on the Germans and taught them to keep hands off.

Moreover, they ought to have been made not only with the French against the Germans, but also with the Germans against the French.

If it is true (as says Sir Edward) that "there is no note of these conversations at the British War Office or Foreign Office," does he mean to say that the reports of these conversations were kept in another place, or that "these conversations" were purely private and were neither authorized by, nor at all reported to, the British government? If they were indeed so rigorously conditional on a German invasion why was the condition not emphasized at the start in plain and unmistakable words, but only incidentally mentioned? And I feel inclined to add: if they only served to encourage the Belgians to resist, why were they not lived up to by Great Britain? The Germans did not want this war and are perfectly well convinced that their Kaiser strove for peace up to the last minute.

The art of English diplomacy consisted in uniting all the elements hostile to Germany and making them act simultaneously. The plan was to deal the enemy a sudden and crushing blow by an overwhelming array of hostile forces which would invade Germany at once on two sides, the east and the west; and we must grant, the idea was very clever. The French and the Russians would have done the work, and as usual the English would have reaped the benefit.

Germany broke Belgian neutrality because she knew that the French intended to attack the poorly-protected Rhenish province, and this is the reason which the German Chancellor gave officially. He regretted the necessity for the deed, he granted that it was wrong and proclaimed that for the damage caused by the German army Germany would reimburse the sufferers. Moreover, he guaranteed Belgian independence—and all this provided Belgium would allow the Germans to pass through Belgium. Belgium rejected the offer and joined the Triple Entente.

Sir Edward Grey, in commenting on the situation, not unappropriately quotes the parody on a Shakespeare passage thus:

"Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
But four times he that gets his blow in fust."

Sir Edward is right; the quotation from *King Henry IV*,¹ as well as the sarcastic gloss added to it, is right, and it is an old Prussian principle to act on it. Prussian strategists believe that there is only one method of defense which can be successful, that

¹ Part II, Act iii, Scene 2.



THE MARRIAGE OF ST. CATHARINE.
By Hans Memling.

is, a vigorous offensive. This course alone promises victory. It was natural that the Kaiser should hesitate to begin a war; but it was equally to be expected that, as soon as he knew that war was unavoidable, he would take the offensive, in order to get "his blow in fust," even though this course exposed him to the criticism of having begun the war. The pro-British press has made good use of this point, and has on the strength of it converted many to regard Germany as the disturber of the peace.

I have given careful consideration to the English presentation of the question and have come to the conclusion that, as usual, it shows much more keenness and diplomatic wisdom than the German, and thus has a strong appearance of justice; but the cause of Germany, though often presented in a misleading way, is truly just. The war, and also the breach of Belgian neutrality, were forced upon Germany. Therefore, according to Sir Edward Grey's quotation, the Germans are seven times armed; three times because their quarrel is just, and four times because, as soon as they saw that war was positively unavoidable, they did not wait for the allies to invade Germany, but dealt the first blow.

I believe in the Germans and in the German cause, but for that reason I am not anti-English, or anti-British. I am fully convinced that the English people did not begin this war; but I do believe that the British diplomats have carefully prepared it and have gradually made the English believe that the war was necessary. The first step toward the war was the formation of the Triple Entente, and the Triple Entente with all that it implies was not only vicious, but also an asinine stupidity. I will not here dwell on the viciousness of this compact, for diplomats believe that in statecraft no moral law is binding, and English diplomats have acted accordingly. The policy of British diplomacy has of course been kept secret, for part of the diplomatic art consists in the hypocrisy of pretending to be truthful and moral, at the same time making the enemy seem a liar even when he is simply suffering (as are the Germans) from an undiplomatic frankness or "brazen candor."

I will lose no space here in pointing out the moral deficiencies of the English policy. These are apparent in all her recent wars, not one of which has been righteous. And, in the present war, I insist that the scheme of crushing Germany is insensate beyond measure.

First, neither the Russians nor the French are or, in spite of their present alliance, can become true friends of the English; on the contrary both dislike, or even hate, the English even at the



ST. CATHARINE.
From a Memling Breviary.

present time most intensely. The English propose to use their allies for the sake of helping them to crush the Germans, but as soon as the task is done the old enmities will be renewed.

Secondly, the English underrate German strength, intelligence and ability in both the defensive and the offensive; they have not the slightest idea of what their cousins on the continent will endure in patience and sacrifice. The Germans are a more formidable foe than the English have ever before encountered, and they should have thought twice before entering this war—the very first war in history between England and Germany.

Thirdly, the English have overrated their allies and also themselves. The chances for an easy victory looked splendid; indeed victory seemed perfectly assured. The French army was in better condition than ever, even under the first Napoleon; the Russians are so numerous; and the two ought to have been sufficient to crush the Germans. But it takes more than an overwhelming majority to beat the Germans; it takes leadership as well, and that is missing in both France and Russia. The English think they can supply it, and they boast of their former historical victories. The English people do not even now know that the victories of Marlborough were gained by Prince Eugene; Marlborough simply happened to be present; and the battle of Waterloo was almost lost by Wellington when the genius of Gneisenau saved the day by means of Blücher's Prussian army. The English have a very good opinion of themselves, and it would have been better for them if they had not overrated their own ability before they had brought on the crisis.

