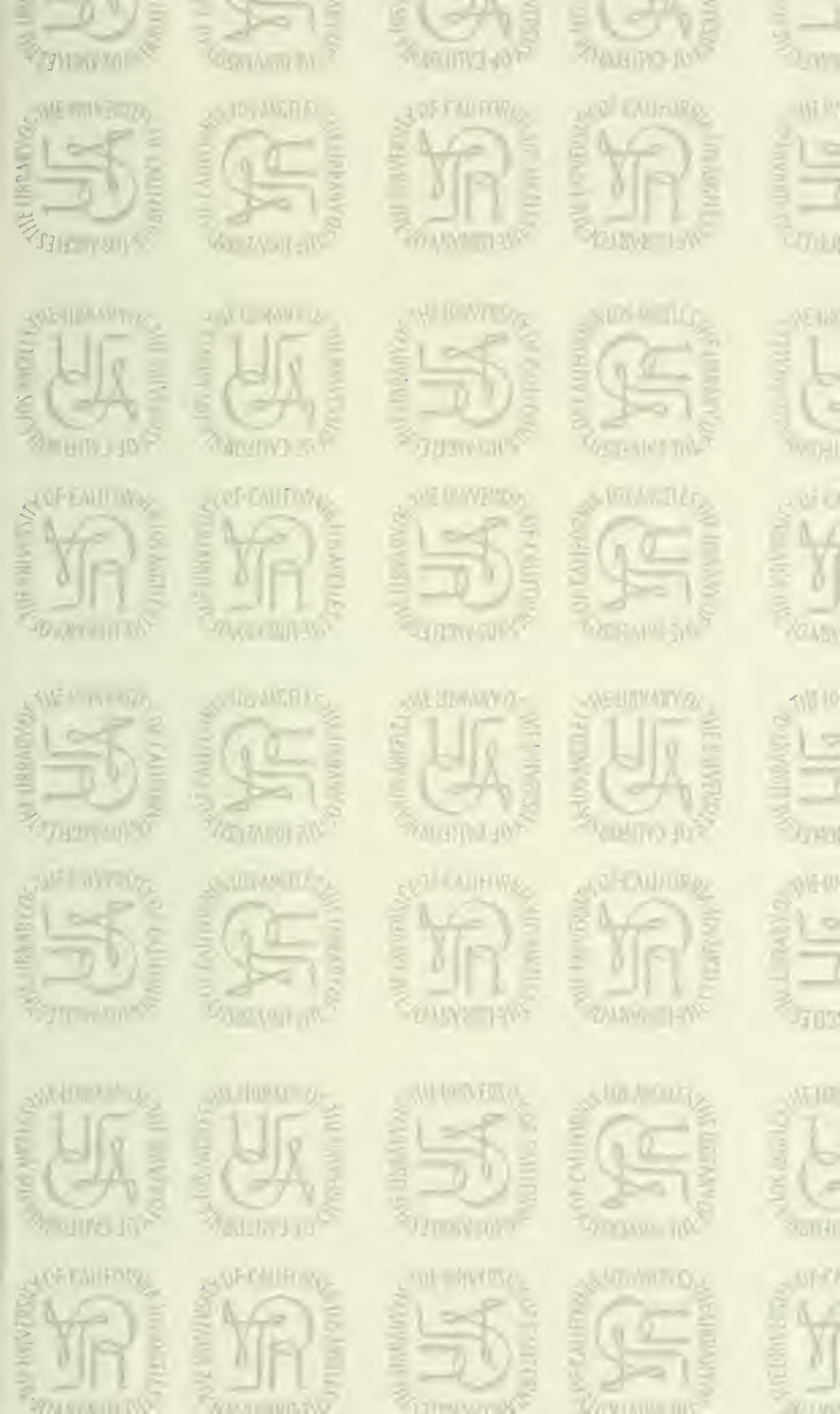

FLEMISH LITERATURE

LONDON
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A SKETCH

OF

THE HISTORY

OF

FLEMISH LITERATURE

AND

ITS CELEBRATED AUTHORS

FROM THE TWELFTH CENTURY DOWN TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY OCTAVE DELEPIERRE, LL.D.

Compiled from Flemish Sources

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FLEMISH LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE LANGUAGE. — FIRST USE IN OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS. — TRADITIONS, SONGS, BALLADS, ROMANCES, EPICS.

BEFORE we give a sketch of Flemish Literature, we deem it necessary to say a few words on the Dialect itself, of which little is clearly known. Flemish is not the obscure remains of an extinct idiom, like the *Basque* and *Bas Breton* languages; it is not either a dialect of the widely spread Germanic tongue. It forms a part of the two principal branches of this last idiom, made use of along the coasts of the Northern and Baltic Seas, from Dunkirk to Königsberg, and from Flensbourg in Denmark to the Hartz Mountains.

It is called *Low Dutch* (Niederdeutsch) because it was and is spoken in the Low Countries and in Low Germany; while the other branch of the same

mother tongue which extends over the higher and mountainous parts of those countries, in Switzerland, Austria, Saxony, &c., is called *High Dutch* (Hochdeutsch).

This is not only proved by the study of the general history of the literature of Europe, but by the fact that the people in the North as well as in the South had formerly only one word to express their idiom, *Dietsch* or *Deutsch*. The word *Flemisch* (Vlaemsch) is posterior to the sixteenth century; and the word *Hollandsch*, made use of to express the name of the language spoken in *Holland*, is altogether of modern origin. Till the end of the seventeenth century, the idiom spoken in Holland as well as in Belgium was called *Flemish*. The English have still only one word, *Dutch*, for the language spoken in Holland as well as in Flanders.

It is rather a curious fact that a country which has produced in modern times a very popular novel-writer*, and poets known all over Germany† in olden times, a far-famed satirical poem‡, mediæval

* Conscience, whose works have been translated into English, German, French, and Danish, and form part of the English and French railway-library books.

† Van Duyse, Snellaert, Willems, &c.

‡ *Renard the Fox*, of which the scene is principally laid in Flanders, the oldest manuscript known written in Low Dutch, and ascertained by the latest philological discussions to belong to Belgium.

romances*, fables, proverbs, and emblems in verse†, historical rhymed chronicles‡, and so forth, should not occupy even the smallest place in the vast range of English sketches of the various literatures of Europe. Hallam, in his introduction to *The Literature of Europe*, has in a great measure overlooked Dutch authors, quoting only a few names of European celebrity, of comparatively recent times, and he has altogether omitted Flemish writers and their works.

The well-merited fame of his book, and its great authority, suggested to us the idea of making up in some degree for this omission, and of giving to the English public a sketch of these neglected authors.

It is true that the extent of country where the Low Dutch or Flemish is spoken is comparatively small, and that it cannot compete with the riches of the three great modern languages, English, German, and French, which surround it on all sides; but this does not justify to studious minds the utter indifference manifested towards the acquisition of some knowledge of its ancient literature. Other

* *Floris and Blanchefloer*, the Knight of the Swan, &c.

† Jacob Cats, whose emblems and proverbs have lately been presented to the public in an English dress by Messrs. Longman & Co.

‡ Van Maerlant, Van Helu, &c.

northern tongues are labouring under the same difficulties, and daily losing ground before the German, or *Hochdeutsch;* but the study of their literature, however circumscribed, is not therefore utterly abandoned by foreigners. In Denmark and Sweden the national writers are constantly opposing the invasion of German books. One of the most celebrated Danish authors, the poet Œhlenschläger, has himself translated his best works into German, and it is only then that he acquired a European reputation and fame. "*When I write in Danish*," says he, with a sad heart, in the introduction to one of his books, "I write only for six hundred persons."

But this is no reason why the literature of an ancient language should be ignored, or its treasures remain uninvestigated. We hope, therefore, that the short sketch which we here present to the public will not be without interest to English readers; and we shall be glad if they consider the time as not altogether lost which gives them some little insight into the works of the principal ancient Flemish authors. May we help to insure for these in England a small share of that renown which they formerly obtained abroad, and which we think they would not fail to acquire in England, were they better known and more prominently brought forward.

Dr. Bosworth *, in speaking of the division into Low and High German, says the former is more soft and flowing than the latter. It changes the High German *sch* into *s*, the harsh *sz* into *t*, and delights more in simple vowels. The High German dialect, on the contrary, is distinguished by its predilection for diphthongs, and rough, hard, and aspirated consonants, especially by the harsh pronunciation of *sch*, *st*, *sz*, &c.

The coexistence of the Low Dutch and of the High Dutch, or what we call German, is historically proved since the eighth century. The form in which the Pagans renounced their old creed and became Christians, a form prescribed in the Council of Liptines (742), is so like the dialect of the Netherlands that it hardly requires the alteration of a few letters to make it perfectly intelligible to the Flemings.†

It is perhaps well to state here, once for all, with Dr. Bosworth, that when we speak of Flemish we designate the language called in general *Dutch*, by

* The Origin of the English, Germanic, and Scandinavian Languages and Nations, &c., p. 13.

† *Forsachistu Diabolæ?—Ec forsacho Diabolæ.— End allum diabol-gelde? —End allum Diabol werkum? — Gelobistu in God Almechigen Fadær?*

This is the Low Dutch :—*Versacks u den Duvel? — Ik versake den Duvel.— End allen Duvels-gilden ?—End alle Duvels Werken? — Geloft u in God Almachtigen Vader ?*

the English. Flemish and Dutch, especially in their earliest form, may be considered the very same language. In the thirteenth century — because of the flourishing state of the Flemings, and the care of their writers to observe great purity in their diction, and to express correctly the gender and inflection of words — this improved form of the Dutch language was denominated *Flemish*. Even at the present day it is nothing more than the Dutch of the preceding century. The same similarity is shown in many other works of the ninth and tenth centuries, which we will pass over, not to give too much space to philological discussions, and hasten to say a few preliminary words on the origin of the people whose national tongue was the Flemish or Niederdeutsch.

In the first ages of the Christian era, we find in the east and north of the Low Countries, inhabitants of Saxon and Friesland extraction. The Franks showed themselves to the north-east; these were Low Germans, like the former, but for political purposes they amalgamated the allied High German with their own language, giving their own name to this foreign dialect. These three nations, the Saxon, Friesland, and Frank, having each furnished its contingent to the formation of the Flemish or Netherlandish nation, their respective tongues co-operated in the formation of that idiom.

At the time of the downfall of the Roman Empire, it was assailed on all sides by German nations. Goths, Burgundians, Alemanni, Franks, and others, attacked it from the Continent; Saxons, Frieslanders, and Normans by sea, and when the fatal hour had at last struck for the tyrants of the world, those who had possessed themselves of their spoils turned their arms against each other. The Franks, aspiring to universal dominion, remained everywhere the masters, and under the sceptre of Charlemagne there arose a new Empire of the West, of much greater extent than that over which the eagle of the Cæsars had floated.

These nations embraced the Christian religion at different epochs, and under divers influences. The conquerors, and, in the first rank, the Goths, rallied at an early period round the new civilisation, whilst it was only under Charlemagne that the Saxons and Frieslanders suffered any other worship than that of their ancestors to be imposed upon them; even long after the death of this monarch, Christianity had in Flanders but a precarious existence. No literary monument of those times has descended to us, and without the Scandinavian books of theogony, without the Edda, we should have very little acquaintance with the religious dogmas of the Flemings or Nederlanders.

In the fifth century, Ulphilas, a bishop of the Mœ-

so-Goths, translated the Bible; some fragments of it have come down to us. They exhibit the Gothic as a dialect composed of High and Low German. From the seventh to the eighth century, a Frankish translation of a work on the nativity of Christ, by the Spanish bishop, Isidore, has been collected, as well as a translation of the rules of St. Benedict in Alemannic, a dialect of High German still harsher than the Frank. None of these works are written in an idiom that can be said to have been spoken by the people of the Low Countries, although it is true that the Gothic possesses many of the forms essentially belonging to the Flemish. But history and literary monuments disclose to us a dialect, the traces of which, after a lapse of ten centuries, have continued stamped upon two languages, spoken by nations removed from each other, and which demonstrates that in earlier times the British Isles and the Low Countries were united by closer ties than those of commerce. In fact, the Pagan ancestors of the Flemings received their missionaries from the Anglo-Saxons. Either these pious men issued from the nation itself, or were Gauls or others who went first to England to learn the language which they were afterwards to employ in the Low Countries. This fact is a sufficient indication that the inhabitants of the whole of the lower coast of the North Sea, Saxons, Frieslanders, and Anglo-

Saxons participated in one common mode of life, and that the preachers from beyond the sea saw in the Nederlanders members of one same family, only separated by ancient national creeds.

At the time of the dominion of the Franks, these relations diminished under the influence of the semi-Roman civilisation of the governing people.

The most ancient literary relic that the Flemish language has a right to claim, is a fragment of a translation, in prose, of the Psalms, written during the dynasty of Charlemagne. Others could be mentioned, but only, it must be admitted, as reflecting back the normal form of the language, and the prosody of the Low German, in those remote times. Such are the Oath of Fidelity taken by the Saxons to the conqueror *Witikind;* the poem of *Heliand*, which is in alliterative lines; a *Harmony of the Gospels;* the *Lay of Hildebrand.* The curious may read fragments of many of these ancient authors in the first volume of Wackernagel's *Deutsches Lesebuch.*

The struggle between Paganism and Christianity was prolonged in the country along the North Sea until the eleventh century, when a new social movement occurred to change the face of the West.

The Crusades, in establishing intimate relations among all Christian countries, modified by this contact the form of their languages. It is in this

age that the Flemish language quitted its embryo state, in order to attain shortly after a great development, giving an unquestionable proof of the high degree of civilisation and wealth enjoyed at this period by the people of the Low Countries.

From the beginning of the thirteenth century public deeds began to be drawn up in the national language. We will quote a few lines from one of them, in order to give the proof of a most extraordinary fact in the history of modern languages: we mean to say, that after a lapse of more than six hundred years, the very same words and grammatical construction are those made use of by the Flemings of to-day, and are perfectly intelligible to the people of the Low Countries, where Flemish is spoken.

We quote from a charter of Brussels, A.D. 1299, from the *Book of Privileges* of that town, and which is printed in a literary collection of the learned J. F. Willems.*

"Ic Heinric, bi der gratien Goeds, Hertoghe van Brabant, ende ic Heinric syn oudste sone, wi doen u kennen die gescrifte allen den genen die un syn, ende die nacomende syn, dat wi overmids vroeden rade onser mannen en der Sceprenen, en der gesworne van Bruesele desen coren (keuren) hebben

* Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche tael en letterkunde, &c. Antwerp, 2 vols. 8vo. 1819—1824.

geset binnen Bruesele bi brouwen en de bi eede onser manne ende gemeinlee den Poerteren van Bruesele desen core (keuren) te houden om gemeine orbore ende vordane meer in deser manieren."

Literal English.

"I, Henry, by the grace of God, Duke of Brabant, and I, Henry, his eldest son, we make this writing known to all those who now are, and who are to come, that we, in consequence of the wise counsel of our men, and of the Sheriffs, and of the sworn of Brussels, these statutes have established in Brussels, through the fidelity and oath of our men, and also the citizens (burghers) of Brussels, these statutes are to keep for general convenience—and for the future, more in this wise."

It is also in the same century that Van Maerlant, Willem van Utenhove, and many others less known, gave a brilliant impulse to the language through their poetical writings. But before we enter into some details on the works of these two leaders of Flemish literature, let us say a few words on two poems belonging by their subject to the cycle of Charlemagne, although the time of their composition is not quite ascertained. They are called *Charles and Elegast*, and *Floris and Blanchefloer*. The first is an original composition, the second a free imitation.

The narrative of *Charles and Elegast* is as follows. One night an angel appeared to Charlemagne, ordering him to rise and become a highway robber. The monarch, at first astonished, believes it to be a dream, and pays no attention to the injunction. But the angel repeats the order, and Charles is forced to recognise the finger of God. He obeys. On his road he meets a knight clad in black armour, and mounted on a charger, also black. It is *Elegast*, proscribed by the king on account of his irresistible propensity to the profession of a robber, a pastime much in favour at that time with many of the nobility.

They both ride on in company, and Charles is not long before he ascertains that this man, hunted down like a wild beast, is more attached to his suzerain than are many of his courtiers.

They arrive before the castle of Eggeric, one of the king's chief vassals. Elegast, who to his calling of robber unites the talent of subjecting all persons and things to his enchantment, casts into a deep sleep every living being within the precincts of the castle. But when he wishes to carry off the saddle belonging to Eggeric, the bells with which it is ornamented make so much noise, that the vassal and his spouse are awakened.

The latter declares that the noise is imaginary, and that the mind of her husband is only disturbed

by agitating thoughts; Eggeric then avows to her that he is at the head of a conspiracy which is to break out on the following day, and to end in the assassination of the king. The lady, related to King Charles, tries to dissuade her husband from this wicked project. Eggeric, as a last argument, strikes her on the face with so much violence that the blood gushes from her nose.

Elegast steals towards the bed of the married couple, receives into his glove the blood of the lady, and pronouncing some magic words, the whole castle is again plunged in sleep. He then relates to the king all that he has overheard. Charles, forewarned, takes his precautions, and at the moment when Eggeric with his friends and vassals penetrates into the royal dwelling, he is arrested. The king having ascertained on all points the truth of Elegast's statement, punishes the traitor, whilst on the other hand he reinstates his faithful servitor in the possession of his rights and property.

Charles then understands why on that night God had forced him to appear in the character of a robber.

Floris and Blanchefloer is the charming and sweet picture of the love of the son of a Moorish king, and a Frankish girl of noble birth, carried off during an inroad of the infidels into France,

and brought up at the Court of King Fénus. After several years of reverses, Floris ascended the throne of his father, was converted to the religion of Blanchefloer, whom he espoused, and by whom he had Berthe, the mother of Charlemagne. To give an analysis of this poem, would be, in a manner, to touch with withering hand a flower of the garland which wreathes the brow of the poet Thierri d'Assenede. We will only affirm with the editor, *Hoffman von Fallersleben*, that in all our literature, ancient and modern, few poems can be compared to this in delicacy and finish of execution, clearness of style, and felicity of expression. In passing into Flemish literature, this production has become a precious gem, worked with all the skill of a consummate artist. In those countries subject to the influence of Frankish dominion, Charlemagne was the centre of a cycle of national Christian poems; on the other hand, England wished also to have her Christian and national hero. To the popular tales of Britain was added the name of Arthur, and the legends of the Round Table rapidly increased, and contended for favour with the national poems of Frankish countries.

