

## LETTER XLIII.

## THROUGH HOLLAND AND BELGIUM.

WHAT a battle-field is all the Valley of the Rhine! Each city is a perfect fortress. Aside from the wonderful walls of Strasburg, the approaches to the city for miles are defended by a series of fortifications. Mayence, Cologne, and other important places, are more really walled cities than any we saw in China; for the walls in these cases are made to withstand the most vigorous artillery attacks. Life in this valley would seem to be no more secure than in many cities of the Orient. Nor have France and Prussia been the only combatants, for the ruins of old castles, which one sees in nearly every landscape, tell of dangers and battles for many centuries. Moreover, this ground promises to be equally historic in the future. Prussia, so long humbled by France, has reason to fear that her late victories are temporary. Her old foe will seek to reconquer the cities so lately wrested from her, and to repeat, if possible, Prussia's humiliation. There is eternal enmity between the two nations. King William's soldiers are massed in this disputed territory, while an explanation is demanded about every suspicious military movement of her old enemy. The time of the conflict may be remote, but each nation confidently expects it, and here will be the battle-field.

Prussia's most formidable fortress is situated on

the banks of the Rhine. It is called her Gibraltar. It is known as Ehrenbreitstein, and overlooks Coblenz, the emperor's summer residence. The immense forts are large enough to hold one hundred thousand men, and yet so strong as to be successfully defended by five thousand.

France has made Prussia the greatest military power in the world. Requiring her to have a standing army of only a few hundred thousand men, Prussia accepted the terms dictated by her conqueror, but by requiring military service of all her citizens, and thus from time to time having them all in the army, she has become a nation of soldiers. We saw them drilling in nearly every city, as if Europe were now in a state of war. Evidently her policy is to be ready for war at any moment. Her military system is certainly most costly, but saves her from the hardly greater expense of a long conflict. The fate of France was sealed in the late war in less time than it took Russia to get her first troops into Turkish dominions. The battles between the Russians and the Turks are now all fought in Berlin before the first gun is fired. The military opinion of leading German officers is telegraphed over Europe like the news of an actual battle.

The Rhine has the water and current of the Missouri, but the banks of the Hudson. The current is so swift as to run flour-mills anchored out in the river like flat-bottom boats. They are run on the principle of the under-shot wheel. Draw-bridges are opened and shut by the force of the current, and by a peculiar device ferry-boats are made to cross to either side of the river, from no other force than that of the running water. The principle in either case is the same. Each is provided with a simple steering apparatus, which, once being fixed, the current does not disturb. The boat, for exam-



ple, is anchored in the middle of the river, but by a cable so long that it can reach either bank at some distance below. Its prow is then turned in the direction you wish it to go, and the current takes it across.

The steam-boat which took us down the Rhine from Mayence to Cologne was very like the better class on our American rivers. The passenger-list was very large, and while aft you would imagine yourself on the Hudson, the German passengers being nearly all at the bow. We ran the entire length of the interesting scenery of the river, and over much of this distance the country was level and wanting in beauty. Along about Bingen, and until after we passed the Seven Mountains, the banks were often bold and beautiful, but the Rhine is not so attractive as the Hudson, either in the clearness of the water or the scenery along its banks. It lacks the palisades and the handsome villages of the Hudson, but it possesses the picturesque ruins of old castles. If the Hudson only had these historic remains it would be perhaps the most charming river in the world. It is these, in my opinion, which, more than any thing else, have given the Rhine its reputation for beauty. There are the Castles of the Two Brothers who fought each other to the bitter death; the Castle of the Cat watching the tiny Castle of the Mouse; and there are dismantled castles and castles restored. In fact, the whole river for many miles bristles with them, and they are its charm.

Cologne is one of the largest cities of the German Empire. Its public buildings are as creditable as the streets in the older part of the city are crooked and odorous. The drainage seems quite imperfect, and many of the numerous smells detected by Coleridge still linger in the air. One is reminded of his witty verse:

Ye nymphs who reign o'er sewers and sinks,  
The River Rhine, it is well known,  
Doth wash your city of Cologne;  
But tell me, nymphs, what power divine  
Shall henceforth wash the River Rhine?