The Germans are by no means the only people in the world who represent culture, science, and the progress of humanity. There are other civilized and partly civilized nations. The French and the English range as high in literature and general culture as the Germans, but one thing is sure, the Germans are leading in almost every science and branch of cultural aspirations, not only in music and other arts but also in chemistry and manufacture of all kinds. Even if the Germans were defeated in war the cultural qualities of Germany would make her indispensable for the progress of mankind, and it is this quality which adds to her warlike strength in this critical moment when England seems to hold the key to the situation on account of both her wealth and her naval supremacy.

We quote the following lines on German inventiveness from Bulletin No. 10 of the "*Kriegs-Ausschuss der deutschen Industrie Berlin*":

"England has planned on the largest scale possible to starve

out Germany. She is endeavoring to cut off all food supplies from the inhabitants of Germany—men, women and children—and to bring the German industry forcibly to a standstill by preventing the importation of raw materials. In this way she hopes to weaken the German people by hunger and make it impossible for them to

manufacture munitions of war, so that they will finally be compelled to accept a peace dictated by England.

“The English plan is based upon the fact that before the war Germany purchased a portion of its food supply and raw materials abroad. . . . Through its intimate cooperation with science German industrie has been particularly successful in the past in discovering new uses for apparently worthless raw materials; and the public life of Germany has always been distinguished for a model organization recognized even by our enemies.

“During the present war England has cut off Germany from the supply of natural saltpetre in order to prevent the manufacture of explosives and make it impossible to fertilize the fields. In the course of the few months since the beginning of the war the chemical industry has succeeded in making sufficient quantities of artificial nitrates from air and coal. The necessary factories have been built, and Germany is now assured of an adequate supply of saltpetre. Indeed, it may be said even now, that after the end of the war these new plants will continue to operate and thus diminish to no small extent the importation of natural saltpetre,

so that England's starvation policy will bring permanent injury only to the producers of natural saltpetre. Similarly in the matter of petroleum. Since the importation of petroleum has been made impossible, the great majority have now taken to the use of gas and electricity. The new gas and electric fittings will of course



ST. CATHARINE.
By Jan Van Eyck.

continue to be used after the conclusion of the war, and we can safely assume that in future Germany will import very much less petroleum than formerly."

We will add that Dr. Hans Friedlander has recently improved the chemical process of changing straw into food, and England's proposition to reduce Germany by starvation seems thereby to have received an additional check, one which would prove sufficient even if the enormous agricultural improvements did not work.

A glaring instance of the difference between German efficiency and English lack of progressiveness appears in naval warfare. The superiority of the English navy consists in numbers, but in naval training, in good marksmanship and in grit the Germans are fully their equal. It is certain that the German crews handle their submarines better than the English marines their dreadnoughts.

The chances of crushing Germany seemed excellent, but the Germans are up to the mark and it looks as if this time the English have undertaken too much.

There are still other reasons why this war is an incredible stupidity; and we must bear in mind English bulldoggedness which will carry on the war to the bitter end, even when conditions become more and more unfavorable.

The war can bring no good to England. It can do her only harm. It jeopardizes all the many advantageous positions England has gained, the Suez canal, South Africa, Egypt, India. It may also liberate Ireland. The war has allied her with Japan, a doubtful and even dangerous confederate which will demand a high price for its services—presumably nothing less than the recognition of an Asiatic Monroe doctrine, Asia for the Asiatics. This means at present, China for the Japanese and the Pacific for Asia; in the future it may mean more.

There is no need of going into further details, but it seems to me it is not even in the interest of England that the cause of the Allies should come out victorious. The English are fighting for a cause which is most injurious to England herself.

It is true and I grant that England was in a precarious state, due to what the English call the "German peril," and this seems to me to be the only justification for her going to war. We have been told that German aggressiveness could not be tolerated, and that Germany must be crushed before she becomes too strong, and before she can endanger England's dominion over the seas. This is the real reason for the war. All other reasons are mere pretexts;

they are opportunities seized by smart diplomats for the purpose of making Germany seem the responsible party.

It is true that Germany has been growing rapidly and even threatened to eclipse England. But if English diplomacy had been less smart and more wise it would have been possible to make of the Germans friends and allies; and how much better would they have served the England of the future than the Japanese, or the Russians, or even the French! I have a great respect for English diplomacy, but how much better had it been applied if it had treated German rivalry as a friendly and helpful competition. Have not German settlers proved a most valuable element in English colonies in times past, and have not the Germans been distinguished by their diligence and industry as well as by their faithfulness? All the benefits which England might have derived from a continued friendship with the German people now seem well-nigh impossible of realization, and the hope of building up a firmly established world peace upon the good entente of Germany, England and the United States almost appears lost for all time.

Who is guilty of this crime? I repeat, it is the inventor of the Triple Entente and the diplomats who have carried out the plan underlying it; and it is a sin that cannot be forgiven—neither in the world of present conditions nor in the life to come. The curse of it will live on into the distant future of mankind, and if the English people but knew the inner workings of their politics they would rise in indignation and give the men responsible for the present situation their deserts. But I fear it is too late.