The Round Table was an order of chivalry which owed its origin to the following facts.

The legend relates that Philip the Apostle, having directed his steps towards Gaul to preach

the Gospel, sent his companion, Joseph of Arimathea, on the same errand to England, who carried there the holy Chalice, named the *Graal*. This was the cup that Jesus Christ had used at the last supper, and in which Joseph of Arimathea had received the blood of the Saviour while nailed to the Cross. Joseph bequeathed this precious relic to his son and namesake, Bishop Joseph, who was the first to institute the Order of the Holy Chalice, or rather, of the Round Table. During the celebration of the festivals, the initiated seated themselves round a table, on which the precious Vase was placed. One seat remained vacant; it was that which Jesus Christ had occupied, and which was reserved for a descendant of Joseph, named Galaäd; it was called the place of Galaäd. Several ambitious members attempted to occupy it, but in vain; they were all swallowed up in the bowels of the earth, until the fourth century gave birth to this Galaäd, so long desired, who effectively took possession of the reserved seat. The respect, mingled with terror, which this history inspired throughout England, induced the great King Arthur to institute an Order of the Round Table, for the flower of the knights of his kingdom. He caused a table, on the model of that of Joseph, to be constructed, and whenever the members of the Order held their sittings, the place of

Jesus was left vacant. Everything was in conformity with the legend; only the holy Chalice, the principal object on which the Order had been founded, was wanting: it was lost; it had disappeared, it was said, on account of the sins which desolated the kingdom. At any cost it must be recovered. Here begins a series of the most adventurous journeys and exploits, in which the knights of the Round Table signalise themselves in their search for the precious object on which the peace and honour of England depend. The recital of these glorious deeds became in such vogue throughout the country, that he was considered destitute of all education who did not know by heart the chronicle of the *Brut*, the first source of the Legend of King Arthur.

The earliest importers of this chronicle on the Continent appear to have been the Flemings, and especially some colonists established since 1108 in Glamorgan. Count Philip of Alsace (who died in 1191), a prince enthusiastic for the Crusades, as is well known, finding in the exploits of Arthur and his knights an incitement to his own bravery, caused some French epic poems upon the English heroes to be composed by Artesian poets, whom he had in his pay. These poems were shortly afterwards translated into Flemish by others of his subjects. These translations are for the most part lost, if we can

believe them to be the poems of which Maerlant and the poets who succeeded him speak, and which are the *Saint Graal*, the *Tristram*, the *Galehot*, the *Ywein*, the *Lenval*, and the *Parcival*. Although they were highly appreciated, although they represent their heroes as affixing a more elevated stamp upon chivalrous life, and giving to their exploits these three noble aims, God, his Lady, and his Prince, the poems of the cycle of King Arthur appear notwithstanding to be confined to narrow limits. Whilst on all sides we find numerous fragments belonging to epics of the time of Charlemagne, the period of Arthur, by its subdivision, has left scarcely any traces. Fortunately three epic poems have escaped the wreck. They are the *Ferguut*, the *Lancelot*, and the *Walewein*. The first, imitated probably from a romance in prose, has only 6,000 verses, whilst the second, although it has descended to us in an incomplete state, in a single manuscript, presents us with nearly 50,000. *Ferguut* is the son of a farmer, but his personal qualities and courage make him worthy to be a knight; his exploits and adventures procure him the favour of King Arthur, and the hand of the lovely Galiene. The *Lancelot* is the corresponding poem to *Tristram;* the tone of the latter is elegiac, whilst animation and gaiety pervade the former. The *Lancelot* recounts the loves of the

knight of this name and the fair Genevra, the spouse of King Arthur, his prowess, and that of Prince Gauvin, Perceval and others; it concludes with the death of King Arthur. This poem, although translated from the French, contains nevertheless several episodes which its editor, the learned *Jonckbloet*, has not found in the original manuscript. Composed at the end of the twelfth century, it can only at the utmost have been half a century later that the Flemish translation appeared, since Maerlant speaks of it as of a well-known work. It is the same with the *Walewein*, a part of which, an author pretends, was translated, not from the French, but from the Gallic. The translation having been made by two writers, Penninc and Vostaert, it is possible that the latter was posterior to the former by nearly half a century, since the only manuscript existing bears the date of 1350; this date may, however, apply to the translation rather than to the original.

No less celebrated than the paladins of Charlemagne and King Arthur, we find in the Middle Ages the heroes of ancient Greece, and particularly the defenders of Troy and the conqueror of the empire of Darius. The exploits of Hector and Alexander were sung and recited throughout the whole of Europe, as deeds belonging to the age of Christianity, and even to the national history of a

race among whom we may single out the "Brabançons," whose princes passed for descendants of some companion in misfortune to Æneas. These poems form the subjects of a fourth period, surnamed the Classic, because in ancient times Greece was the country where civilisation shone with the greatest splendour.

In the Middle Ages, the masterpieces of Athenian and Roman literature were not unknown to the Germanic nations. Some fragments of a translation of the *Æneid* have been lately found, a translation which ascends to the twelfth century. *Thierri d'Assenede* speaks of the works of Juvenal, and Ovid's *Art of Love*, as of books that were placed in the hands of youth. *Maerlant* cites Homer with respect, and as a great master of poetry. The poems of the classic age are, however, not translations from the Greek. That of the destruction of Troy is simply an epic of the Middle Ages, and the Greek and Trojan heroes are Christian knights. This poem, written with spirit and ease, is said, according to the most recent researches, to be the work of two authors,—of *Siger Dieregodgaf*, who is supposed to have composed the first part from Latin authorities, and of *Maerlant*, who wrought out the rest from the French work of *Benoît de St. Maure*. It was believed, until then, that each of these two authors had written a poem of his own, since in

the first part is found the name of *Siger*, and *Maerlant* acknowledges having composed, before 1270, a poem on the foundation and destruction of Troy. Probably this poet, of whom we shall shortly speak more fully, wrote his work previous to the middle of the thirteenth century, before his mind had taken that direction which soon impressed itself on the whole of Flemish literature. The same remark applies to his poem of *Alexander*, which at the request of a noble lady he translated, or rather imitated, from the Latin of Philippe de Castellione.

It is probable that the classic age was not limited solely to the poems of Alexander and the Trojan War; there are indications that render it probable that the Flemish celebrated the exploits of Jason and the Argonauts, as well as the legendary lives of the first Roman emperors.

After having enumerated so many French, Breton, Greek, and Roman heroes, we may add, that in the Middle Ages, Flemings and Frieslanders, Brabançons and Dutch, still took pleasure in reading the *Nibelungen*, the *Godreon*, the *Hildebrant*, and other epic poems belonging to generations lost in the abyss of ages. Some of the national traditions which belong more particularly to Flanders, and which have been probably embodied in these last works, still exist. It is probable that the history

of *Frederick and his Mother*, the recital of the deeds of arms of *Baudouin Bras-de-fer*, against the King of France, rest upon "sagas" sung by some Flemish poet. Perhaps the *Flandrys*, a fragment of which was found by the learned German *Mone*, and since lost, was a poem of this kind. The following very ancient song, almost Homeric in its form, relates to one of those terrible warriors renowned for their cruelty, before Christianity was preached in Flanders: —

"The Lord Halewyn knows a song; all those who heard it were attracted towards him.

"It was once heard by the daughter of the king, who was so beloved by her parents.

"She presented herself before her father: 'Oh! father, may I go to the Lord Halewyn?'

"'Oh! no, my child, no; they who go to him never come back again.'

"She presents herself to her mother: 'Oh! mother, may I go to the Lord Halewyn?'

"'Oh! no, my child, no; they who go to him never come back again.'

"She presents herself to her sister: 'Oh! sister, may I go to the Lord Halewyn?'

"'Oh! no, sister, no: they who go to him never come back again.'

"She presents herself to her brother: 'Oh! brother, may I go to the Lord Halewyn?'

"'Little care I where thou goest, provided thou preservest thine honour and thy crown.'

" She goes up into her chamber; she clothes herself in her best garments.

" What does she put on first? A shift finer than silk.

" What does she gird round her lovely waist? Strong bands of gold.

" What does she put upon her scarlet petticoat? On every seam a golden button.

" What does she place on her beautiful fair hair? A massive golden crown.

" What does she put upon her kirtle? On every seam a pearl.

" She goes into her father's stable, and takes out his best charger. She mounts him proudly, and so, laughing and singing, rides through the forest. When she reaches the middle of the forest, she meets the Lord Halewyn.

" ' Hail!' said he, approaching her, ' Hail! beautiful virgin, with eyes so black and brilliant.'

" They proceed together, chatting as they go.

" They arrive at a field in which stands a gallows. The bodies of several women hang from it.

" The Lord Halewyn says to her, ' As you are the loveliest of all virgins, say, how will you die? The time is come.'

" ' It is well; as I may choose, I choose the sword.

" ' But first of all, take off your tunic, for the blood of a virgin gushes out so far, that it might reach you, and I should be sorry.'

" But before he had divested himself of his tunic, his head rolled off and lay at his feet: his lips still murmured these words:

" ' Go down there into that corn-field, and blow the horn, so that my friends may hear it.'

" ' Into that corn-field I shall not go, neither shall I blow the horn. I do not follow the counsel of a murderer.'

"'Go then down under the gallows, and gather the balm which you shall find there, and spread it over my bloody throat.'

"'Under the gallows I shall not go, on your bloody throat I shall spread no balm. I do not follow the counsel of a murderer.'

"She took the head up by the hair, and washed it at a clear fountain.

"She mounted her charger proudly, and laughing and singing, she rode through the forest.

"When she reached the middle of the forest, she met the mother of Halewyn. 'Beautiful virgin, have you not seen my son?'

"'Your son, the Lord Halewyn, is gone hunting; you will never see him again.'

"'Your son, the Lord Halewyn is dead. I have his head in my apron, which is red with his blood.'

"And when she arrived at her father's gate, she blew the horn like a man.

"And when her father saw her, he rejoiced at her return.

"He celebrated it by a feast, and the head of Halewyn was placed on the table."

William Grimm published some years ago a fragment of a German epic poem which he entitled *Rudolf*, from the name of the hero. Rudolf was a Flemish count who took part in the siege of Ascalon, in Palestine, 1148. The poem is evidently translated from the Flemish, a point worthy of remark, for the same thing has happened to a number of other Flemish productions, some of which were original, others translated from the

French, while very few German pieces of the Middle Ages have passed into Netherlandish literature. Among the poems which have been thus transplanted beyond the Rhine, besides the ancient epic of the *Godreon*, of which we have already spoken, we may cite *Ogier le Danois*, *Renaud de Montalban*, *Malagys*, and *Les Enfants de Limbourg*. This latter poem contains a series of adventures which take place in the Greek Empire, and which afford much interest with regard to art, customs, and creeds. It appears that the author was a certain Hendrick, who lived in the middle of the fourteenth century, although some critics fix his birth a century earlier.

If in all these romances, which record adventures, patriotic souvenirs, national customs and manners occupy but little space, we possess, on the other hand, a poem which in itself alone eclipses the three cycles held in most honour in the Middle Ages, we speak of the poem of *Reinaert*.

The celebrated brothers Grimm have long since drawn the distinction between natural and artificial poetry (Natur-und Kunst-gedichten). The first, sprung from the people, reflects accurately its habits, its social life, while the artificial poem is evidently stamped with the conventional forms of the author's education. The first is the simple garment, the second a more or less elaborate

attire. To give birth to such a poem as the *Reinaert*, it was essential that a people should be in the enjoyment of social independence, in no wise the slaves of their masters, and in whom the influence of a simple, homely life should not be extinct. There could not exist among them any of those degenerate sons, estranged from their country by ties which in our day alienate men from the national interests of hearth and home. In Flanders, more than in any other country, were these elements combined. While they preserved their love of independence, a distinctive feature in the German and Roman people, the Flemings, whom this same desire of personal freedom had attracted in large masses into towns, acquired a real well-being and prosperity which enabled them still to retain their free and unfettered mode of life.

Hence sprang the first part of the *Reinaert*, standing alone in its simplicity and nationality, and for that very reason grand and sublime. The author had undergone neither the rigours of the cloister nor the unreasonable demands of caste imposed by the nobles; and if he belonged to either of these classes, only the more merit is due to him.

In the second part of the *Reinaert* we see developed a remarkably philosophical genius, and a profound acquaintance with the fable of classic

nations, of which frequent use is made. In a word, it is more erudite than the first poem.

In both its forms the *Reinaert* is the Epic of the People, contradistinguished from chivalrous poetry; and its national characteristics betray themselves even in the style of the translation. Whilst the poems of other periods pass into High German, for the benefit of the nobles beyond the Rhine, the *Reinaert*, on the contrary, finds a Low Saxon translator, who makes this masterpiece familiar to the citizens of the Hanseatic Towns.

In the fifteenth century an English translation was made from an edition in prose; and have we not seen in our own days Goethe, the great modern German poet, devoting his muse to reproduce in his own language these Flemish verses of the twelfth century? The French, who in the Middle Ages were still half Franks, have composed several *Branches of the Reinaert* (Branches du Renard).

The right of the Flemings to the entire poem was for a long time contested. Some pretended that the *Reinaert* was a translation from the French; others wished to make the Low Saxon translation pass for an original work. Willems, whose premature loss has been so keenly felt in Flemish literature, cast into this chaos of opinions the wand of his perspicacity, and irrevocably decided the question to the advantage of Flanders.

The poem was first written in the old Flemish dialect, says Bosworth, in his *Origin of the Dutch*, affording a fine and very early specimen of the language.

The Flemish manuscript is undoubtedly the original, of which the famous Low Saxon *Reinecke Vos*, published at Lubeck, 1498, is a free translation, The old prose editions of *Reinecke Vos*, printed at Gouda, 1479, and at *Delft*, 1485, appear to be only a careless translation of the Flemish poem, preserving even, in many instances, the metre and rhyme of the original.

The English version, by William Caxton, 1481, was made from the *Gouda* edition. By the indefatigable researches of *Mr. J. E. Willems*, it appears clear that the first part of the Flemish *Reinaert* was written about 1150; and by recent inquiries, as well as by the preface to his modernised Flemish *Reinaert de Vos*, (Eecloo, 1834,) it is concluded that *Willem van Utenhoven*, a priest of Ardenbourg, was the real author of the second part, which was composed about the year 1250. *Jacob van Maerlant*, the father of the Flemish chroniclers and poets, of whom more will be said anon, complains, as early as 1270, of the alterations and additions made by copyists of *Reinaert's* merry jests and tricks.

The poem of the *Reinaert* was the fore-runner of

a new era, struggling against ancient ideas. Fertile, abounding in anticipations of intellectual and moral progress, it had no leaning towards that soft sentimental poetry which had, until then, been predominant. Like those flowers which thrive only in the caresses of the breeze in the happy sunshine, this style of poetry languished and faded under the breath of political passions, and under the influence of cold reason. The *Reinaert* was the expression of the good sense of the people, it was the straightforward intelligence of the many opposed to the vices of the nobles, and the irregularities of the monks, and it clothed itself in the caustic form of satire, armed with all the superiority of talent which personal freedom never fails to engender. The *Reinaert*, in short, was popular feeling, expressed in the grandeur of an epic poem; it was Philosophy yet ignorant of its own existence, and too young to array itself in the cloak of argument.

In order to complete the history of this very remarkable work, we think we cannot do better than follow the learned Dr. Bosworth, who has investigated the subject with great care.

The numerous editions *, as well as the complaint

* We have, among modern works, the erudite volume of *Reinardus Vulpes* of F. T. Mone, Stutgardt, 1832. Also Méon's highly interesting collection of nearly all the parts of the fables

of Waltherus de Coinsi, Prior of *Vic-sur-aisne*, in his *Louanges de Notre Dame* and *Miracles de la Vierge*, that *Renard* was preferred to the reading of legends, sufficiently show how many pens it has employed, and at what an early period this celebrated poem served for entertainment and instruction.

A slight comparison of the Flemish *Reinaert de Vos*, with all the former productions, must lead to the conviction, that whatever use its author may have made of the works of his predecessors, he has far surpassed them all, and has composed a *chef-d'œuvre*, fully deserving the eulogium which the most competent judges have bestowed upon it. It is important both for matter and composition, and if it were the only interesting and valuable work existing in the Flemish, it alone would fully repay the trouble of learning that tongue. Mr. T. F. Willems, in his edition of this poem *, has proved not only its true Flemish origin, but shown also,

and tales of *The Fox*, treated by various French authors, 4 vols. 8vo., Paris, 1826. The learned researches of T. Grimm are published under the title of *Reinhart-Fuchs*, Berlin, 1834, printed from an old Flemish manuscript preserved at Stutgardt; and last, not least, *Reinaert de Vos*, published by T. F. Willems, in Ghent, from the MS. bought at Heber's sale.

* From a very ancient manuscript purchased by the Belgian Government. A French translation of it was published by us in Brussels, 1838, with literary notices on the French editions of the same poem.

how easy and flowing the versification is, in a language which would be far more valued, were it better known.

Events were moving rapidly towards the point where all power seemed likely to become invested in the Commons, leaving the rulers only a shadow of authority. Are we to attribute to this ardent popular thirst for liberty, the indifference manifested by the Flemish princes for their national language and literature? We are tempted to think so. History portrays many Counts of Flanders attaching to their court French poets, and encouraging them to compose voluminous works, whilst few among them deigned to lend an ear to the strains of Flemish minstrelsy. Thus Louis de Nevers, demanding from the depths of his prison of Montargis, a Flemish education for his children, appears to us to stand out majestically in the annals of Flanders, for he alone, among the princely race, feelingly appreciated the vital powers of the nation. What a contrast between these foreign rulers over subjects whose customs and habits they cannot understand, and those Dukes of Brabant, those Lieutenant-Generals of the Empire, who, although sons-in-law to kings of France, are not merely satisfied with protecting the language as the national right of a great people, but who take a pride in ennobling it, in raising it to a level with the

Latin tongue for state purposes, and who even employ it themselves to charm the leisure hours of the fair sex of the duchy, in preference to the foreign language of the Troubadours.