The famous cathedral is still unfinished. More than six centuries in building, the different ages of its various parts are manifest in the appearance of the stone. What has been done is largely owing to royal bounty, and it would still require the contents of an imperial treasury to finish it. It strongly resembles the cathedral of Milan. One church in Cologne which I saw contains the bones of some eleven thousand virgins who were slain here with St. Ursula, while returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, according to the tradition. At any rate, these bones are placed pell-mell in glass cases which are arranged about the interior of the church. They are in full sight of the congregation, and are supposed to give great sanctity to the edifice. It was gratifying in such a city to attend service at a large Protestant Church, where the minister preached to a considerable congregation, whose singing, although like the sermon, in an unknown tongue, was with unction and power. In Germany, where the battle of the Reformation was fought, the victory was only half won, and appears to have been fully as much political as religious. Such German cities, at least, as we have visited seem hardly more Protestant than some in Italy. What we saw of the people confirmed our ideas of their thrift and industry and social habits, with which we are so familiar in America. Unhappily, I do not need to describe a German Sabbath.

From Cologne we went by rail to Amsterdam. This part of Germany, like most of the other parts that we traveled through, is quite level and apparently fertile. Such, we learned, is the character of



the country also between the Rhine and Berlin. Of course we found Holland flat as we entered it, and we soon had glimpses of her wonderful system of canals. We saw two great tracts of sand, perfectly sterile, with here and there a shrub struggling for an existence. These districts are, of course, uncultivated. The Hollander seems to shun them as hopeless, or at least as less remunerative than the bottom of the sea, after he has diked it and pumped out the water. Along the canals are many signs of prosperity. Every cottage, aside from the beauty of its own neatness and cleanliness, has a display of flowers in its yard. I doubt not that a close inspection would have discovered many of the tulips for which Holland is so famous, and which were once speculated in by her citizens as wildly as corner-lots in Chicago or mining stocks in San Francisco.

The Hollander's ruling passion is sand and soap. Whether the fair complexion of the women is due to the same cause I cannot say, but such clean doorsteps and white windows and doors one cannot find anywhere else in the world. Even younger women wear white caps, which give them a most attractive appearance. I expected to find many very fat men, with pipes, but almost the only stout people that I saw were elderly women, and I cannot recall a single smoker. Perchance the *retired* Hollander is the traditional one, but such as we saw were brisk and energetic, and with not so much flesh as to interfere with business. The fattest things that we saw were strawberries, regular burgomasters that had lived on the fat of the land. They almost had to be eaten with a knife and fork. A hungry man might cut them in two with a spoon, but even he would hesitate to put a whole one in his mouth at once.

Amsterdam, like the other Dutch cities that we visited, is most substantially built. Its houses are of brick, and are usually quite tall, and with pointed

roofs. Here we saw for the first time small mirrors in metallic frames, so arranged on the outside of the dwelling-houses as to inform the ladies what is going on in the streets. Sometimes there was such a combination of them that a lady, at her sewing or conversation, could see every thing on the streets below without changing position in her chair. Such are the luxuries of wealth in Holland! In fact, we saw no costly, elegant houses, but we judged of the good circumstances of a family by the number of mirrors. Even as with us, the poor sometimes imitate the rich. The Flemish ladies, too, we found, had adopted this custom, and it is not unknown even in London and New York, especially in the fashionable streets.

Amsterdam is a city of canals, which divide it into some ninety islands, connected by means of nearly three hundred bridges. The houses are all constructed on foundations of piles, just as in Venice. The water of the canals is quite uninviting, and only the introduction of pure water from the Zuyder Zee keeps it from becoming stagnant and foul. Water, which is Holland's greatest enemy, and requires constant watching, is depended on as her best ally in time of war, as the whole country can be instantly inundated, and thus check the progress of any foreign army. It is on the water that she has won her famous victories, and acquired her immense wealth. We saw some old warehouses which were in use when the Dutch established commercial relations with Japan, and alone, of all Europe, knew any thing of "the land of the rising sun." Even now on these canals float ships from the most distant parts of the world. A nation denied almost an existence on the land, Holland founded her colonies in Japan and Java, bought Manhattan Island, and projected what is already the third city in the world; and though still smallest among the nations, she is



one of the greatest commercial powers ever known. Her capital is located on a dam at the mouth of the Amstel, which gives the city its name, Amsterdam. Thus, no less at home than abroad, she rules the waves. The mouths of the canals and the river are closed with immense gates, which may still be opened whenever resort must be had to the dire remedy of flooding the country.

