

Our Holiday Letters.

[FROM BRUSSELS.]

FROM Ghent to Brussels is only a short run, and visitors to Belgium will naturally not omit to pay a visit to the capital of which all Belgians are justly proud. We had only a few days there, too short to explore all its beauties, but still one can get a very fair general idea of it in three or four days. Anyone going to Brussels for a short time will do well to stay near the centre of the town. Many, and indeed most, of the pensions are some little way from this, and much valuable time is wasted in going backwards and forwards. We found this a distinct drawback. I am told that the pensions kept by Mrs. Lumsden, in the Rue de la Pepiniere, and Madame Bourrcoud, 6, Rue Jourdan, Avenue Louise, are very comfortable, but I cannot speak of them from personal experience. One of the most interesting things in Brussels is the Grande Place, which is surrounded by very fine mediæval houses; indeed the Place is said to be one of the finest mediæval squares in existence. In one of the houses, the Maison du Roi, Counts Egmont and Hoorn spent the night previous to their execution, and it is said that a scaffolding was erected from a balcony of the house, in order that they might pass direct to the block, and so avoid the possibility of a rescue by the populace. The house is now used as a public museum, and is well worth a visit. Besides Egmont and Hoorn, twenty-five nobles were beheaded in the Place in 1568, by order of the Duke of Alva, so that it has been the scene of many tragedies. The Hotel de Ville, which is on the opposite side of the Place to the Maison du Roi, is certainly the most interesting buildings in Brussels. Externally it is very handsome, and internally it is a perfect dream of beauty, needing a far abler pen than mine to describe it adequately. The tapestry, the gilding, the painted ceilings, the pictures and the frescoes, all combine to make it quite ideal. The remembrance of a visit to this lovely building is one to store away in the recesses of one's memory, to be brought out and enjoyed over and over again in quiet moments.

We were fortunate in being at Brussels on the 21st of July, which day is the anniversary of the Revolution. The King and Queen, and other Royal personages, went in State to the Cathedral, where a solemn Te Deum was sung, and the procession of five or six royal carriages, preceded by an escort, was quite an imposing one. In the evening, there was a procession of troops by torchlight. The Cathedral is Gothic, with a very fine west front. It contains some wonderful stained glass, the most beautiful being in the Chapel of the Sacrament. The arches of the Choir are at high festivals hung with tapestry which is beautifully preserved and very valuable.

There is a very interesting column called the Colonne du Congrès, which has been erected in the Place du Congrès, in commemoration of the Congress, held on June 4th, 1831, when the present constitution was established, and Prince Leopold of Saxe Coburg, was elected king. A statue of the king, in bronze, surmounts the column. At the four corners are female figures in bronze, emblematical of the Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Education, Freedom of Association, and Freedom of Public Worship. The Palais de Justice is a very handsome building, but quite modern, having been inaugurated as recently as 1883 to commemorate the jubilee of Belgium's existence as a separate kingdom. It covers an area

considerably larger than that of S. Peter's at Rome. Not far from the Palais de Justice is the Monument to Counts Egmont and Hoorn, and very beautiful it is. They are represented on their way to execution. The figures of the two Counts are in bronze, and in a half circle, round the monument, are marble statues of ten of their contemporaries. The Palais des Beaux Arts is well worth a visit, containing, as it does, beautiful pictures and sculptures. Some of the latter are very lovely. There are some beautiful paintings by Rubens amongst the pictures, but one cannot help wishing that as Rubens used his wives so often as his models he had been critical in selecting them; more especially is this the case with number two. One cannot either imagine that a woman of the type which appears over and over again in his pictures could ever have been a comrade to an artist so glorious as Rubens; but perhaps his art satisfied him, and he wanted his wives as housekeepers.

The museum which interested me most in Brussels was the Musée Wiertz, a wonderful collection of paintings, which it is fully worth making a journey to Brussels in order to see. Wiertz is a man who fell upon evil days in this nineteenth century, when the greed of gold has paralysed all that is worthiest in the nations, when we estimate a man's value by his balance at his bankers, and when the motto of the age would seem to be "Make money, honestly if you can, but make money." Wiertz, on the contrary, held that "when the learning and influence of Athens were at their greatest height, her sage took no payments and the schools were free; from the time that Isocrates accepted money from each pupil and all the philosophers followed his example, the glory of Athens began to wane. Art is like Athens; worldly prudence in her teachers means spiritual decay in her empire. Wiertz, convinced of this truth, consecrated himself to its dominion with an absolute self-devotion in which his generation saw little except insanity. . . . In the mediæval days Wiertz would have been revered, adored, followed whether to the Calvary or to the Golgotha of Art. In the nineteenth century he stood absolutely alone, and all men held aloof from him; with its aims he had no sympathy, with its temper no affinity; it is full of the 'infinitely little'; of impersonal desires it has no conception, its one measuring rod is gold, and all its productions are dwarfed to the popular standard; into such an age Wiertz came: a Titan amidst poor humanity. Of a necessity the Titan was everlastingly assailed, of a necessity everlastingly alone. They say that when he lay lifeless the peace refused to him throughout his arduous life, came over him at last, and that when the summer sunrise streamed through the ivy shadows of his casement in the glory of the morning, his face was like the face of his Christ—his Christ who broke asunder the bonds of the grave and rose triumphant in the power of God."

The key note of Wiertz' life is embodied in his reply to a connoisseur, who offered him a large sum for one of his pictures. "Keep your gold, it is the murderer of art." The nineteenth century could not forgive the man who might have lived in luxury by his art, but who preferred to live in abject poverty for his art. He could not make up his mind to let any picture go out into the world where he could not retouch it if he should wish, so he painted a few portraits now and then as pot boilers, but kept all his great pictures in the museum, where they at present hang, and which was built for him by the government on the condition

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