It is under the reign of Guy de Dampierre that we first become fully acquainted with the merits of a man who was destined to give a new phase to Flemish literature, to substitute didactic works for sentimental poetry. His name is *Jacques van Maerlant*. Before him, poetry was a vagrant art, which, in the long winter evenings, took refuge in the chimney corner of the great feudal castle, where it served to amuse and console the young maiden, who repaid the efforts of the poet by a sympathetic tear of compassion. In summer, the muse gambolled in the meadows, side by side with the fair damsel. Disdaining cities, the minstrel of that period was to be seen wherever noble blood presided, and it was an exception when he occasionally condescended to bestow a few favours on the most eminent among the plebeian classes. At court he was ever welcome, the prince loaded him with benefits, and sought to make him one of his retinue, for it was often to the minstrel's art alone that he was indebted for his fame.

The nobility were scattered over the level country, enclosed in their strongholds; even the princes rarely dwelt in cities. At a later period, we see

poetry and song following the nobles into towns, and even placing themselves under the protection of the wealthy citizen.

In the age of chivalry, the wandering poet was called *Spreker*, *Segger*, or *Vinder*. The two first terms are equivalent to that of story-teller (conteur), the third to that of *Trouvère*, *Troubadour*. The rewards which he received from the great, consisted of money, horses, and clothes. The nobleman often divested himself of his robe, to place it on the shoulders of the minstrel, and the latter, in his turn, took a pride in wearing it upon all great occasions, to encourage fresh listeners to imitate such generous examples. (Roquefort, *Poésie Française dans le* $12^{ième}$ *et* $13^{ième}$ *siècles.*) He travelled alone or with a companion, and in the latter case he took the name of *Gezel*, which is equivalent to minstrel.

The encouragement given by the nobles to itinerant poets so extensively increased the number of the Trouvères, that the gifts bestowed on them sensibly diminished; hence there resulted material privation on the one side, and slackened esteem on the other. Besides, this wandering and vagabond life led to a corruption of morals, which went hand in hand with the gradually increasing distresses of the Mæcenates. The demoralisation augmented to such a degree, that in France, for instance, these

wandering minstrels associated themselves with mountebanks and leaders of tame animals, and it was under the reign of Philip Augustus that the ridiculous Royalty of Fiddlers was set up. In the Low Countries many *gezellen* were condemned to capital punishment for theft and other crimes. These were the last examples of the ruin to which the race was speedily brought.

The professional character of the *Spreker*, *Zegger*, or *Gezel*, sufficiently explains why they neither wrote nor declaimed very long poems. This honour was reserved for the sedentary poet attached to a court, or to some great noble. Honoured with the title of poet *par excellence*, he was then called *Dichter*, although instances exist of his being still styled *Spreker*. We possess the works of several *Sprekers*, consisting chiefly of *Sproken* (tales, fables, satires, allegories, and amatory poems), inspired by various circumstances, and written for all ranks of society, for the nobility, the cloister, the citizens, and even for the lower classes. Of the wandering poets who lived before Maerlant, very few have bequeathed their names to posterity. They have taken as much pains to conceal themselves as the authors of great epics, as if, before the ascendancy of the burgher class, there was no merit in being a Flemish poet. It is only in the course of the fourteenth century that we find the names of *Augustynken*, of *Lodewike*,

of *Jean van Hollant*, of *Jean Dille*, of *Colpaert*, of *Pieter van Tersele*, of *Guillaume van Hildegaertsberge*, of *Baudoin van der Loren*. This latter was cotemporary with Philippe van Artevelde, and probably a companion in arms with the celebrated Flemish captain. He possessed an ardent soul, lived only for liberty and his country, was a real poet, seeking out untrodden paths, and following them up with success. The learned M. Blommaert has published a part of the works of *Van der Loren*.

Among the Flemish metrical tales, there is a collection which deserves to be especially mentioned. It is the *Minneloep* (Cours d'Amour). It consists of more than fifty love-stories, which the author has formed into a whole, by classing his tales in order, and according to the different degrees of love which they represent, and which he divides into four kinds: constant love, noble and pure love, licit and illicit love. The *Minneloep*, of which Dire Potter (a nobleman probably by birth) is the author, is not simply a collection of tales; it is enriched by interesting observations, by a comparison of the various degrees of love, and arguments on their inherent worth. In this point of view, the collection may be considered as the immediate forerunner of *Howaert*, and of *Cats*, or rather, as holding a middle position between these

didactic poets and the author of the *Romance of the Rose*, that allegorical poem which made so much stir in the Middle Ages, and which has had the honour of being translated from the French into almost every language of Europe.

CHAP. II.

JACQUES VAN MAERLANT AND HIS WORKS. — JEAN I., DUKE OF BRABANT. — JEAN VAN HELU. — MELIS STOKE. — JEAN DE KLERK. — SCIENTIFIC WORKS. — JEAN RUYSBROEK. — MARTIN VAN THOROUT. — LEGENDARY WRITINGS. — MILO. — TRAGEDIES, COMEDIES, FARCES. — SATIRICAL SONGS AND POEMS.

When, in the middle of the thirteenth century, *Jacques van Maerlant* appeared, chivalry was on the decline, and another phase of ideas only awaited a signal, to dethrone that which, during three centuries, had constituted the strength of central Europe. The towns continued to increase in power, and exercised over the princes and nobles an irresistible influence. The unfortunate issue of the expeditions to the Holy Land had dispelled many a dream of glory and of fame. The indifference evinced for exploits beyond the sea had gained such a point, that the appeals of the best poets, and the most eloquent orators, no longer stirred the souls of men. The demoralisation had reached its height. "The world is drawing to an end," exclaims Maerlant. "We have reached the days foretold by the Apostle. Men no longer love anything but themselves. Provided they possess wealth, they are indifferent to the means of acquirement; provided they are amused, it is of little

importance whether they listen to falsehood or to truth. If we are only handsomely dressed, say they, that we dine well, that the wine is plentiful, that we sleep softly, it is all that any of us require, whether priests or laymen;—egotism alone rules." This energetic language, unusual as it was to the ears of the Flemish, acted gradually upon their minds, which soon abandoned lighter reading for books of history and science. The useful prevailed over the merely entertaining.

Jacob van Maerlant was born at Damme*, a not inconsiderable port of Flanders, at a period when that country had reached its highest point of prosperity and fame (1235–1300). He was distinguished as a poet, a philosopher, and an orator. He wrote for the people. His works were read everywhere, studied, and even translated into Latin. All the subsequent writers acknowledged his influence. His name is still revered by his country, and is ever coupled with the epithet of *Father of the Flemish poets.* He first destined himself to the Church†, and it is probably then that he acquired his vast erudition; but soon disgusted by the depravity of the clergy‡, he wandered about as a

* He says himself, in one of his poems, that he is a Fleming:

"Ende om dat ic Vlamine ben."

† Revue Trimestrielle, sixième année, tom. ii.

‡ To have an idea of which at this period, see the sketch given

Minnesinger, visited Brabant, Holland, Zeland, &c., and it seems that during his travels he fell in love with a lady of the name of *Gotile*, to whom he dedicated one of his finest chivalric romances, *Alexandre*.

Arrived at a mature age, Van Maerlant gave up the composition of works on love and chivalry, and from henceforth devoted himself to sacred and profane history. He taught his countrymen physiology, medicine, and natural history; he wrote on the duties of man, demonstrating that a title of nobility is something more than a sheet of parchment, and that the virtue of a priest does not lie in his tonsure. It was not without reason that his cotemporaries gave him the glorious designation of "Father of the Flemish poets:" and if his didactic genius dealt a hard blow to poetical romance, we are disposed to forgive him, in consideration of the salutary influence which this great man exercised over the moral condition of the Belgians. He broke down the barrier which separated the educated classes from the people, by adapting into his native tongue, for their instruction, the best works of the time.

"What!" says he, in a poem on St. Franciscus,

by Jacques de Vitry, in his *Historia Orientalis* apud Bongars' *Gesta Dei per Francos*.

"the reading of the Bible is forbidden to the people, and they listen to the adventures of *Tristan* and *Launcelot*, imaginary characters and personages; and throughout the world love and war stories are read, and the Gospel is thought to be too grave, because it teaches truth and justice?"

Van Maerlant undertook to publish for the people a sort of encyclopedia, long before that word had been invented. He wrote it in verse, in order that its precepts might be the more easily engraved on the minds of all. The first part is entitled *Flowers of Nature*.* After this, he composed his greatest work, *The Historical Mirror*, where, in four parts and thirty-one books, he gives the history of the world from the Creation to the thirteenth century. It appeared in 1283, and although taken in a great measure from the *Speculum Historiale* of *Vincentius Bellovacensis*, Van Maerlant aimed at a very different result. Vincentius treated his subject, as he says, *ad fidei nostræ dogmatis instructionem*. Our author, on the contrary eschewed all that was scholastic and dogmatic, selecting only such matter as would possess an interest for laymen, and for the

* It contains sixteen books, divided as follows: 1, of Men; 2, of Quadrupeds; 3, of Birds; 4, of the Marvels of the Sea; 5, of Fishes; 6, of Serpents; 7, of Insects; 8, of Trees; 9, of Medical Plants; 10, of the Vegetable Kingdom; 11, of Fountains; 12, of Precious Stones; 13, of the seven Metals. The work was translated from *Cantipratanus de Naturis Rerum*.

people. His *Rym bibel* *, or Bible in verse, written some years previously, caused him to be persecuted by the clergy, and he had to justify himself before the Pope. But notwithstanding, he persevered in the attainment of the great object he had in view, viz. the education of the people.

The three great works which we have just mentioned, contain the epitome of all that is most useful, and of a practical interest for mankind in the fourteenth century.

We see, then, by the works of Maerlant, that the aim of this author was entirely humanising, that his own fame was less his object than the welfare of his country; had it been otherwise, he would certainly have given a bolder flight to his poetical genius, for he was a true poet when withheld by no restraints, and he possessed sufficient vigour to raise the art of versification to a high degree of perfection.

Besides his larger works, Maerlant wrote a great number of small poems divided into stanzas; among others, *Het Boucsken van den Houte;* or, *De drie Gaerden* (The Book of the Wood; or, The Three Gardens), a marvellous tale of the cross of the Saviour, probably a work of his early youth; *Van*

* Taken from the *Biblia Scholastica,* by *Petrus Comestor,* to which Van Maerlant added the New Testament, and the War of the Romans against the Jews under the Emperor *Titus.*

ons Heren Kijnscheide (Of the Infancy of Our Saviour); *Van den Lande van Oversee* (Of the Country beyond the Sea).

The most original and poetical of his works is unquestionably the *Wapen Martin*, a poem in dialogue and stanzas, which treats of the inequalities of the conditions of life, and of the corruption into which the nobility and clergy had fallen. Sometimes the poet takes the tone of satire, at others he affects the lyric style. The *Wapen Martin* consists of scarcely more than a thousand verses, but the design is patriotic and the language lofty. We have already shown that the poem of the *Reinart* precedes by a century the principal works of our author, and that he himself speaks of the greater number of the chivalrous poems as having been already dispersed throughout the whole of Flanders.

To give a specimen of the satirical vein of Van Maerlant, we here translate a passage of what he calls *The Complaint.*

"Is Antichrist already come into the world, and have his disciples prepared the way before him? If I dared, I would say yes!* Let a cunning serf become a judge, and if he be only possessed of gold, he will be listened to in the

* "The world is drawing to its end," had he already said in his prologue to *Sinte Franciscus.*

council of princes. Does a fool become a grain the wiser by increasing the size of his tonsure even to his ears?

"Almighty God! I implore Thy aid. I wish to speak of the humiliation of the first tonsure, of that of St. Peter at Antioch, when he was cast into a dungeon, because he sought to reclaim an erring people. In our days, the tonsure is only a source of traffic to those cormorants whom nothing can satiate. I believe a race so greedy of gain was never before beheld.

"How many wolves have become shepherds to the precious flock for which Christ shed His blood! They have adopted short clothing, large swords, long beards, sumptuous garments, and ride fine chargers. They make use of the sacred possessions of the Church for the purposes of personal pride and vanity.

"They go and gather grapes in the vineyard of the Lord, and reap for themselves the richness of the harvest. It is they, and such as they, who preach benevolence to the people, but they care not if their flock tremble with cold, and cry out from hunger, owing to their lack of charity. From this cause proceed the lamentations of the poor, 'Ah, Lord, wilt Thou not have pity upon me, that I starve not?' So do they call out, hungry, sick, and naked. And you, you in the meanwhile,

who are seated in the enjoyment of your braziers, suffer them not to warm themselves in your presence. You thrust from you those whom you are bound to protect, and you appropriate the property of the holy Church, to which you have never had any right.

"Listen to your sentence. You are accused. Your limbs are clothed in garments belonging to the poor; all your efforts are strained for the acquisition of wealth. Your hands are always closed. The poor complain that you refuse them when they come to you for alms. You wish to walk in the steps of the nobles. But your pride shall be humbled. How severe was the retribution of the rich man, when he entreated the beggar Lazarus to cool his lips!"

Whilst the Counts of Flanders, sometimes hostile, sometimes friendly to the Kings of France, are contending against patriotic feeling, we find the Dukes of Brabant, on the contrary, like enlightened princes, calling upon the people in their own language to participate in the lustre of their crown. We have already named Jean I., a prince as refined as brave, who sang in the Flemish tongue to the beauties of his court. *Willems* has published the twelve pretty love-songs that remain to us from the most ancient Flemish poet known among crowned heads.

To give a specimen of the poetry of the thirteenth century, and likewise of the slight difference existing between the language of that remote period and the actual Flemish, let us quote one of the songs of Jean I., Duke of Brabant, who died in 1294.

The following is a literal translation of the text :

" Early one morning in May
I arose ;
In a beautiful little orchard
I wished to amuse myself.
I found there three young maidens,
Full of grace and beauty.
They sang alternately
Harba lori fa, harba lori fa, harba lori fa.

" When I saw these charming flowers
In this little orchard,
And heard the notes of the sweet music
Chaunted by the pretty maidens,
My heart was so elated,
That I also joined in chorus,
Harba lori fa, harba lori fa, harba lori fa.

" I then bowed to the handsomest,
Who was standing under a tree,
My arm found itself around her,
Then at the same moment
I wished to kiss her on the mouth,
But she exclaimed, ' Away, away, away ! '
Harba lori fa, harba lori fa, harba lori fa."

" Eens meien morgens vroege
Was ic upgestaen,
In een scoen boemgardekin
Soud ic spelen gaen,
Daer vant ic drie jongfrouwen staen;
Si waren so wale gedaen,
Dene sanc vore, dander sanc na:
Harba lori fa, &c. &c.

" Doe ic versach dat scone cruut
In den boemgardekin,
Ende ie verhoorde dat soete geluut,
Van den mageden fyn,
Doe verblide dat herte myn
Dat ic moeste singen me:
Harba lori fa," &c. &c.

This prince, more than any other, encouraged poets at his court, and it seems certain that Van Helu was one of its ornaments. Jean van Helu, who was present at the battle of Woeringue, in what capacity we know not, composed, on this memorable feat of arms, a remarkable historical poem, which he dedicated to the betrothed of Jean I., the Princess Margaret of England. He wrote it for the princess, in order, said he, that the wish to become acquainted with the deeds of her father-in-law might inspire her with the desire to learn the Flemish language.

The Battle of Woeringue bears all the characteristics of an epic poem, and will be considered as

such by those who know how to compare nations and epochs. The purity and simplicity of the style of this work of Van Helu justify the favour with which it has been received in Belgium since Willems has introduced it to a wider public, by giving a more careful and well-annotated edition.*

It is well known that this battle was fought on the 12th June, 1288, by Jean of Brabant, called the Victorious, against the Archbishop of Cologne, and that the result was the annexation of Limbourg to the possessions of the victor. We will quote, to give an idea of the poetry, the speech which Jean I. addressed to his soldiers before the battle :—

"Remember to-day the valour of your ancestors! They were never known to fly, or to abandon their prince! Soldiers! follow their example, and glory will be your reward. This day you shall see me victorious or dead! God knows that I wished for peace, so He will not forsake me. My horse being one of the best, you will constantly see me at your head. Take care that the enemy does not take me in flank or in the rear. I shall myself take care of those who attack me in front. One word more, if you see me surrender, or fly, kill me on the spot."

We also claim the title of Epic, for another poem

* Rymkronyk van Jan van Helu. Brussels, 4to. 1836.

composed in Brabant, *The War of Grimbergue*, by an anonymous author. It contains nearly 13,000 verses. The subject of the poem is the wars of the Dukes of Brabant against the Lord of Grimbergue, and the ruin of the latter with all his family. Contrary to the usual course of the epic, the hero of this poem is vanquished. It is a licence on the part of the poet which has been justified by its success. In fact, our anonymous author has centred the whole interest on the Berthouds; we desire victory for them, although we see in the opposite army, suspended to the branches of an old willow, a cradle, in which reposes an orphan, four years old, whose future depends upon the issue of the battle: the author scarcely touches upon this dramatic episode. The Berthouds appear everywhere as the bravest of the brave, true models of intrepid and independent knights. There are some tedious parts in Van Helu, but many more in the anonymous author; the decisive battle occupies no less than four thousand verses. Only two copies exist of this poem, the oldest of which has been made by Espinoy in 1620.

Huydekoper, a learned Dutchman, published in the middle of the last century a Flemish chronicle written by Melis Stoke, a cotemporary of Maerlant, who completed his *Poetical Chronicle* (Rym Kronyk) in 1305. It was begun before the year

1296, as it is dedicated to Count Florens the Fifth, who died in that year.

This work was published in 1591, and again in 3 vols. 4to., in 1772, by *Huydekoper*, with valuable notes.

Melis Stoke was a priest of the church of Utrecht, in the service of Florens V., who was a great patron of national literature. The style of this author is as pure as that of Maerlant, whose works probably served as models to the Dutch chronicler.

In the southern provinces, we see Jean de Klerk of Antwerp, encouraged by the princes and nobles of Brabant, writing histories and didactic poems. He dedicated to Duke Jean III. his *Brabantsche Yeesten* (History of Brabant), a chronicle in rhyme, of several thousand verses, written in a popular style, and without pretension. This chronicle was afterwards continued up to the time of the House of Burgundy, by an anonymous author, under the superintendence of the historian A. Thymo.