While we were most interested in this indomitable *people*, and in their harbors and massive piers, in their canal-boats and fishing-smacks, and their thrifty owners who lived upon them and *poled* them through the city, we found time to see something of Amsterdam's most famous home industry—*diamond polishing*. Having long dispensed with the services of a guide in Europe (as we would advise others to do), we consulted our invaluable *Baedicker* and found the location of a large diamond-polishing establishment on a certain *gracht*, or canal. On reaching the building its great size confused us. Here was an establishment large enough for a manufactory of agricultural implements; and could *diamonds* be in such numbers as to require even one such building, while this was only one of several in the city? Backshish, so powerful in all the rest of the world, opened this door for us in Holland. We found the whole run by steam, and the diamonds polished by being held on revolving disks of iron on which was placed a slight mixture of oil and diamond-dust. Sometimes a large stone is cut by means of a wire covered with diamond-dust, but usually the diamond is fastened by some sort of composition in the end of a small piece of iron not larger than an ordinary lead pencil, and this is held to its place on the disk. Sometimes a skilled workman had several in his possession, and his trained eye knew just when each face was sufficiently polished. It is mostly Portuguese Jews who have

established this great industry, and they employ a considerable number of men, commanding as they do the confidence of the leading jewelers of the world. It was in one of these establishments that the famous Kohinoor, Queen Victoria's diamond, was polished. The system of restraint thrown around the workmen renders losses or thefts almost impossible. I should think that more than a hundred men were employed in the building that we visited.

Our route from Amsterdam to the Hague and Rotterdam led through what, up to 1840, was a vast inland lake. It required some six millions of dollars and about thirteen years to drain it. Great as was the cost, the land sold for less than one hundred dollars an acre, and is now worth nearly four hundred dollars. Large engines were used for pumping out the water, and the numerous windmills of the country are still employed to remove any surplus water. This vast "polder," or drained bed, is evidently very fertile. It is one great field divided into smaller districts by means of numerous canals. These latter serve as fences as well as help to drain the land. Foot-bridges connect the different fields, but the opening of the draw in each prevents cattle from straying into wrong pastures. We heard of plans on foot for recovering from the sea yet vaster districts than this, once covered by the Haarlem Meer. The enterprising Hollander can almost regulate the seasons, allowing the moisture to remain so long as it facilitates the growth of his barley or oats, and then pumping it away whenever his crops require a dry season. Still the land is most favorable for cattle. Much of England's choicest beef is fattened in those fine pastures which lie below the level of the sea. Yonder dunes, or sand-hills, to the right, mark the bounds where the ocean beats and roars but cannot cross.



Amsterdam is the capital, and here we visited one of the royal palaces, but the king lives mostly at the Hague, or the Hedge, which formerly marked the favorite residence of the courts of Holland. It is a considerable city of nearly a hundred thousand souls, and being the residence of the court, has fine buildings and streets, and is the art-center of Holland. Here we found some of Rembrandt's best paintings in his peculiar style of art, where the picture is self-illuminated, with others of Van Dyck and Holbein; but, most famous, Paul Potter's "Young Bull," which is regarded as one of the first half dozen pictures of the world. It is so life-like that a nervous lady would be pardoned if her first impulse on seeing it was to run! Here, too, we saw the finest collection of Chinese and Japanese curiosities to be found anywhere. We saw nothing like them for completeness even in China and Japan. The peculiar facilities of a nation with colonists in remote regions have thus been faithfully utilized. Only England and Holland could gather such collections. Many of the articles were no doubt brought here centuries ago.

In the Queen's Palace, or "the House in the Woods," we found rooms entirely fitted up with Chinese and Japanese furniture, brought over when these articles were a world's wonder. Every thing was most elegant; but more wonderful than any thing else about the palace were DeWitt's paintings in relief, so perfect that we were slow to believe that they were not sculpture. The interior of the palace is as elegant as the exterior is simple and unimposing. Here lived and died the Queen of the Netherlands, who was as much an object of pride among her people for her gentleness and culture as her surviving lord is of pity and contempt for his ignorance and coarseness. The park which surrounds the palace embraces a considerable area, and

is filled with stately trees, most of them, no doubt, in their original condition when all this was a forest. The drives through this park are among the finest in the world.