With the exception, perhaps, of a romance of chivalry, which he translated, Jean de Klerk followed the footsteps of Maerlant. Besides his great historical work, and the *Deeds of King Edward III. of England*, he edited two didactic poems, *Der Leeken Spiegel* (The Mirror of the Laity), in 1330, and the *Dietsche Doctrinael* (The Flemish Doc-

trinal), in 1345. These two works, written in a forcible and pure style, exercised a great influence over the popular mind. It was at this time that the Dukes of Brabant, and the Counts of Holland, interested themselves especially in the instruction of the people, and that the institution of a brotherhood, for parochial education, was established at Deventer by *Geert Groete* (Gerardus Magnus), the friend of Ruysbroek, and the distinguished pupil of the famous *Gerson*, of the Sorbonne, and which spread itself through all the Low Countries, and through the Lower Rhine and Westphalia. First and second-class schools multiplied everywhere, and produced many instructive works, such as the distichs of Cato, the *Dietsche Lucidarius*, and others of the same kind. Works on medicine and physiology also appeared in great numbers; they afford a fresh proof of that love for the natural sciences which is still a peculiar feature of the Flemish character. Besides the great work of Maerlant, of which we have already spoken, and which is the principal production of the Middle Ages, on natural history, we possess works in rhyme, the *Natuerkunde van het Heelal* (The System of Nature), attributed to the Brabanter Gheraert van Lienhout; *De Cracht der Mane* (The Lunar Influence), of Heinric van Hollant; *Astronomiæ en Fleubotomia*, of Claeskyn; *Heimelicheit van Man en Vrou;*

Der Vrouwen Heimelicheit; and a *Chiromancie* by a certain priest, *Van den Hamme.* There are not wanting also works in prose, on medicine and physiology, of the fourteenth century: such are the productions of Jean Ypermans, a treatise on chiromancy, and another on physiognomy. Between romantic and didactic literature, between the literature of the nobility and that of the citizens, monastic works take their place, partaking of the one element or the other, always indicating an ascetic object, and giving to everything a peculiar colouring; investing worldly, even Pagan objects, with a Christian signification, and filling the expansions of the soul with the sacred fire of love. For instance, we see amongst other works, the *Voyage of Saint Brandain*, an amusing piece of mental folly, a confused mixture of traditions belonging to the history of old Flanders, and of geographical errors, the whole attributed to a fictitious being who is placed in the rank of the saints. Then again we have the *Miracle of Theophilus*, the *Faust*, the *Don Juan* of the Middle Ages; these are so many proofs that a lover of a life of adventure, weary of the world, did not forswear his taste for the fantastic when he put his foot on the threshold of the cloister. Again, we read of a nun composing mystic songs, so full of ardour, that they seem rather addressed to a living being than to Heaven. At this period the

licence of the cloister had reached its height, and the zeal for study had everywhere relaxed. Some few men of piety vindicated with dignity the cause of morality and religion, so shamefully outraged by those who professed themselves its supporters. One of the foremost in the Low Countries in denouncing this corruption was *Jean Ruysbroek*, of blessed memory, Prior of the Abbey of Groenendale, near Brussels. This remarkable man, born in Brabant in 1293, of noble parents, was noted for his elegant construction of Flemish prose. Ruysbroek belonged to that class of choice intellects in the fourteenth century, who gave themselves up to the spirit of mysticism, a spirit essentially salutary at a time when the irregularities of the clergy had reached their climax. His numerous writings are preserved, many of them in his own hand. In spite of their value with respect to style as well as to tone and feeling, although they have acquired the rare distinction of being translated into the Romanic dialects, the writings of Ruysbroek remain still in manuscript, with the exception of one, *Het Cieraet der Geesteliker Bruloft*, printed at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Some years before Ruysbroek, in the time of Maerlant, there lived in the Abbey of Eenhame, near Audenarde, *Martin van Thorout*, a man as pious as he was erudite, a writer in a pure and correct style. He

had already attained an advanced age, when, in 1290, he finished one of his poems. Except a translation of the distichs of Cato, his writings are for the most part legends, particularly the legends of St. Eustache, St. Werner, St. Agatha, St. Catherine, and others. His contemporary, William, a monk of the Abbey of Affligem, wrote, about the year 1260, the life of St. Ludgarde, and a certain brother Gérard, that of St. Christine the Miraculous. The legends, according to what we have just said, must have been numerous, although we can now count but few of them, for besides those we have enumerated, and the life of St. Francis, by Maerlant, we are only acquainted with the collection entitled *Der Ystorien Bloeme* (The Flower of Histories), and the fragment of a martyrology. The life of St. Amand, by Gilles de Wevel, of Bruges, who put the finishing stroke to this poem in 1366, belongs rather to the history of Flanders. The authors who wrote on the life of our Lord, as well in prose as in verse, are not less numerous. Already some of these legends, all of which do not rest upon accredited authority, have been published; that by Professor Meyer, of Groningue, from a manuscript in the library at Liege, is one of the most ancient, if not the most ancient, legend in prose, that Flemish literature is acquainted with up to this day.

When we carry our attention back to the monastic life and society of those times, we perceive in the Flemish works of the middle of the fourteenth century, a phenomenon hitherto unmentioned in modern literature; this is the apparition of a theatre, strictly speaking, of tragedies, comedies, and farces, cultivated as part of classical literature. A manuscript in which these productions are preserved dates from the beginning of the fifteenth century, but evidently they are only copies of the original pieces, which go back as far as the middle of the fourteenth century, when the national life of Flanders was in its highest state of vigour. They are ten in number, of which four are tragedies, written perhaps by a single author, who was probably not the first to acquaint our ancestors with scenic amusements. One of these pieces is an allegorical subject, written in Latin, by a Flemish monk named *Milo;* it is an imitation, adapted to the theatre, of a dispute between Spring and Winter. He also wrote, in the middle of the ninth century, a life of St. Amand, in verse.

In the manuscript above mentioned, the pieces are found already prepared for the stage, so that a long tragedy is always followed by a little farce. They are preceded by a prologue common to both, which gives rise to the supposition that they might have belonged to a *Spreker*, who represented them

with his *Gezellen*. We will not discuss the manner in which these pieces were performed. The author tells us that the representations took place in the upper part of a house, that the time between the principal piece and the farce was sufficient to enable the spectators to take refreshment, and that they returned the next day, probably for the two successive representations. The three principal pieces are entitled, *Esmoreit of Sicily*, the *Duke of Brunswick*, and *Lancelot of Denmark*. In order to make the arrangement of these pieces understood, we will endeavour to give an analysis of the first.

The astrologer of a Mahometan king reads one night in the stars that a son has just been born to the King of Sicily, who will kill the Sultan, his master, after having married his daughter and made her abjure the religion of Mahomet. Master Platus, the astrologer in question, devises a means of frustrating destiny; he will himself go to Sicily and possess himself of the young prince by stratagem or gold. The Sultan will bring him up in his palace, will make a good Mussulman of him, and permit him to think that they are father and son.

In another place, also in Sicily, the birth of this infant disturbs the repose of interested relatives. Robert, the nephew of the king, in a paroxysm of jealousy, wishes to kill his little cousin. He carries him off, and at the moment when he is about to

put his dark design into execution, Master Platus presents himself before him, and proposes to purchase the child and convey it into a Mahometan country. The bargain is soon concluded, and the astrologer carries the infant to Damascus to his master, who makes the child pass for a foundling, and confides it to the care of his daughter Damietta.

In the meantime the Court of Sicily is lost in conjectures at the disappearance of the young prince. Robert accuses the queen, who, according to him, has committed this crime because another has usurped her place in the affections of her grey-bearded husband. The king, furious against his guilty spouse, overwhelms her with abuse, and delivers her up to his nephew, who thrusts her into prison.

Esmoreit, the abducted child, has just attained his eighteenth year. One day, wandering in the royal gardens of Damascus, he expresses his astonishment that the heart of his sister, the beautiful Damietta, has not yet expanded to the sentiment of love. He asks himself if she does not nourish some secret passion. At this moment the princess and her attendant approach; she has not perceived Esmoreit, and in an unguarded moment she reveals to her companion the secret of his birth. What a blow to him! From the lips of Damietta herself he

learns that he is only a foundling, perhaps of base extraction, brought without doubt from a distant country. Suddenly his determination is taken; whatever may happen, he will discover those who have so inhumanly abandoned him. At this declaration Damietta can no longer conceal her feelings: she exhausts every artifice to prevent the departure of Esmoreit; but all her reasonings, all the emotions they excite in him, only strengthen his resolution. Finally he promises to return. Damietta then restores to him the scarf in which he was enveloped on his arrival from his father's court, and advises him to cover his head with it in order that it may serve as a sign of recognition.

Thus attired, Esmoreit begins his journey, and hastens from country to country. When arrived in Sicily, he passes near a tower, from the top of which a female prisoner calls to him, and asks from whence he comes, and from whom he received the scarf that he wears. "By Mahomet!" he replies, "this scarf enveloped me when I was abandoned in my infancy. I wear it thus in my adventurous journey, in the hope of meeting with some person in whom it may awaken a remembrance." "Without doubt," exclaims the prisoner, "this scarf is the work of my own hands, and you are my child, you are Esmoreit." "And who are you?" replies the young man; "and who then is my father?"

The mother then gives the narrative of her misfortunes. Esmoreit has a perception of the intrigues of the traitor who covets the crown, and whose machinations tend to the ruin of a king and a royal prince.

The next scene begins by a monologue of Robert. The king, having recovered his son, Robert has reason to fear lest his plots should be discovered, and expresses his regret that he did not kill the prince rather than expose his life. However, no suspicion rests upon him, and the king trusts him with the mission of restoring the queen to liberty, and conducting her back to court. Esmoreit is requested to relate his adventures, and Robert, like a bold courtier, expresses at every pause his indignation. "Now, my son," said the king, "you must abjure Mahomet, and believe in Mary and in God, whose goodness makes the grass of the fields to grow." "Provided," answered Esmoreit, "He preserves Damietta, who has taken care of my life, and whom I love beyond everything."

The scene is then changed to Damascus. Damietta complains of the lengthened absence of Esmoreit. Has he met with death, or pleasures that have made him forget his gentle friend? She will know the truth, even should she be obliged to traverse the whole earth. She confides her design to Master Platus, who consents to accompany her. Disguised

as Christian pilgrims, they arrive at the Court of Sicily, where Damietta again finds Esmoreit. So many proofs of love and fidelity fill up the measure of the young prince's happiness. The old monarch profits by this circumstance to place the crown upon the head of his son. At this sight, Robert hastens to pay his court to the future queen, but as he advances towards her, Platus recognises and unmasks the traitor. Robert attempts to deny everything; the astrologer overwhelms him with proofs. Robert, disconcerted, appeals "*to the judgment of God;*" but no one will enter the lists with him, and he soon loses all hope of escaping the vengeance that Esmoreit has sworn to take upon the author of his mother's sufferings: he undergoes the punishment of traitors, and the gallows puts an end to the life of the wretched man.

We see that Art has known how to give action and interest to this piece, to which neither the *Duke of Brunswick* nor *Lancelot* are inferior. In the latter fidelity triumphs over the most revolting humiliations. The *Duke of Brunswick* is the history of that mysterious sympathetic link in which lovers delight to believe.

The farces contained in this collection turn for the most part upon domestic misfortunes. They depict the manners of the day as being coarse and unbridled. Every observer who is without preju-

dice must perceive in these theatrical pieces traces of a profound knowledge of the human heart, joined to a ready imagination, and a talent of exposition which denotes that this was not a first attempt at the Drama.

Divers sanguinary contests broke out in Flanders, during the fourteenth century, between the burghers and peasantry, and the nobles.

Many satirical songs and poems prove the hatred which existed between the two classes. We will give as an instance one of these pieces, composed by a knight against his adversaries, who were known under the name of *Kerls*, which was probably the origin of the English word *Churls*.

"The Churls (Kerls) are the theme of our song. They are evil-minded, and wish to lord it over the knights. They wear long beards, and their clothes are ragged. Their hoods are all awry on their heads, and their stockings and shoes are in holes. They eat clotted milk and bread and cheese all the day long, and that is why the Churl is so stupid. He over-eats himself.

"A great piece of rye-bread is quite enough for him. He holds it in his hand as he goes to the plough. He is followed by his wife in rags, with her mouth stuffed half full with hemp, turning her spindle, till it is time for her to go and prepare the porringer for their meal. They eat clotted milk and

bread and cheese all the day long, and that is why, &c.

"To the merry-makings he goes. He thinks himself a lord, and is ready to knock down all who come in his way with his knotted club. He drinks wine until he is quite drunk, and then is all the world his own, — towns, villages, and lands. They eat clotted milk and bread and cheese, and that is why, &c.

"See the Churls go with their Zealand knives showing from their pockets.* Oh! may they be for ever cursed. Well shall we punish these Churls. We shall ride our horses through their fields. They have none but evil thoughts. We shall trample them on the ground, and hang them. They cannot escape us. They must bear the yoke again. They eat clotted milk and bread and cheese, and that is why the Churl is so stupid. He over-eats himself."

* Mr. Kervyn, in his *Histoire de Flandre*, and Mr. Louis de Baecker, in *Chants Historiques de la Flandre*, have both reproduced that song with some variations, and both, curiously enough, have made the same mistake as to the *Zealand Knife*, the one not translating the word at all, and the other supposing it signifies a stick, *bâton noueux*.

CHAP. III.

DISTURBED STATE OF THE COUNTRY.—CONTESTS WITH FRANCE.—PURITY OF THE FLEMISH LANGUAGE DETERIORATED.—CHAMBERS OF RHETORIC.—PILGRIMS.—INTRODUCTION OF THE DRAMA.—THE "LANDJUWEEL" AND "HAEGSPEL."—BURGUNDIAN DRAMA.—ALLEGORICAL PIECES.—THE "REFRAIN."—ANNA BYNS, CASTELEYN, VAN GHISTELLE, FRUYTIERS, ETC.—GOVERNMENT OF THE DUKE OF ALVA.—TRANSLATION OF THE PSALMS OF DAVID.—VAN DER VOORT.—HOUWAERT AND HIS WORKS.—CELEBRATED PREACHERS.—LUTHER'S DOCTRINES OPPOSED.—DATHENUS, MARNIX, ETC.

THE Battle of Roosebeke, in which the second Artevelde and his companions succumbed to numbers, was the last great enterprise of the Flemish against France. Half a century earlier, Jacques Artevelde had raised a formidable league against a country which had incessantly harboured ambitious designs against Flanders; but the course of events insensibly augmented French influence, not only over this country, but over a great many other adjacent provinces. The flames of civil war and discord raged throughout the whole of the Low Countries. Flanders was divided into patriots and partisans of France, into *Clauwaerts* and *Leliaerts*.*

* The first called so because they wore three lion's claws as their badge; the others because their red caps were embroidered with three *fleurs-de-lis*.

In Holland the *Hoekschen* and *Kabeljauwschen;* in Friesland, the *Schieringers* and the *Vetkoopers;* in Gueldres, the parties of *Bronkhorst* and of *Hekeren*, waged deadly war against each other. The Duke of Brabant was childless. The Count of Flanders, a prince who showed an unconquerable aversion to the language of his subjects, gave his daughter, his only legitimate child, in marriage to the Duke of Burgundy, and thus threw open to this powerful sovereign the entrance to the Low Countries. Taking a skilful advantage of the critical position of the different provinces, the Dukes of Burgundy made themselves masters of them in a few years, they were even upon the point of founding a kingdom capable of maintaining gloriously the struggle against France. But the Burgundian rule brought with it a scourge more formidable than the armed battalions of our foes. The Burgundians were a French people, and their dukes aspired to the throne of the Valois.

The purity of the language had already deteriorated; in Flanders by the double contact with the French and with Hainault, and in Holland by the transmission of the sovereign crown to the House d'Avesnes. The spirit of imitation took possession of the people, and the poets especially employed a heterogeneous language, a visible sign of the decay which had fastened upon the Netherlands. But we will not anticipate events.

On the accession of the House of Burgundy, the *Sprekers* and the *Gezellen* had for the most part forgotten their wandering life, and contracted more sedentary habits. The spirit of association, so powerful at that time, could not fail to act upon the poets, and the same causes which prompted men to unite in order to train themselves to war, caused them also to associate for important literary purposes.

Some writers date the origin of the Flemish Chambers of Rhetoric from an advanced period of the Middle Ages. The town of Diest lays claim to the possession of a poetical society as early as 1302, and according to their device, A MOR VINCIT, the Catherinists * of Alost would date from the year 1107. These assertions are improbable, although pilgrims returning from the Holy Land may have given representations in these places, and tradition may have augmented these chance meetings into a permanent society. It is also likely that the towns of Diest and Alost were for a time the residence of bands of fiddlers.

We have just spoken of the pilgrims. Although it may be inexact to assert that the drama was introduced into the Netherlands by those who had visited the Holy Land, — for it is to the Romans that we are directly indebted for the theatre, which at no period had entirely disappeared from that

* The Catherinists derived their name from St. Catherine, their patroness.

country,—still it is incontestable that pilgrims, on their return to Europe, gave scenic representations of the life of our Lord. In the churches, on great festivals, these representations concluded the Divine service at Christmas, at the Epiphany, at Easter, and at Pentecost. They were given either by priests or by *Gezellen;* probably the clergy and the laity mutually assisted in the same representation. They also played in the public places on the days of procession: thus Henri Bal, of Malines, at the request of the Magistrate of Lierre, composed and played with his companions from 1432 to 1475, at various times in this city, the play of St. Gomare and others. The Chamber of Rhetoric of Brussels, *La Fleur de Blé*, also played, in 1444, *The First Joy of the Virgin Mary*, the most ancient Flemish piece which has been discovered up to the present day.

In our opinion, the Chambers of Rhetoric, or dramatic and literary societies, owed their origin to the *Gezellen*, whether their meetings were only temporary, or whether, like the crossbow-men and other corporations of this kind in the fourteenth century, they had formed themselves into societies and confraternities. Some authors believe that they arose from the companies of crossbow-men; we are inclined to think that these latter, very flourishing at that period, called in the *Gezellen* to

enliven by their scenic performances their festivals, which sometimes lasted several days.