In Rotterdam we visited one of the windmills for which Holland is so famous. It was a residence and flour-mill all in one. The wife presided in the office on the ground-floor. The family apartments were in the second story, and were as neat as a Dutch housewife always keeps them, while in the several stories above were the millstones and the wheat-bins. We ventured out on the roof, keeping at a safe distance from the long arms of the windmill, which threatened to demolish us at each revolution. Rotterdam gives one a fine idea of old Holland, as there have been but few modern improvements made. The principal street of the city runs along the top of a dike built to protect a large part of the place from inundation. The town is intersected by numerous canals crossed by draw-bridges. Large vessels can come up these canals to the very heart of the city and discharge their cargoes brought from the remote regions of the earth. A view from the steeple of the Church of St. Lawrence revealed a panorama of canals, windmills, and masts, as far as the eye could reach; and from some of the steeples one can see almost the whole of Holland. There is nothing but sand-dunes and occasional avenues of trees to break the level of the fields and water.

We were well impressed with the Dutch. The nation which produced a William of Orange and an Erasmus has still a race of industrious, enterprising citizens, for the most part staunch Protestants. Her vast commerce has brought her in large wealth. With becoming charity she cares well for her seamen. It was pleasant to find the English language spoken by nearly every one with whom



we had occasion to speak. It may be pleasing to American pride to know that our manufactures may always be found in Dutch stores. In fact, being compelled to buy a trunk, I was unable to get any other than one made in America, being assured by the merchants that they could purchase more reasonably of us than in England.

Entering Belgium from Holland, and observing the marked differences between the two people, one does not marvel that the union of the two countries into one kingdom was so short-lived. Together they made a respectable nation in size, but there was no sympathy between the two. The Belgians, especially the dwellers in the cities, are essentially French, alike in their language and instincts. The agricultural population speak the Flemish, which is closely allied to the Dutch. Antwerp and Brussels are really French cities, second and smaller editions of Paris. Both cities have fine boulevards and parks, while the stores and residences are on a palatial scale, strongly contrasting with the simpler style of Holland. The dress of the people is Parisian, and their religion is Catholic. The clergy receive their stipends from the State. With so many points of dissimilarity it is not strange that the unnatural union lasted less than a score of years.

We found at Antwerp the masterpieces of her two famous artists, Rubens and Van Dyck. We lingered in admiration over the former's two great works in the cathedral—"the Elevation of the Cross," and "the Descent from the Cross." These, and other paintings which we saw in the museum, are *winged*—that is, have a companion-piece on each side connected with the central picture. The art-collection here is quite rich in the works of the Antwerp school, not least distinguished of which was the former blacksmith, Quentin Matsys. It was to be expected that we should find here a *Dutch*

Madonna, as we had found *Italian* features in Rome, and saw that a *Spanish* face was Murillo's ideal. The cathedral, a large and beautiful Gothic edifice, is an elegant home for some of the finest productions of the brush and of the wood-carver's art. The confessionals and the pulpit are marvels of skill. Quite near the cathedral we found the famous well-cover of Antwerp's blacksmith-artist, an exquisite piece of work, which tradition says he made entirely with the rude implements of his smithy.

Taking a carriage for a drive about this old Dutch town, so fast becoming French, we could not understand for a time why the numerous ships at the wharf should be so gayly decorated with bunting. Could it be some religious festival that called out such enthusiasm, even from the sailors? What was the saint's day? Corpus Christi was past—they were celebrating that when we were in Naples. What was the day of the month? Why should the *stars and stripes* be floating at so many mast-heads? It was the *Fourth of July*. I doffed my hat at the memory of my country's birthday, and sat a trifle more erect at its recognition in a foreign land.

If Antwerp was a gay city, what shall I say of Brussels? Only this, that it was as much more like Paris as it is geographically nearer. Here are made the delicate laces which adorn the fashionable world. Would the ladies know how they are made? Come with us about sunset, as we visit one of the largest establishments in Brussels. The silk or linen thread on these spools is the very finest that is spun. This display in the salesroom is worth hundreds of thousands. Who made these elegant shawls and wonderful collars and handkerchiefs? Look at the long row of pale, bowed, toiling women, and listen at the pick, pick of the needle or the noise of the bobbin.