It is in the first years of the reign of the House of Burgundy that we see these companies form themselves and increase rapidly, throw themselves open to competition, and receive subsidies from the towns. In the year 1394, the city of Tournay held a literary meeting, at which the members of the Flemish Chambers were invited to strive for pre-eminence. But in the Walloon country these societies were not so universal as in Flanders, where in a short space of time there was scarcely a town to be found, or even a simple village, which had not its Chamber of Rhetoric. From Flanders the taste for these assemblies passed into Brabant. John IV., the founder of the University of Louvain, following the example of his cousin, the Duke of Burgundy, encouraged arts and sciences. After Brabant, Holland and Zealand took part in the movement.

The object and tendency of the Chambers of Rhetoric could not fail to attract the attention of the people. We have seen in the preceding chapter, that Maerlant, the great reformer of the literature of the thirteenth century, and with him some worthy contemporaries and successors, had given a didactic direction to the public mind. The people, it is true, always gifted with a sense of poetry, did

not abandon the sentimental style, as we shall soon have occasion to demonstrate; but constrained in their tastes by those who monopolised all intellectual resources, they formed themselves upon this new model, and literature took a deplorable direction with regard to form, expression and thought; and yet this school attained maturity, and produced a people who dared to measure themselves with the most formidable despot that Europe was ever afflicted with before the nineteenth century!

The Chambers of Rhetoric were divided into two categories: the free and the *not* free. To be declared free, two grants were necessary, one from the principal authority of the place, who, of his own accord, should engage to furnish subsidies; the other from the upper chamber (*hoofdkamer*), for so the *Alpha* and *Omega* of Ypres and the *Fontaine* of Ghent were entitled. By the latter, the right to be present at the meetings was secured.

The members of a chamber were divided into chiefs, *Hoofden*, and into private members, *Kameristen* or *Kamerbroeders*. The chiefs were called *Prince*, *Emperor*, *Doyen*, *Hoofdman*, *Facteur*. There was also a treasurer, *Fiscal*, to keep order, a standard-bearer and a jester.

The *Facteur* was the poet of the society. His office consisted in composing poems and theatrical pieces for great solemnities; in drawing up notes of invitation, and solving questions proposed by

other societies. He was obliged to teach the art of rhetoric to the young men, and distributed to each actor his part. Every *Facteur* had his device; generally an anagram of his name, by which he was known throughout the country. The real head of the chamber was the *Prince*, who enjoyed immense privileges. The *Facteur* was never permitted to read a poem without dedicating it to him.

The chambers occupied themselves with the composition of poems of different kinds, which at stated times they recited in public; but the scenic representations which took place on solemn festivals, or at the opening of the provincial meetings, were especially received with enthusiasm. These meetings were held in general for the free chambers of the same province. Among the large assemblies of the middle of the sixteenth century, we may cite the *Landjuweel* of 1539 at Ghent, for the Flemish Chambers, the *Landjuweel* and the *Haegspel* of 1561 at Antwerp, for the Chambers of Brabant, and the *Landjuweel* of the same date at Rotterdam, for the Dutch Chambers. The term *Landjuweel* (jewel of the country) signified the assemblage which took place in the towns, or rather the triumphal entry of these societies. The name of *Haegspel* (sport of the hedge) was given to the solemn entry into a village, or into a town, for the purpose of closing a *Landjuweel*.

Nothing could be more magnificent than these festivities, given at the expense of the nobility and of the citizens; foreigners as well as natives of the country hastened to witness them, and to join in the general acclamation, and thousands of cavaliers, vying in luxury and wealth, eagerly assembled there; amateurs also abounded, borne on triumphal cars, and disputing the palm of science and of art. The nobility were not long before they mixed in these solemnities; at first from idleness, then in order to imitate those sovereigns who, like Henry IV. of Brabant, and Philippe-le-Bel, were attached to Flemish literature and to national literary tastes; later, they found it convenient to consult together, during these assemblies, upon the more serious interest of the commonweal.

We have seen what was the relative position of these provincial chambers towards each other, and we have said that there were *hoofdkamers*, which were privileged by the right of grants.

Philippe-le-Bel, laying down this fact as a principle, and striving to give a uniform impulse to all the Flemish Chambers, established at Malines in 1493 a sovereign Chamber, to which he appointed, as *sovereign Prince*, his chaplain, Pierre Aelters. The decree was passed, "according to a convention of the different chambers, colleges, and confraternities of the art of rhetoric in the Flemish tongue

in the Low Countries, at least the majority of them, specially convoked for this purpose." In 1505 Aelters removed this sovereign Chamber from Malines to Ghent, where he procured an altar for it in the Prince's own chapel. It was to consist of fifteen members, and the President or Prince was the sovereign himself; but as he could not always be present at the meetings, a *Stadtholder* (or lieutenant) was elected. Fifteen pupils were obliged to be instructed in the art of rhetoric, and as this institution was partly religious, fifteen ladies were admitted into it, in honour of the fifteen joys of Mary. The general assemblies were held fifteen times in the course of the year. This distinction provoked the jealousy of the other chambers of Ghent, the more so as the *Fontaine* lost thereby its right of grant. They appealed to the Council of Flanders, and to the Grand Council at Malines, but the Emperor Maximilian, in his quality of guardian to his nephew Charles V., gave his decision on two separate occasions in favour of the sovereign Chamber. This institution hardly survived the Flemish princes, and Charles V. was its last chief. It greeted the Prince of Orange's arrival in 1577, and this was the last sign of vitality it gave.

The drama which the Burgundian dominion introduced from France was entirely allegorical; it was a cold representation of vices and virtues suc-

ceeding to the drama of the Middle Ages, a feeble link which connected ancient with modern tragedy. The allegorical drama, or *spel van sinne*, was well suited to the tendency of the Belgian mind, at once religious and satirical, and the more the public taste took the tone of criticism, the more it acquired that reactionary character which terminated in reform. From before the middle of the sixteenth century the spirit of Luther ruled in Flanders, and manifested itself by the voice of the rhetoricians. The greater number of the allegorical pieces played at Ghent at the *Landjuweel* in 1539, upon the question, "What is the greatest consolation to the dying man?" are cutting satires against the Pope, the monks, indulgences, pilgrimages, &c. Thus, from their first appearance, these pieces, authorised by Charles V. himself, were prohibited, and it is not without reason that the *Landjuweel* of 1539 was cited, as having first stirred up the literary world in favour of reform.

Let us go back to the facts which in this age of excitement crowd around us.

The dramas destined for competition being answers to given questions, their number increased considerably, and each society had its repertory. This repertory has generally remained unpublished, and even most of the authors of the published pieces are only known by their device. Amongst

those who have written allegorical pieces in the sixteenth century, are *Ryssaert van Spiere*, *D'Audenarde*, and *Guillaume van Haecht*, of Antwerp.

We may also point out as having fallen into the same oblivion, the authors of the "esbattements," satirists *par excellence*, the guardians of the farces of the Middle Ages, in some respects more witty and sarcastic, but certainly quite as immoral.

The Burgundian dominion made no great improvement in these matters. The pieces of *Corneille Everaert*, who wrote between the years 1509 and 1531 for the theatre of the *Drie Sanctinnen* of Bruges, are written in the same strain as those which we have already passed in review. They are "fabliaux" put into a dramatic form: an astonishing licence sometimes pervades them; but this was tolerated in dramatic writings, for our ancestors seem to have had other ideas than ourselves upon the manner in which the stage should act upon the audience. They represented scandal and vice in all their nakedness, and in the century of which we are speaking, these were exhibited through the prism of satire and burlesque: then, at the conclusion, came the moral application. A modern audience, on the contrary, requires to be amused, and will on no account listen to any application.

The pieces of Everaert that have remained unpublished (and, it must be confessed, no one has been

bold enough to publish them) are about thirty in number, almost all "esbattements" intermingled with some *spelen van sinne*, and *tafelspelen*, trifles which were represented at the feasts of nobles and of private individuals, compositions of divers kinds, often bearing the impress of the religious and political opinions of the day. Among the few authors of "esbattements" whose names are known, we will mention *J. De Knubber*, of Brussels, and *Colyn van Ryssel*.

The favourite form of drama was not exclusively such as we have mentioned above; there were some pieces which recalled the theatre of the Middle Ages; such as the *Homulus* of Van Diest, a poet of Brabant, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This Homulus is a species of Don Juan, perhaps the boldest conception we possess of that century; and justifies, even at the present day, the reception it met with, and which procured it the honour of being translated into Latin. The *Saint Trudon*, an unpublished drama of Fastraets, of Limburg, full of spirit and power, belongs rather to the so-called religious class of plays.

The historical form was even well adapted to the allegorical drama, which at once employed for its purposes the Bible, ancient history and the annals of the country. Among the authors of this style, we may mention the priest *François Machet*, whose

"Destruction of Sodom," played at Courtrai, has not yet been published; Keyaert, Houwaert, Duym, and, perhaps, De Roovere, Manilius, and Van Mander, whose dramatic pieces have never been found. Here the *Senses*, or *Zinnekens*, are usually only two in number, playing satirical and comic characters, and in some respects taking the part of the chorus in the Greek, or of the humble follower in the French tragedies. It is thus that in *Eneas and Dido* of Houwaert, *Jonstich van Herte*, and *Fame van Eere*, real satires, the consuming passion of the amorous couple is brought before us even while they are uttering bitter sarcasms against the weak Trojan prince, the frenzied queen, and the constancy of women: and as at that time the public mind was incessantly pre-occupied with the critical position in which our country was placed, the poet did not fear to interrupt the unity of the piece by making direct allusions to the politics of the day.

If from the theatre we turn our eyes to that other form of poetry so much cultivated by rhetorical poets, viz., the *Refrain* (Referein), we see this same tendency to an assimilation with the spirit of the times, the earnest feeling of the people sculptured in the couplets as upon blocks of granite. Here, again, we find no names; for what are a score of names to thousands of poems, the production of the popular mind, read and sung before assembled

cities! What are a hundred names in a country where innumerable towns and even hamlets counted at least their Chamber of Rhetoric, and sought with equal ardour to develope every intellectual faculty? But the theatre was exclusively under the control of the Chambers, while the *Refrain*, possessing more individuality, made its way independently of the multitude. Thus the theatrical pieces are, for the most part favourable to reform, while the *Refrain* had sturdy supporters on the side of Rome; and if, in general, the Catholic *Refrain* does not triumph over the advocates for reform, at least it maintains an advantageous position, and *Anna Byns* is acknowledged on all sides to have held a dignified place at the head of the poets of the early part of the sixteenth century, by the energy of her style, the purity of her language, and the harmony of her versification.

Anna Byns, a woman of extraordinary piety, was a teacher at Antwerp, her native town, where she died about the middle of the sixteenth century, at an advanced age. She was the oracle of the Catholics, who named her the *Sappho of Brabant;* a name but little suitable, it is true, but perfectly justified by the ideas of that period. They translated her verses into the Latin tongue, and reprinted her works during a century and a half. Certainly the reputation of an author is ephemeral, especially

when party spirit sustains or lowers it, but we may boldly assert—and our judgment is safe, since we find ourselves supported by all our critics—that the reputation of Anna Byns has in no wise deteriorated. But let the reader judge for himself. Here is a very close translation of one of her hymns:—

> "When on the verdant mead you tread,
> And soothe your heart with Nature's charms,
> Think of the land above your head,
> Which spring, and spring eternal warms;
> Where ripen fruits on earth unknown,
> And flowers without blight or thorn.
> How great that God whose word alone
> Could thus the earth with flowers adorn!
> Let your mind cull those fadeless flowers,
> Your heart that happy home desire,—
> More brilliant glow those heavenly bowers
> Than any monarch's rich attire.
> And now is music all around!
> All things proclaim their Maker's praise!"

Anna Byns shone in her greatest splendour under the government of Margaret of Austria; that is to say, at a time when the national language was in its most degenerate state. Although this princess was not in fact anti-national, and has even had several pretty Flemish verses attributed to her, yet she was active in propagating French notions. Brought up at the court of Louis XI., she was enthusiastically in favour of everything that was French. She

attracted around her the nobility of the country, whom she placed in contact with a crowd of French courtiers; she encouraged Frenchmen of wit and talent, with whom she disputed the palm of poetry, and aided by the first musicians of Europe, and the most renowned dancing-masters, her court became a continued succession of festivities. In the midst of this vortex of dissipation the people and their language were forgotten, the nobility acquired a half-foreign mode of communication, and the nation, always inclined to imitate their superiors in rank, accepted this jargon as the type of elegance and refinement. The Flemish language which had already lost its primitive purity, soon became difficult to be recognised, even when poets wielded the pen, and as at court, where all was frivolity and coquetry, so in literary circles, the true national feeling disappeared from poetry, and gave place to vapid and unmeaning ornament.

It was then that *Casteleyn* appeared, the legislator of the Flemish Parnassus of this period. Endowed with more patriotism than poetical genius, he wrote an *Art of Poetry*, called by him, after the fashion of the time, *Art of Rhetoric* (Const van Rhetoriken). It was rare in these days for a poet to publish his works, for especial note was taken of those who were bold enough to do so. Thus the work of Casteleyn, who was a priest and agent of

the Chamber *Pax Vobis* at Audenarde, only appeared after the death of the author, but it was preceded by a reputation which he had the good fortune to preserve during the whole of the Burgundian epoch. It was the *vade mecum* both of the *factor* and the pupils, divested of the exaggeration of the schools. In imitation of France, from whence we received them, the writers of the Low Countries made use of an infinite variety of verses, the names of which were equally barbarous and trivial, and which Casteleyn had the good sense to condemn in spite of the literary mountebanks. The styles most extolled by him, were the *Ballad*, the *Refrain*, and the *Snede*. They were poems divided into stanzas, the first from seven to nine, the second from ten to twenty verses, while the stanzas of the last were of an indefinite number. The *Refrain* took its name from the last verse, which usually recurred at the end of each stanza, and was reckoned more or less perfect according to its epigrammatic value. There were three different kinds, the serious, the gay, and the amorous ("in't wyse, in't zotte, en in't amoureuse"). The latter was a mere flight of fancy, but the two former represented the ideas and feelings of the day. It is in the *Refrain* that Anna Byns, in a language of singular purity for that epoch, hurls her energetic epigrams against Luther and his adherents. A

meek woman, whom faith rendered bold and courageous, she treated the language with such great felicity, that her poems, obsolete as the grammatical form may be, have not ceased to please by the harmony of the rythm and the simplicity and elegance of the style.

A few years previously, *Corneille van Ghistelle*, of Antwerp, had translated in verse the Comedies of Terence, the Satires of Horace, the Æneid of Virgil, and the Heroides of Ovid. His language is pure, and his translation poetical, although not so faithful as could be desired.

We must not forget to mention *John Fruytiers*, who, besides many works in prose and verse, published a rhymed translation of the book of *Ecclesiasticus*, full of power and harmony.

Let us quote a few lines : —

> " Who the boundless sky has spanned,
> Or fathomed the deep sea,
> Or watched the mighty Maker's hand,
> In all His secresy ?
> He is a King of power sublime,
> Of harmony the cause ;
> His throne is Truth, more old than Time,
> Obeyed with one applause."

Liberty of conscience was enthusiastically advocated. Whilst the placards of Charles V. threatened with the faggot a few poets and wretched

women, books were disseminated by thousands among the people. It was a grand and noble spectacle, this agitation of the popular mind, stimulated by the art of printing, recently introduced into every town of importance, and strengthened moreover by uneasy anticipations of a future which loomed more and more distinctly in the distance.

The desire of investigation necessitated the translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue. This task was confided to the University of Louvain. It was a sort of compensation for the repeated affront to the national feeling by the introduction of the French tongue into the departments of high administration.

In the meantime the Reformation continued to make progress; the press took up the controversy, and showed resistance in proportion to the restraints imposed upon it. Those who perished victims to their opinions were honoured as martyrs, and hymns were chanted to their honour. Messire Guillaume van Zuylen van Nyevelt published a collection of the Psalms of David, which he had set to music to the best known popular airs. These psalms formed an essential part of the Protestant service, replacing the Catholic rites. They were greeted with such enthusiasm by the people, notwithstanding every persecution, that in the year when they appeared they underwent at Antwerp

six different editions. Out of precaution, the well-known songs were parodied, and when necessary some other poetical compositions were substituted.

Considered as art, Van Zuylen's work is of the highest interest. In the general degeneracy of the language, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, popular song remained, if we may so express it, intact, and protected from the corruption of the rhetoricians. It continued to be what it had been in the preceding centuries, simple and natural with respect to poetical composition and to musical expression. The romances, the ballads, the love-songs, even the religious hymns, were indicative of an independent people, leading a life of their own, treading the path of progress without being disturbed by ideas irrelevant to their simple mode of existence.

Van Zuylen even sought to imitate the artless simplicity of the popular song, and had the merit of saving it from oblivion. But on the other hand, in adopting the psalm, the primitive song was forgotten, and the melody alone remained. The Catholics imitated the Reformers; their hymns were set to popular airs, and the text of the greater part of the old Flemish chants was lost for ever. The moral sentiment, however, remained always strongly impressed in the national character, and during the great crisis of the sixteenth century, as

well as before this period, the didactic form of poetry continued to prevail. The years which preceded the appearance of Anna Byns, sterile in literary productions, and which may be regarded as a season of repose in the midst of great social agitation, these years forming the last half of the fifteenth century, reckon among their eminent men Jacob Vilt, of Bruges, Lambert Goetman, Gérard Roelants, Thierry de Munster, and Jean van den Dale. The works of these authors are worthy of praise, for the purity of the language and the elegance of the style; the versification being yet free from contact with the rhetoricians. The best known among them is Jean van den Dale, who carried off the prize allotted by the Chamber of Rhetoric of Brussels, *Het Boek* (The Book). This prize consisted of a precious ring given by Philippe-le-Bon. There remain to us two poems of Van den Dale, printed after his death, about the middle of the sixteenth century; one is entitled *De Huere van der Doodt* (The Hour of Death), the other is called *Die Stove* (The Bathing-house).

The subject of the latter poem is a conversation between two women upon the difficulty of living at peace with their husbands, and on the best means of procuring domestic repose. The versification is easy and harmonious. This work contained, unfortunately, ideas but little conformable to the

requirements of the Duke of Alva; *Die Stove* was prohibited, and the works of the poet laureate became literary curiosities.

Here is a ballad of the sixteenth century, edited by *Willems*, and of which the original is anterior to Charlemagne:—

"'I will return to my country,' says Master Hildebrand; 'who will show me the way to Bern, my native town? That country has become unknown to me since many a long day; for thirty years I have not seen Dame Godeline.'

"'Do you wish to return to your country?' says Prince Abelor; 'you will find on the heaths a young and brave warrior; you will find on the frontier the young Hildebrand. See, he advances towards you.'

"'If he dares to attack me, I cleave his buckler in twain, and he shall have no reason to boast; I will cleave his buckler in twain, with so fearful a stroke, that his mother shall wail over him for a year.'

"'You shall not do so,' says the noble Dideryk (Théoderick). 'I love the young Hildebrand with all my heart; you shall salute him properly, such is my will, and he will let you ride tranquilly by.'

"At these words, the old Hildebrand entered a garden of roses on the frontier; on the frontier he met Hildebrand the younger. 'What is that old man doing in my father's country?'

"'You wear a breastplate of pure metal, like the son of a king: you rejoice my heart. You shall stay here and rest yourself.' The old man laughed a strange laugh, and replied:

"'Shall I stay and rest here? All my life long I have

spoken only of war and of battles, only of war and of battles throughout my journey; I tell you, young man, on that account is my beard nearly white.'

"'That beard, I will tear it out, and I will strike you so violently that the blood shall run down your cheeks: you shall give me your breastplate and your buckler; you are my prisoner, and you may thank God that I spare your life.'

"'As to my breastplate and buckler, they suit me very well; and no one has ever yet intimidated me.' They ceased their colloquy, and went out to fight with the sword; what they did you shall know.

"The youngest of the combatants gave the old man a terrible blow, such as he had never received; his horse drew back twenty paces. 'A woman taught you to strike thus!'

"'If I went to a school of women, it would be a shame to me. In my country there are neither knights nor nobles. I have, in my father's palace, neither knights nor companions, and that which I have not yet learnt I am learning.'

"The old man waves his buckler, and strikes so, that the sword of the young Hildebrand falls from his hand. Then he takes him by the body, and throws him down on the grass.

"'When one takes a pleasure in knocking one's self against an iron pot, one ought to like punishment; such is your case, young man, you would measure yourself against me. Confess yourself now, I will be your confessor, that you may escape the wolves.'

"'Wolves are wolves, they run about in the forest. I am a brave youth of the Greek stamp; my mother is named Dame Godeline, a noble princess, and Hildebrand is my father.'

"'Thy mother is named Dame Godeline, a noble princess, and Hildebrand is thy father! Thou art then my son? He

raised the visor of his casque, he kissed him. Now I thank God that I see thee again alive.'

" ' Oh! my father, my dear father, the wound which I gave you, I shall feel it every day in my heart.'

" ' Enough, my son; console thyself, I know a balm for this wound. Let us go hence, and may God guide us on our journey.'

" Those who saw them pass, asked, ' Who is that prisoner whom you are conducting?' and they replied, ' It is a wicked man—such another was never begotten by woman.'

" It was on a Saturday, at the hour of Vespers, that the young Hildebrand entered the garden of roses; he wore on his casque a golden garland, and had by his side a beloved father.

" He led him as if he were his prisoner, then made him sit at table by his mother's side. ' My son, my dear son, your conduct surprises me; why do you place this prisoner near me?'

" ' My mother,' said he, ' my mother! I will tell you the truth; down there, on the green heaths, he overthrew me, and almost deprived me of life. It is the old Hildebrand, my beloved father! Take him in your arms, and bid him welcome!'

" She took him in her arms, and gave him a kiss on his mouth. ' Now, I thank God that I see you once more alive! Let us depart from hence, and return to our own country, to Bern, where we are well known.' "

Without dwelling upon many other works, excellent as regards morality, but mediocre in a literary point of view, we pass on to the government of the Duke of Alva, the man whose

ostensible mission was to calm the political and religious excitement in the Low Countries.

This arrogant and inflexible soldier was as unfortunate in the execution of his purpose as he was persevering in his endeavours to destroy the national spirit of the Belgians. Instead of peace, he brought us civil war and the scaffold. Under the government of this man, who caused ten thousand heads to fall under the axe of the executioner, exile became a boon. Possessed of a penetrating mind, a single glance was sufficient to enable him to discover wherein lay the moral force of the people, and a war against the language and literary institutions of the country was immediately resolved upon. The duke began by writing his letters patent to the Council of Brabant, in French; but this provocation passed by unheeded. He took the most severe measures against the Chambers of Rhetoric: his intention was to seize the first opportunity to destroy them all; we have a proof of this in his treatment of the Chamber of Malines. After the horrible sack of this town in 1572, under the command of his son, the Duke of Alva restored its rights and privileges, but remained inflexible in prohibiting the re-opening of the Chamber of Rhetoric. The Burgomaster, Antoine van Stralen, whom we have seen at the head of the celebrated *Landjuweel* of 1562, was beheaded by his orders; a

great number of rhetoricians sank under the torture, and a still greater number sought to avoid this horrible death by flight. Frankenthal, Cologne, Wezel, Embden, in Germany, London and Norwich in England, were filled with Flemish refugees, who formed themselves into communities, remaining faithful to their country, but their hearts swelling with hatred against the foreign despot, then its absolute ruler. These unhappy exiles sought consolation in religion, and employed themselves in publishing Canticles and Psalms for Divine service.

We have seen that Van Zuylen van Nyewelt had published the Psalms of David with the melodies borrowed from popular songs; it was a means of facilitating the access of the reformed chants to the people. Some years later, and when the above-mentioned towns swarmed with Flemish fugitives, a noble of Ghent, Jean Utenhove, considering these melodies profane, made a new translation of the Psalms, a part of which he published during his seclusion at Embden in 1557 and 1561. His complete translation of the Psalms was considered by the Protestants as the most suitable for their form of worship, and it appeared in London in 1566, a short time after the death of the author. Although much in request, this translation was soon replaced by that of Dathenus, published in 1556, and reprinted at Rouen, at Delft, at Norwich, and else-

where. This work, flowing in its versification, and pure in style, surpassed, in the opinion of the Dutch, all subsequent translations up to the end of the last century, an epoch at which the Protestant hymns were entirely remodelled in the Low Countries. Many superior to these had certainly been published. In a literary point of view the work of Dathenus was very inferior to that of Philippe de Marnix, which had also the merit of being translated from the Hebrew text, whilst that of Dathenus was from the translation of Clément Marot. But the latter followed the colloquial idiom more than Marnix; and at the Council of Dordrecht (Synod of Dort), held in 1618 and 1619, in the discussions on the translation of the Bible, several grammatical forms were adopted peculiar to West Flanders, the native country of Dathenus, and to Holland. It must, moreover, be remarked, that the Protestants preserved, so to say, a superstitious respect for the work of the celebrated translator, even after the introduction of the new hymns at the end of the last century.

In 1565, another translation of the Psalms appeared at Ghent in Marot's style, by the painter Luc de Deere, and in 1579 Guillaume van Haecht published his collection for the Lutheran service at Antwerp. The translation made by Marnix appeared in the latter town in 1580. Other religious

hymns, for the use of sectarians, were written by Flemings or by Brabançons, among others by Jean Fruytiers, one of the councillors of the Prince of Orange, and by Van Mander, the celebrated painter, who, with his whole family, quitted his birthplace, the market-town of Meulebeke, to live at Amsterdam, after this town had abandoned the cause of the king.

From this short statement of the publication of hymns non-Catholic, we may understand how great must have been the religious agitation in Flanders and Brabant. Dathenus and Hembyse reigned supreme at Ghent, and during this remarkable period the capital of Flanders established a school for the use of the Reformers; the professional chairs were almost all occupied by Flemings, and during its short existence it produced distinguished pupils, the greater number of whom became afterwards celebrated at Leyden and elsewhere. To the list of didactic authors of the sixteenth century we must add two names belonging to that brilliant phalanx of men who, at a period when vigorous spirits abounded, wielded at the same time the pen and the sword. They are Jerome van der Voort, of Antwerp, and J. B. Houwaert, of Brussels. The first served in the army of the Prince of Orange, and accompanied him in all his expeditions. After having carried away a great many prizes at the

literary meetings, he wrote, during his military career, a work in verse upon the miseries of human life, remarkable for a deep insight into the human heart, a healthy tone of philosophy, and an energetic style. Houwaert, who remained a Catholic, was also one of the avowed partisans of the *Taciturne*. He took an active part in the defence of Brussels, and the capture of the citadel of Antwerp from the Spaniards. Besides his dramatic pieces, which we have already had occasion to mention, he composed several didactic poems, such as *The Gardens of the Virgins*, *The Course of the World*, *Political Instructions*, &c. The first of these works is a series of sixteen books or cantos upon the dangers to which the fair sex is exposed; it tends to demonstrate that love has no reality but when it is centred in God. A great many exemplifications taken from the Bible, from history, and from fables, colour it with a pleasant variety, often enlivened by a harmonious refrain. Few poems ever created such a sensation or had such popularity. It was thought at one time that a new Homer had appeared in Brabant. The young girls of Brussels presented the author with a crown of laurel, and a crowd of poets of both sexes emulously tuned their lyre to his honour. Houwaert was the predecessor of Cats, to whom he appears to have served as a model for the composition of *The Nuptial Ring* (De

Trouwring). He possessed the same facility in composition, for he finished his work in a single winter, in the midst of war, and in spite of his military duties. With the exception of this one point of resemblance, a comparison between these two poets would be unjust, although it may be truly said, that the literature of the sixteenth century has been too much depreciated; as if, all things considered, the age of Hooft, of Vondel, and of Cats, was not germinating in the productions of the preceding century.

At this period of intellectual labour, prose was not less cultivated than poetry, and we may say, to its honour, that it was less profaned by the admixture of foreign elements. Almost all matters appertaining to human intelligence were developed in the Flemish tongue, and at this epoch it is well known that the Low Countries produced the most eminent men of the age. Pulpit eloquence acquired betimes a masculine energy, — an evident proof of earnest application to the study of the language, as well as to the subjects which were sought to be propagated. The most celebrated Flemish preacher of the fifteenth century whose name has reached us, is Jean Brugman, of Kempen, who died at Nimeguen in 1473, after having preached in several towns of the northern Low Countries. Harphius, who died at Malines in

1478, and Jean Storm, whose light was quenched about the same time at Brussels, shone in this phalanx of ascetic preachers, at the head of whom we have already met with Van Ruysbroek, and where we also find the names of Taulerus, Brinkerink, Gerardus Magnus, or De Groote, Thomas-à-Kempis, and many others celebrated for their eloquence.

This would not be the proper place to speak of the vices which marked the preachers in general, as well among the ascetics as the scholars; it is, however, worthy of mention, that the chief fault of this period, the absurd medley of sacred and profane subjects, shows itself in a much less degree in the Flemish sermons than in those of France and Italy.

When the spirit of Luther made its way into the Low Countries, the mission of combating his ideas was not suited to the gentle and contemplative spirit of mysticism; it required more energy, more ardour of controversy, every means which opposition could employ. The first champion worthy of his success was Herenthals, who began preaching at Ypres, in 1519. After him came Corneille Adriaenssens, of deplorable memory, if one may believe the infamies attributed to him under the name of *Broeder Cornelis*. Born at Dort, in 1521, he for some time taught polite lite-

rature at Bruges, and became remarkable in the pulpit for his declamations against Erasmus. He thundered accusations of heresy against him with that burlesque monastic eloquence which seduces the multitude by its singularity, but not by any devotional unction, in which he was utterly deficient. Adriaenssens published his sermons at Antwerp in 1556.

But the rapid and universal progress of the Reformation seemed to take away from the Catholic preachers the gift of eloquence. Encountering in general only the incredulous or the fanatical, they had at last no other weapons but bad jests or controversial arguments. When at last the successes of the Prince of Parma had restored to the King of Spain his authority over the Belgian provinces, preachers were then seen to mount the pulpit truly worthy of the name. Such were Jacques van der Borg, Costerus, and especially Adriani, of Antwerp, whose sermons went through several editions.

During this state of disorder, the results obtained by the Reformers cannot have been much more satisfactory. We possess no information relative to the oratorical talents of those who perished at the stake, accused of heresy; but it is scarcely probable that the sermons of Herman and of Dathenus were more than denunciations against the king, the Catholic worship, and its ministers. Dathenus,

who we have already mentioned, as a translator of the Psalms, played too important a part during these troublous times for us not to pause a moment on his name. There are different opinions as to the manner of writing it, and as to his birth-place. Born at Ypres, or at Poperingue, Pierre Dathenus bore in his mother tongue the name of Daets or Daeten. It is supposed that he was a monk, of the order of the Carmelites, or of that of St. Frances or St. Dominick; even the year of his birth is unknown. With such mysterious antecedents, Dathenus was of an enterprising character, and an ardent disposition, possessing a popular style of eloquence, suited to gain over the masses. When still young, he was persecuted for his opinions. During his exile, he preached successively in London, Frankfort, Frankenthal, and Heidelberg, and assisted at several synods and congresses. On his return to his native country, he travelled through the Netherlands, evincing everywhere an extraordinary activity, and attracting the mass of the people by his sermons. He is accused of having encouraged the Iconoclasts, which appears to us probable enough, for he was on terms of intimacy with the Prince Palatine, Frederic III., and frequented his court when this prince, by a decree of the 3rd October, 1565, a few months before the churches in Belgium were pillaged, ordered and

organised the plunder of the Catholic cathedrals in his territories. At Ghent, Dathenus contracted a friendship for Hembyse, sharing his opinions and his energy. He passed into Holland, where he was thrown into prison for having made use of expressions insulting to the Prince of Orange. When he regained his liberty, he returned into Germany, where he changed his name for that of Pierre Montanus, and employed himself in the practice of medicine. He settled at Staden, near Bremen, and ultimately at Elbing, where he died in 1590, regretted by his new fellow-citizens, who erected a magnificent tomb to his memory, surmounted by his statue.

His life was that of a real genius. He was the man of the people, called everywhere, abroad as well as at home, to the most honourable posts; persecuted by some, beloved by others, and dying at a distance from his native country, venerated by those who had generously extended their hospitality to him. His powerful influence over the multitude he owed especially to his seductive eloquence; but his zeal for the propagation of Protestant principles also contributed to his popularity. The eagerness that was shown to nominate him President of the Synod of Dort, in 1570, sufficiently indicates the confidence of the learned in his vast acquirements.

When we speak of Dathenus, the name of Philippe de Marnix presents itself to the mind. Drawn towards each other by their political views at a time when opinions differed so widely, they both directed their steps to the same goal, and with the same ardour, although by different paths. While the voice of Dathenus roused the people, and by its vehemence drew them away from Rome and from Spain, the writings of Marnix produced the same results. Sprung from one of the first families of the country, the very soul of the confederation of the nobles, the intimate friend and counsellor of William of Orange, and renowned for his vast erudition, it was by anonymous writings that he struck the severest blows at his adversaries. Laying aside the vanity of an author, he felt that his voice would be so much the more powerful if it should resound as the universal expression of the nobility, the men of learning, and of the people. He was the mysterious author of the patriotic song *Wilhelmus van Nassauwen*, and of the *Roomsche Biekorf* (The Hive of the Roman Church). This last work, which Marnix wrote during his exile, appeared in 1569. It is, under an apologetic form, an outrageous satire upon Catholic worship and institutions, captivating the mind of the reader both by the purity and novelty of the style and the piquancy of the recital.

Marnix, born in Brussels in 1538, gave a new impulse to literature. With him began an era which presaged the sudden downfall of the literature of the rhetoricians, and the inauguration of the age of Hooft and of Vondel. His prose far surpassed that of his predecessors: more concise in style, it evinces a deeper philosophical study of the ancients, from whom the writer borrows all the poignancy which renders him the rival of Erasmus. He is also superior to most of his contemporaries in his perfect acquaintance with the language. In consequence of the innumerable barbarisms introduced during this period into the Flemish tongue, a fatal licence necessarily prevailed. Marnix contributed by his labours to the correction of grammatical errors, for the grammars of the day treated almost exclusively of orthography. These treatises were limited to three: the Flemish Orthography (*Nederlandsche Spellinghe*), by Joos Lambrecht, which appeared at Ghent in 1550; *L'Ortographia Linguæ Belgicæ*, by Ant. Tsestich, or Sexagius, at Louvain, in 1576; and the Flemish Orthography (*Nederduitsche Orthographie*), by Pontus de Heuiter, at Antwerp, in 1581. But already, at the end of the preceding century, the "Brothers of Common Life" had published grammatical precepts opposite to their Latin grammars; and it is probably to these men, as commendable for their national feeling as

for their piety, that we owe those Latin-Flemish dictionaries, among which the most ancient copies go as far back as the year 1477. At a later period we see Servilius in 1550, and Adrien Junius in 1577, facilitate by their dictionaries the study of the classical authors of Rome, then the objects of the exclusive admiration of the Belgians. But in these lexicons the language itself was not explained; this essential task was at first undertaken for a single dialect, that of Cleves, by G. van der Schueren, who printed his *Teutonista of Duytschlender* at Cologne, at the end of the fifteenth century, and afterwards more generally by Christoffe Plantyn and by Kilian. The latter especially opened a rich mine to Flemish philologers, and his etymological dictionary has continued to be the great standard of reference in the historical study of the language. About the middle of the sixteenth century, the Society of Rhetoric of Amsterdam, *In liefde bloeigende*, by the works of some of its members published in the name of this association, placed itself rapidly at the head of all the societies of the Low Countries. Its first production was a grammar, in which the preconised system of orthography is not the result of a single dialect, as with Lambrecht and Tsestich; Spiegel, its supposed author, having equally consulted philologers of Holland, Brabant, and Flanders. This chamber also published a

course of logic (*Ruygh-bewerp van de Redekaveling*) and a course of rhetoric (*Rederijck-kunst*). Although but lately established, it possessed even then the three most remarkable literary men among the Dutch, Spiegel, Roemer Visscher, and Coornhert. The latter devoted himself especially to elegant prose, and became the rival of Marnix. His translations of Cicero and Boëce, are distinguished for fidelity and purity of style, a praise too seldom merited by the translators of the first half of the fifteenth century. But the greater the progress in the study of languages, the greater the precision and elegance in the translations. In general, prose had a great superiority over poetry. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to compare the *Odyssey* by Coornhert, the *Iliad* and the *Georgics* by Van Mander, the *Æneid* and the *Comedies of Terence* by Van Ghistelle, with the translations into prose either by the poets or the classic prose writers.