They have been at work since sunrise, and they must labor *twelve hours a day*. What though their eyes grow weak and their fingers ache? there are children at home whose bread must come from the meager wages of a whole day's toil. The contribution-box is more tempting to me than the laces, and I remember our Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." About one hundred and thirty thousand women are employed in this way in Belgium, and they make ten million dollars' worth of laces each year.

It was in this gay capital where brave men were called from the dance to the battle. Who can visit Brussels and not see Waterloo? For us the chief object of interest was this battle-field of Europe. In the early morning a large four-in-hand drives around to the leading hotels, so that all guests interested may, for a fixed fee, not including backshish for guide and driver, visit the scene of Napoleon's defeat. A bugler discourses music until we reach the fine boulevard that leads from the city, when with a last grand flourish he leaves us. There is not a *Frenchman* in our party. Our guide whom we took on at Waterloo—a dry wit, dressed in a peasant's blouse—said it was a great pity that Napoleon was not killed on the battle-field, as Frenchmen would then come to see where he died, while as it is none ever come. The only ones that ever visited it, so far as is known, were French soldiers on their way to Antwerp, in 1832, who stopped long enough to hack off part of the tail of the monumental lion, and who would have blown it up had they not been prevented.

Followed by peasant boys and girls, turning somersaults in hope of coppers, we at length reached the town of Waterloo. We stopped in front of the house where Wellington spent the night and wrote his dispatches after the battle. Why should it be

called the battle of Waterloo, when the fight took place four miles distant, and much nearer the village of Mont St. Jean? Let those who have never done so read Victor Hugo's description of this "hinge of the nineteenth century." No one will attempt to describe it after reading his graphic sketch. No doubt, as he says, the field has been greatly changed by the triumphal mound, some two hundred feet in height, made of earth filled with human bones buried where mowed down by shot and shell; yet the general outline of the battle-field is the same, and what most impresses you is that in so small a space one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers could be maneuvered. But so it is; the whole extent of the field is within easy sight. The farm of Hougomont, which both Wellington and Napoleon regarded as the key of the situation; the heights of Belle Alliance, where the French troops were stationed, with the Allies only a mile distant; the long undulating hills, with the slight valley between; such is the simple outline which one sees, where "the light and shade of Europe changed places because a cow-boy said to a Prussian in a wood, 'Pass this way, and not that.'" Years before the keen eye of Wellington had selected this as a possible battle-field, and he knew every ravine and every foot-path and thicket. Here he took up his position with confidence. It was less a brilliant victory than a hard-won battle in which prudence and sagacity fought against venture and daring. The battle-field has been the study of successful military men ever since. "Your General Sheridan was here," said our guide. "He is a little man, just like me. I was his guide, but I could not tell him any thing about the field. He knew it all better than I did, and I have been over it a thousand times, and he was never here before!"

Belgium, the battle-field of Europe, is still not certain of peace, and her fortifications are among



the finest of the Continent. But her railroad system is yet more wonderful. The lines are more numerous, and the rates are cheaper, than in any other part of the world. They are largely owned and controlled by the States. The triumphs of peace may be thus greater than those of war.

## LETTER XLIV.

## PARIS AND LONDON.

A WEEK spent in Paris and eleven days in London do not seem enough time to give to the two largest cities of the world. In one view the time is very short, and yet in a few days of systematic sight-seeing a visitor may learn more of a city than is known to a resident of many years, who has never made it his business to study it. We came simply to see, and while we dare not say, "We came, we saw, we conquered," we can say that we employed all our time in seeking, by observation and inquiry, the most reliable information. These cities are already so well known that I shall simply consider their points of likeness and contrast.

Each city is a world in itself. London contains more people than the whole of Scotland. Count the population of London at four millions and Paris at two millions (which the census in each case will justify), and there are no other cities in the world that can compare with them. Formerly Peking and Yeddo were ranked as the most populous cities, but, through change of circumstances or on closer inspection, they have shriveled into moderate cities of not over a million each, and even these figures are possibly an overestimate. The three greatest cities of the world are doubtless London, Paris, and New York, including Brooklyn. The problem of supporting dense masses within a small area is best solved by Chris-