In these times of stormy religious and political discussions, the nation felt a renewed thirst for poetry. Side by side with its Canticles, it breathed forth amorous ditties and the tales of romance which had been sung to the lyre of the last minstrels, since become foot-soldiers, or lansquenets, spread from hamlet to hamlet. The epic poems of the times of the Crusades having ceased to satisfy

the people in their primitive form, they were translated into prose without entirely losing their poetical essence. These romances occupied the first place in what is called *the blue library*, still much sought after throughout Germany. In these old editions the reader is sometimes shocked by a rhythmical cadence, and even by rhymes, melancholy remains of the ancient epic forms: but these defects, which in that age of transition were not regarded as such, are fully compensated for by a simplicity of style which gives to the recital a marvellous charm, acknowledged by all who have emancipated themselves from the yoke of prejudice. Among the romances of this time we will cite *Mariken de Nimègue*, printed at Antwerp in 1514, and written half in verse, half in prose. It is the strange history of a female Faustus, not less interesting than that which has occupied for three centuries the learned world.

By the side of the romances are ranged the travels which at this period were made in eastern countries. The most remarkable are those of Joos van Ghistel, a noble of Ghent, who must not be confounded with his namesake and contemporary, Corneille, whom we have already noticed among the translators of the classical poets of Rome.

In a literary point of view, the historians of this period, worthy of mention, are few in number.

The most celebrated belong to Flanders. Nicolas Despars, of Bruges, wrote a *Chronique* of this country, in an agreeable style, but it possesses to a great degree the defect of the first half of the sixteenth century to which it belongs; that is to say, it is crowded with borrowed terms and expressions. This chronicle, of which the tone is completely national, and the defects attributable to the partial education of the author, is a faithful type of the language then in vogue among the Flemish nobility. Another historian is also cited, Marc van Vaernewyck, born at Ghent, where he died at an advanced age. He wrote, amongst other works, a *History of Belgium* (Historie van Belgis), showing considerable erudition and research, but wanting method in the arrangement. This work is besides curious for its traditional portion, which entitles certain parts of it to be classed under the order of romance.

Before bringing this epoch to a close, we may affirm, that, in the sixteenth century especially, the Flemish people, who are fond of mingling the love of the mysterious with the positive, devoted themselves particularly to the study of natural sciences, especially to botany. About the year 1540, the celebrated German professor Fuchs brought out at Basle his *New Herbarium* (Den Nieuwen Herbarius), the most ancient work of the kind

known in our literature; he dedicated it to Mary of Hungary, sister to Charles V. Ten years later, Dodoné, of Malines, published his great treatise upon the same subject, which acquired an immense popularity in the country, and was translated into several languages by the most esteemed scholars.

CHAP. IV.

SPANISH DOMINION IN THE LOW COUNTRIES. — ITS DEPRESSING EFFECT ON LITERATURE. — CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY. — EMIGRATION FROM THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES.—REVIVAL OF LITERATURE.—HOOFT, COSTER, BREDERO, ETC. — ADAPTATION OF BIBLICAL SUBJECTS TO THE STAGE.—TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.—HEINSIUS, VAN DER NOOT, VONDEL, ETC.—HOOFT AND HIS WORKS.—POETRY OF CATS.—VAN ZEVECOTE.—ATTEMPTED SUBVERSION OF THE FLEMISH LANGUAGE.—FLEMISH WORKS PROHIBITED. — LITERARY PROGRESS PARALYSED. — YMMELOOT.— ECCLESIASTICAL INFLUENCE ON THE LITERATURE OF THE SPANISH PROVINCES. — TRANSLATIONS FROM THE LATIN. — DE WRÉE, DE VOS, ETC. — PASTORAL POEMS.—THE OPERA.—COMEDIES OF DE CONINCQ.—INTOLERANCE OF THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA.—OGIER AND HIS WORKS.

History has rarely had to inscribe upon its tablets a revolution more noble in its principles, more glorious in its actions, or more happy in its results, than the insurrection of the Low Countries against the Spanish dominion. No revolution had so deeply imbued the popular mind, nor had any political overthrow ever been conducted with such a feeling of national unity by all those whose intelligence elevated them above the vulgar. But alas! human passions, still more than the military genius of the common enemy, were the cause that only a portion of the country reaped the fruits of these gigantic efforts. Moral force sought support elsewhere, and the provinces which had been the first to expel the

intruders, fell again successively under the yoke, losing, with their liberty, their most illustrious sons, and the encouraging example of their leaders. The farther the sixteenth century advanced, the more alarming was the aspect of emigration in the Flemish provinces. Previous to the arrival of the Duke of Alva, it was inconsiderable in proportion to the large population of the country, but on the appearance of this bloodthirsty tyrant, there was a general flight, which continued during several years, the men of talent and capacity being the first to leave the country. The decrees of the Prince of Parma contributed to depopulate the land; whenever a town fell into his power, he granted to those who remained attached to the reformed worship a delay of two years to quit the country. The Court of Madrid preferred to make a desert of this beautiful territory rather than to grant it liberty of conscience. The aspect of the country was indeed distressing; in the metropolis of Flanders horses grazed where busy streets had been, and the wolves were literally masters of the plains around the towns. Six thousand families of Ghent received their passports. Wealth and talent had retired before the enemy, to live in peace and freedom beyond the Scheldt and the Meuse. At the end of the century the United Provinces were enriched by a considerable number of preachers,

theologians, teachers, printers, engravers, physicians, lawyers, diplomatists, mathematicians, admirals, superior officers, historians, and poets; all either Flemings or natives of Brabant. The University of Leyden alone, received, successively, seventeen professors belonging by birth to the southern provinces. The noble family of Damman, of Ghent, counted among its members seven preachers, the greater number of whom emigrated to Holland. Marnix, De Menin, and Aertsens were considered skilful diplomatists, and were employed on different embassies. The noble families of Van der Aa, d'Andelot, Boisot, Van Dorp, De Fiennes, De Loen, De Mérode, Van Zuylen, and many others, produced men who, to their last breath, fought on land and sea for the independence of the Low Countries.

This multitude, of every rank and condition, contributed greatly to the progress of civilisation, concentrated in a single focus, and to the burst of nationality which soon placed the United Provinces in the first rank among modern nations, and rendered its literature at the same time worthy of so remarkable a country. Thus the towns vied with the States-General in their reception of these thousands of new citizens. Many of them had been members of chambers of rhetoric: the towns of Holland instituted new chambers for themselves, distinguished from the original corporations by the

name of Chambers of Flanders or Brabant. They existed at Amsterdam, at Haarlem, Leyden, and Gonda. With respect to art, these institutions continued to follow in the track indicated by Casteleyn, whose works, as well as those of several other poets of the preceding epoch, were reprinted at different times at Rotterdam; they were more occupied with the magnificence of the meetings and public festivals than with the study of the language and with the spirit of poetry and oratory, considered as art. Nevertheless, if they made but little sensible progress as regards form—and, in this respect, the Dutch Chambers were as backward as those of the emigrants—they possessed patriotism in an eminent degree. The Brabant Chamber of Amsterdam, *wt levender jonste* (generosity animates it), rivalled in dramatic art the most illustrious native institutions; it encouraged the first efforts of Vondel, the prince of Flemish poets, who belonged to Antwerp, although, accidentally, born at Cologne, where his parents had first taken refuge. Besides Karel van Mander, with whom we have made the reader acquainted in the preceding epoch, the best known among the emigrant rhetorical poets are Zacharie Heyns, Jean Colm, and Abraham de Koningh.

Zacharie Heyns, born at Antwerp in 1570, was the son of Peter Heyns, who bequeathed to him the love of archeology and geography. His pro-

fession was printer and engraver. Having passed into Holland, he settled first at Amsterdam, and afterwards at Zwolle, where he died in 1640. He composed divers collections of didactic poems, in which we meet with a happy mixture of erudition, a healthy tone of philosophy, and a simple style. Besides this, he displayed a wonderful energy in the cause of the drama, wrote several pieces and *spelen van sinne*, which were mostly represented by the Chamber of Brabant at Amsterdam, and by the Flemish Chamber at Haarlem.

With the revival of our literature, a notable change ensued in the form of scenic performances. The allegorical representations were lively allusions to the vices of the age; in the new drama these characters were generally sustained by the people, and uttered in their provincial jargon, which rendered the contrast more striking, and shed over the picture a spirited variety of colouring. The drama of that day was a perfect representation of society: man was there depicted under the different phases of civilisation; the upper classes were for a while stripped of their conventional mask, and the people, notwithstanding their rough exterior, were made to utter the noblest sentiments.

The Greek chorus was adapted for this purpose, following the example of the English, who were not long, however, in relinquishing it. But the chorus,

in fact, served less to impart to the audience the secret feelings of the principal personages, than to draw moral maxims from their actions. This latter design was always kept in view in the last chorus, called by Vondel "the moral of the play."

The principal poets who entered upon the new dramatic career were Hooft, Coster and Bredero. The first, who is better known as a historian, and to whom we must again revert, brought out his *Gerard van Velsen* in 1613, the same year in which Coster published his *Tijsken van der Schilden.* Coster was the real originator of the Amsterdam Theatre. In his time the pieces were there represented by the Chambers of Flanders and Brabant. Coster established, at his own expense, a new chamber, named the Academy of Coster; it was inaugurated in 1617, but serious discussions having arisen between the old and the new institutions, the magistrate thought it his duty to interfere. In 1632 the two chambers were reconciled; a new theatre was built for them, which was opened in 1638 by the representation of the *Gisbert van Amstel* of Vondel.

In the time of Colm and of De Koningh, the Chamber of Brabant strove worthily with the ancient chamber, and with the academy of Coster. With respect to art, the first of these two dramatic authors scarcely deserves mention; his versification is harsh and his style obscure. Contrary to the

generality of his contemporaries, he preferred allegorical personages to the chorus. Like Hooft, he disdained to introduce satirical characters into tragedy. This novelty was tried by De Koningh, and brought into practice by Bredero.

In truth, it seems more conformable to human nature to look sometimes with a laughing eye on those actions which lead too often to melancholy results. It is the property of a happy organisation to be able sometimes to jest at destiny, and the sardonic smile of misfortune — the most tragical expression, perhaps, which the soul can give — is not far removed from the sad earnest gaze with which we search the human heart and question the coming events of time. It was so that England acquired her Shakspeare, the Genius of Tragedy *par excellence*, at least in modern ages.

In the Low Countries, Bredero carried this style to its highest point. This writer represented so faithfully the occurrences of common life, extracted so skilfully the tragic matter from every-day events, shed over everything so much cordial joviality, and so much good humour, that we sincerely regret not to see his manner more generally adopted on the stage. A capital defect in the Belgian character is the tendency to oscillate between different foreign systems, to suffer themselves to be governed by a narrow spirit which judges their own works of

genius according to the ruling taste of other nations. It is thus that Bredero, and thus that even Vondel fell, and later, all those whose writings did not adapt themselves to the yoke of Boileau. Perhaps the tragedies of Bredero perished under the accusation which was brought against his comedies and farces. The latter represented the manners of the day with a licence quite in opposition to the ideas of the present time, but which was then less offensive. It is true that thunderbolts were launched from the pulpit against the poet, but he alleged in his defence the writings of the ancients, which were everywhere offered to youth as models of art and taste. The war against dramatic authors did not stop here; the theatre and the pulpit were then two hostile camps, discharging against each other a murderous fire. This animosity became invested with a character of extreme bitterness, when, in 1630, Coster again brought upon the stage his tragedy of *Iphigénie,* directed against the clergy of Amsterdam. Vondel had also a terrible opposition to encounter, not only against his *Palamède*, which represented, under disguise, the death of Oldenbarneveld, but also against the tragedy of *Lucifer*, which was banished the theatre through the influence of the dominant clergy, although in the contest the town-council declared in favour of the poets. Vondel at least ought not to have en-

countered objections; on one side he represented classic art, reconciling it as far as he could with Christian ideas; and on the other, his pieces flowed from a source which also supplied the Reformers: they were taken for the most part from the history of the Bible. The inhabitants of Amsterdam having been great gainers by the new order of things, revelled in the prosperity of their metropolis, suddenly become so powerful; but Vondel was the child of misfortune, a foreigner by birth, and proscribed by the town of his forefathers. The Bible was the great consolation of the refugees, and Vondel anticipated the wants of his companions in misfortune, by choosing the subject of his tragedies from the Holy Writings.

In this respect Abraham de Koningh may be regarded as the precursor of Vondel. Having early escaped from the pursuit of the Duke of Alva, he also found a resource and consolation in adapting biblical subjects to the stage. His three tragedies, *Achab*, *Jephté*, and *Samson*, the first of which was played in 1612, do not deserve the complete oblivion into which they have fallen. Nevertheless, it is only in the choice of subjects that the pieces of De Koningh have any resemblance to those of Vondel. With the exception of Colm and two or three other dramatic poets, the chorus was generally adopted; but Vondel has made the nearest approach to the

Greek tragedies by the poetical beauty with which he has adorned the action, and the sublime character with which he has invested the chorus. He had strictly followed the rules of Aristotle with the exception of unity of place. The other dramatic poets paid no attention to these rules, some from ignorance, others from contempt of what they called pedantry, but especially, it appears to us, because they formed another conception of the pleasure which should result from the development of an action. The Greek masters, in order to concentrate the misfortunes of a hero into one dramatic effect, first impressed themselves deeply with their subject, and with the struggles of this personage, who was finally crushed beneath the decree of Destiny; they thus excited two sentiments of the most stimulating nature, fear and compassion. Vondel arrived at the same result, although he did not make *Fate* the basis of his tragedies. He had recourse to Divine Providence, making use of that beneficent conception in contrast to the cruelty of the heathen; but in the struggle this over-ruling Providence leaves less freedom to the powers of man, and for this very reason the situation of the hero has less effect upon the exalted sentiments of the spectator. It is perhaps to be deplored, that so sublime a genius as Vondel should have considered the Greek the only rational tragedy, for of all the

countries of Europe it is certainly the least suited to the Low Countries. Thus, those who were in appearance its greatest partisans imitated little of it but the chorus. For instance, Guillaume van Nieuwelandt, of Antwerp, and Jean de Valckgrave, a physician at Courtrai, were the only persons who, in the Spanish provinces, made any approach to the Greek style. They both rejected the unity of time and place; Van Nieuwelandt even terminated his dramatic career as he had commenced it, by avoiding, as far as possible, the Greek conception of the drama. He called Allegory to his assistance, and bestowed on Love a colouring almost chivalrous.

In the first years of the seventeenth century especially, great efforts were made to give a more free and elegant form to the Flemish language, and to restore to it that stability of which it had been deprived under the House of Burgundy. The translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue is a work of the highest interest in this respect. It was by the translation of sacred books that Luther established the high-German language, and it is to an analogous labour that Flemish is in a great measure indebted for its present form. After many fruitless attempts made at the same time by isolated scholars and by ecclesiastical authorities, the General Synod of Dort decided, in 1618, that a translation should be made from the original Hebrew and Greek texts,

after the example of Marnix; but his great age, added to the important functions to which he was called, obliged him to leave his work incomplete. The new translators and revisers belonged for the most part to Flemish and Brabançon emigrants: they were Baudaert, of Deynse; Thys, of Antwerp; Faukeel, of Bruges; Walæus, of Ghent; Van Kerckhoven, surnamed Polyander, of Ghent; Plancius, of Dranoutre, near Ypres; Sebastian Damman, of Ghent, and Gommarus, of Bruges, the leader of that celebrated band which caused its dogmas to be received as the religion of the state. The translation was completed by two Flemings, Baudaert and Walæus, and two Dutchmen, Bogerman and Hommius. Thus any idea of making one dialect prevail over another was removed. All these men, devoted to the fundamental work of our new edifice, the study of Flemish, were equally attached to the higher branches of education, and enjoyed, as literary or learned men, very great consideration. Baudaert, among other works, wrote a general history, of which the style is clear and precise; Thys is known by several works of controversy and history. Plancius, the first professor of navigation at Amsterdam, and the founder of the Dutch navy, deserves to be cited in mathematical and physical sciences, as the worthy rival of Simon Stevin, that illustrious scholar who so nobly avenged his mother tongue,

and to whom his native town of Bruges, after two centuries of forgetfulness, has just erected a monument.

At this same Synod of Dort, the states of the United Provinces nominated as their secretary another celebrated Fleming, Daniel Heinsius, born at Ghent in 1580. Especially known in the republic of letters as a philologer and the author of Latin works, he is no less remarkable for his Flemish writings, above all for the impetus he gave to versification. From the end of the sixteenth century, the want of a noble and energetic rhythm had been sensibly felt. The "refrain," with its unequal metre, possessed too little solemnity for this age of gigantic struggles, and the ancient heroic verse being forgotten, the Alexandrine was adopted. The first who appears to have made use of it is Jean van der Noot, of the noble Brabançon family of this name, who died at Antwerp in 1590. This new measure soon passed into Holland, where the sire Jacques Duym, born at Louvain, and residing at Leyden, was one of the first to adopt it. But Duym was a better patriot than versifier, and it required the musical ear and poetical genius united to the philological mind of Daniel Heinsius, to give to the heavy Alexandrine the harmony requisite to please the Flemish ear. Although Heinsius dedicated himself especially to classical

literature, his national poetry formed the basis of an era, not only in versification, but also in respect to thought and expression. He had even the glory of seeing the Germans of the north seized with enthusiasm for his poetry, which incited them to form, under the superintendence of Opitz, the Silesian school, which reckoned among its adherents many remarkable men.

The example of Heinsius was not altogether favourable to national literature; we regard it, on the contrary, as having exercised an evil influence, in the sense that this great man, imbued with Greek and Roman ideas, dressed up, in pretty Flemish verses, thoughts eminently classical. He neglected, or rather, as a consequence of his education, he was devoid of the true patriotic spirit; and as he was one of the oracles of the learned world, his example was contagious. From that time the literature of Flanders was tainted with an influence essentially classical, which endowed the country with many excellent works in prose and verse, but whose exclusive character was incessantly deplored by the most judicious men among the imitators of the ancients.

Heinsius was of the number of those poets who cultivated the friendship of the two sisters Marie Tesselschade and Anna Visscher, the daughters of the Roemer Visscher, whom we must class among

the restorers of literature. They were two young persons, uniting to the most amiable qualities and noble dispositions the most varied talents. Possessing a thorough knowledge of several languages, successfully cultivating the national poetry, excellent musicians, and endowed with a peculiar talent for writing and painting upon glass, something of an ideal character hovered around them, which attracted love and admiration. Heinsius and Cats, Hooft and Vondel, Van Baerle and Huygens, the *élite* of the Flemish Parnassus, courted the artistic society of these two young girls, who remained simple and modest in the midst of the exaggerated enthusiasm which they excited. For a long time they were the ornaments of the numerous literary *fêtes* that Hooft gave at his château of Muiden, near Amsterdam.

Hooft, with Vondel and Cats, constituted the triumvirate which ruled the golden age of Flemish literature. This was under the stadtholdership of Prince Frederic-Henry (1625–1647). All the learning of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is connected with these three men of genius, the heads of three schools. Hooft, generally less appreciated in Belgium than his two rivals, deserves, nevertheless, to be attentively studied. His poetry, graceful and flowing, full of sweetness and harmony when it is inspired by the attractions of beauty, or the

charms of rural life, rises in tragedy to the sublime in conception, and is adorned by the boldness and vigour of his style. But in this brilliant phalanx, Hooft is distinguished less by his poetical halo than by his genius as a historian. His versification is too much tinged by the early days of the Renaissance, when the tone adopted by authors wavered between two systems. Besides, he is not altogether free from the reproach of having imitated the tinsel of Italian poetry. To appreciate him in all his greatness, he must be known by his prose works, especially by his historical labours: *The Life of Henry IV.; The calamitous Consequences of the Elevation of the Medici;* and particularly by his *History of the Netherlands.* Before him the noble struggle against the Spaniards had been the theme of more than one remarkable pen; among others it had been recorded by the celebrated Van Meteren, of Antwerp, but no national historian possessed a style on which he could suitably model his own. Hooft, as a historian, studied the ancients just as he had allowed himself as a poet to be fascinated by the accents of Italy. He took Tacitus for his model, and only translated this forcible and concise historian after having read him over more than fifty times. Hooft has been reproached with being obscure, like his model, owing to his efforts to appear concise; but how much on the other hand

has he gained in style! In this respect he has not yet been equalled, and other nations possess few historians who can be compared to him in vigour and vivacity. Full of dignity and philosophy, Hooft rises on all occasions with his subject; admirable in his descriptions, he has the merit of being judicious in the appreciation of causes and effects, and although he may not lay claim to popularity, his works are destined to live as long as the language in which they are written.

Hooft was born at Amsterdam in 1581, and died in 1647, a short time after the death of Prince Frederic-Henry, to whom he had dedicated his history of the Netherlands, and some months before the Treaty of Munster, which consolidated the existence of the republic of the United Provinces. Vondel was born in 1587. He had not, like his rival, the happiness of receiving a finished education, but he was gifted by nature with an ardent soul and an impressible imagination; the circumstances in which he passed his youth exalted this imagination to a point which rendered him the sublimest poet of the Low Countries. Vondel made his first appearance upon the Brabançon Theatre, of Amsterdam, by some very feeble plays, which were soon forgotten for masterpieces of the first order. His conceptions were inspired by the grave events of the period. He was the leading man of his day.

At one time, by his tragedy of *Palamède*, he inflicted a cutting satire on the execution of Barneveld; at another he hurled the thunderbolts of his indignation under the name of *Harpoon* (Harpoen), or under that of *Curry-comb* (Roskam) and of *Rommelpot*, he pilloried the vices and follies of the day. At other times he sang the heroic exploits of the Prince of Orange, of Ruyter and of Tromp. He cultivated different styles with equal success. Artless and simple before the cradle of a child, he soared like the haughty eagle when inspired by a noble feat of arms. We have already had occasion to speak of his tragedies; we will add, that among the choruses, sublime odes are to be met with, comparable to the finest pieces of ancient and modern times. Such is the chorus of the angels in *Lucifer*, a piece remarkable for the simplicity of the plan and the boldness of the execution; also the chorus of the "Clarisses," in *Gysbert d'Amstel*. In his tragedies, Vondel gave to the Alexandrine verse that variety of treatment which can alone render it worthy of the subject, and in this respect, as well as for expression, he was without an equal among his contemporaries. As a poet, Vondel is not faultless, and his works have undergone pitiless criticisms. But, in spite of these systematic attacks, and notwithstanding a sort of conspiracy to lower this prince of poets of the golden age of Flemish literature,

Vondel still retains his sceptre, and a comparison with the different literatures of the day will only serve to sanction the judgment passed upon his works by all true lovers of the beautiful.

Of all the emigrants, or descendants of emigrants, established in Holland, Vondel was, perhaps, the most tolerant of Catholic dogmas. It was no merit at this period to appear religious, every one was really so; this motive, therefore, cannot have induced Vondel, when arrived at an advanced age, to become a convert to Catholicism. However that may be, he was influenced in his decision neither by honours, office, nor flattery; it was rather the current of his poetical genius which led him on to the determination. He had long since published his *Mysteries of the Altar* (Altaer Geheimenissen), a didactic poem in three books, entirely in favour of Catholicism. After this fact in his life, which made so great a sensation and alienated many of his friends from him, he composed his *St. John the Precursor* (Johannes de Boetgezant), an historical poem in six books. He also finished some cantos of a grand epic poem, the *Constantiniade*, the subject of which was the conversion to Christianity of Constantine the Great: this fragment is lost. In these works, and others of the same class, we see the poetical genius of Vondel develope itself in all its splendour, surprising us especially by the facility

with which he throws the most brilliant colours over the most dry and arid subjects.

Vondel was ninety-one years of age when he gently fell asleep, February 5th, 1679.

Cats also lived to the age of eighty-three. He was born in 1577. The qualities by which the writings of this poet recommend themselves, are of a totally different nature from those of his two rivals. Here there is no force, none of that herculean energy, none of those representations which inspire terror, and allure you through scenes of bloodshed and tears, none of those metaphors conceived in the exaltation of feeling. With Cats all is calm; his poetry resembles a limpid brook which flows noiselessly over the even ground of *Zorgvliet*. It is the didactic poem in its simplest and most artless form. Less prodigal of poetical fervour, Cats acquired far greater popularity than his two rivals. For two centuries the works of this poet, so naïvely called by the people "The Book of Cats," are found as often in the hut of the fisherman, and the cottage of the peasant, as in the library of the scholar and the home of the wealthy: they have even gone by the name of the "Household Bible,"—a praise which in certain respects they deserve, being the emanation of a loving heart and of profound and enlightened reflection. What Fleming, what Batavian is there, whose steps in the

arduous path of life have not been sustained by Cats? Where is the woman whose grief he has not consoled?

The poet of *Zorgvliet* must not be represented as an anchorite working out his gloomy precepts in the depths of his retreat. Both by taste and position, Cats was one of the most sociable men of the republic. Sprung from a distinguished family of Zealand, he rose by degrees to the first dignity of the state, that of Pensionary of Holland, a title equivalent to that of Prime Minister, and which he retained during fifteen years, until, at his own request, his resignation was accepted, and he saw himself replaced by the celebrated Jean de Wit. Cats was a skilful lawyer, and one of the most learned men of his time. Promoted by a neighbouring country to the degree of Doctor of Law, employed in various embassies, connected as a large proprietor with persons of every condition, he acquired, as a lawyer and as a public man, an immense knowledge of men and of things. This was the man who, without eclipsing any one, obtained an unrivalled popularity in modern literature. Writing with extraordinary facility, and pre-occupied up to the day of his death with the moral civilisation of his fellow-creatures, Cats published a great number of works,-among which the *Wedding Ring* (Trouwring) and *Marriage* (Houwelyck) are the principal. The *Wedding Ring* is a series of amorous

and conjugal adventures, full of interest and instruction; *Marriage* depicts the different phases of female life in six pictures, bearing the titles of *Virgin*, *Mistress*, *Betrothed*, *Wife*, *Mother*, and *Widow*. These two poems are interspersed with prose, which gives them a striking peculiarity. By means of this artifice, the monotony of the recital, which is sometimes extended beyond due limits, and to which the peculiar versification of Cats singularly lends itself, is skilfully broken to make way for an agreeable variety. On the verge of the tomb, Cats, — this man with a soul so disinterested, that on resigning his office of Grand Pensionary he threw himself on his knees before the assembled council of the States-General, to thank God that He had vouchsafed to grant him rest from his labours,— Cats, we say, drew up his *Confessions*, full of child-like simplicity, and of instructive lessons for practical life, as the last legacy of a man devoted to his country and to humanity, the last act of an existence consecrated to the endeavour to harmonise the enjoyments of life with the duties of society. Cats is pre-eminently the poet of the honest man and of the people. He died in 1660.

Everywhere practical and useful, everywhere original and often sublime, Bilderdyk says of him:

> " Good beloved father Cats,
> How much treasure dost thou contain ! "

"Oh! happy, happy he, whose generous soul can rise
Above the dross of wealth, or pomp, or vanities;
Scorn splendour, pleasure, fame, and say, with honest pride,
I have ye not indeed, but yet am satisfied."

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, emblematical literature was sedulously cultivated by men of learning in almost every country in Europe. It was the favourite medium with the wise and the good for the diffusion of the noblest precepts of Christian morality. To render those precepts more attractive, the aid of all the most celebrated contemporary artists and engravers was enlisted. Of all the eminent men who became famous in this field of combined literature and art, none achieved greater success, both as poet and moralist, than Jacob Cats, whose memory, together with that of Adrien van de Venne, the illustrator of his productions, will be cherished and honoured as long as the Flemings and their language exist.*

It is in consequence of this just praise, that last year a beautiful volume of the *Moral Emblems* of Cats, translated into English, was published in London, where they were almost unknown. Notwithstanding Sir W. Beechey, in his *Life of Reynolds*, states that Sir Joshua's richest store was Jacob Cats's book of emblems, which his grand-

* Notes on Books, &c. Longman & Co., Nov. 1859.

mother, a native of the Netherlands, had brought with her from that country.

Here we terminate this rapid sketch of the three great types who manifested themselves in Flemish literature at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Hooft, Vondel, and Cats. These three men of genius had each their school, from whence issued writings remarkable for style and for thought.

The most celebrated historian emanating from the school of Hooft is Gérard Brandt, the author of the *History of the Reformation* and of the *Life of De Ruyter*. Among the numerous imitators of Vondel, he who approached the nearest to him was Antonides, the author of a poem which may be called epic, in honour of the town of Amsterdam and of its commerce, entitled *De Ystroom* (The River Y). In this poem we admire the boldness of the conception, and the energy of the style; but it is sometimes overloaded with mythological images, a defect to be imputed rather to the period than to the poet in particular. Among the most remarkable men of Holland and of the Spanish Low Countries, Cats found many imitators; it may even be asserted, that he was for a long time the almost exclusive model in Flanders and Brabant, under the Spanish and Austrian rule. But before we follow this school upon Belgian soil, we must pause for a moment to speak of those who abandoned the

banks of the Lys and Scheldt, to breathe the air of freedom on a territory disencumbered of the common enemy.

It is worthy of remark, that the three great men of whom we have just spoken, are closely connected with Brabant, and especially with the town of Antwerp. Vondel, born in Cologne, but of Antwerp extraction, like Rubens, essayed his tragic genius on the theatre of Amsterdam, and it is evident, from his fine treatise in prose, entitled *Introduction to National Poetry*, that he felt great interest in the dialect of the town which was his cradle. But where would our pen lead us, did we attempt to speak of the happy influence exercised over literature in Holland by emigrants who were not, so-called, literary men? Who does not think of that Jeremias de Decker, worthy to be placed by the side of Vondel, having, like this prince of Flemish poets, sprung from a father, a native of Antwerp, to whom he owed all his literary education! Van Baerle, the celebrated Latin poet, but whose Flemish poems, although not numerous, will survive his Latin productions, was also born at Antwerp. When this queen of the Scheldt submitted to the arms of Farnese, she had already lost a great number of her children, and she received a final blow by the truce of twelve years which closed the Scheldt to her, and deprived her of innumerable families belonging to the middle and industrious classes.

Among those who emigrated in these days of humiliation, Belgium lost her most noble poet, Jacques van Zevecote, justly named the prince of his class. Van Zevecote was born at Ghent, January 16th, 1596. Passionately in love with a young girl, his countrywoman, whom he celebrated under the name of "Thaumantis," he had the grief of seeing the object of his song prefer the more living torch of Hymen to the ignis fatuus of the poet. Of an irritable and impetuous disposition, rushing from the excess of joy into the abyss of sorrow, the poet, deeply wounded, shut himself up in a monastery in his native town, under the habit of a friar of St. Augustine. But the monk's cowl could not stifle the tumult of his heart; his ardent soul chafed in the solitude of his cell; the soil of Ghent trembled and groaned like burning lava under the feet of the angry poet. Scarcely eighteen years of age, Zevecote quitted the cloister, and arming himself with a pilgrim's staff, he endeavoured to forget his unhappy love by a journey to Rome. Before quitting his native town, he addressed a last remembrance to his faithless mistress; then, directing his steps through Lorraine and Switzerland, beyond the Alps, he visited the city of the Seven Hills, and returned by France to his own country. This is the first epoch of the poet's life. The amatory poems of Zevecote are not numerous, but to compensate for this, there reigns throughout them an admirable

ingenuousness and delightful freshness of colouring. Zevecote's style bears marks of the study that he made of the poems of his cousin, Daniel Heinsius, to whom he dedicated some verses at the age of sixteen. Heinsius himself, as we have seen, made the ancients his model, and Zevecote, manifesting the same taste as his cousin, obtained for himself a great reputation in Latin poetry. During the truce of twelve years, Heinsius revisited his native town, and Zevecote, whose ideas had not yet been turned to the cloister, full of enthusiasm for the celebrated professor of Leyden, wished to follow him as his pupil, — a project which met with opposition from his father. After his return from Rome, cured, probably, of his love, Zevecote nevertheless failed to find happiness in Ghent, which he accused of being a city ungrateful to its children; nor was he even more contented in any part of Belgium, given up as it was to the exactions of the Spanish Government. He taught in the colleges of his order at Ghent and Brussels until the year 1623; he then set out for Leyden, with the intention of visiting his cousin, or rather, of establishing himself in Holland. He did so, and soon publicly professed the reformed worship. In 1626 he was appointed to the chair of history and elocution at the University of Harderwyk, where he died on the 17th of March, 1642, at the age of forty-six. This second

period of his life Zevecote consecrated especially to didactic poetry and to dramatic pictures. We are indebted to him for a selection of emblems, charming little poems, unfolding with great brilliancy the precepts of a healthy-toned philosophy. He devoted his dramatic talent exclusively to the siege of Leyden; he composed on this subject a tragedy, *The Siege*, and a tragi-comedy, *Raising the Siege*, two pieces which were probably not destined for the theatre. They are rather dramatic poems than tragedies, and consist of monologues and choruses following one another with marked regularity. But their style is so energetic, and so rich in imagery, that in this respect Zevecote yields to none of his contemporaries. His invectives, however, against the Spanish nation display too evidently the hatred he bore to the tyrants of his country. Here is a fine specimen of his vigorous style:—

"Have faith in the changeable winds,
Have faith in the unsteady child,
Have faith in the rolling waves,
Rely on the ice, or the moon;
But beware of trusting those
Who never kept an oath.

"When they first wetted their lips,
They imbibed treason with
Their mother's milk;
Therefore have many noble countries
Been ruined, depopulated, or
Brought under the yoke.

"The snow will cease to be cold,
The summer deprived of the rays
Of the sun, the clouds will be
Immovable, the huge sand-hills on the shore
Levelled, the fire will cease to burn,
Before you will find good faith
In the bosom of a Spaniard."

This was the last, but at the same time the most violent, anathema uttered against those who had destroyed Flemish nationality. But this cry did not reach the land in which the early youth of the poet had expanded. A sanitary line surrounded the United Provinces, and prohibited the admission of Flemish books upon Flemish soil. The national language, which had, so to speak, identified itself with the ideas of the innovators, gave umbrage to the foreign chiefs, and even the Archduke Albert himself, called upon to govern as a sovereign throughout the whole of the Low Countries, shared this aversion to the Flemish tongue: the extreme limit of condescension consisted in replying in high-German to those Flemings who understood only their own language. It does not appear that this prince treated his Walloon subjects with more politeness: if historians are to be believed, he never answered them but in Latin, German or Spanish. In the interior, public spirit was subdued and mastered, but on the frontiers an indefatigable army of emigrants kept watch, waiting

for the opportunity to snatch from the hands of the foreigner their fatherland, and to revive in it a spirit of liberty and independence. The lion was not yet inured to slavery, the chains which bound him must be tightened. The printers and booksellers promised, upon oath, not to put in circulation books considered inimical to the Catholic Faith; the censorship permitted an immoral book to pass, and forbade a work in which the mind of a profound thinker endeavoured to disclose itself.

Belgium was thus prevented from participating in the literary progress of which Holland was so justly proud. Certain chambers of rhetoric, it is true, replied here and there to questions proposed by the meetings, and some few men preserved sufficient independence to enter into correspondence with the illustrious writers of the North, but these isolated instances of intercourse, these passing relations, exercised no influence over civilisation; the people saw their language neglected by those very men who had taken upon themselves the task of furnishing them with a class of literature distinct from works of asceticism. The chambers of rhetoric, whose privileges had been restored during the truce of twelve years, found themselves paralysed in their efforts towards progress. A great metamorphosis would have been necessary to enable them to restore dignity to their language and their

literature. They needed encouragement from high quarters. Formerly the sovereign himself had been seen to confer rewards, and now the most insignificant courtier would have feared to compromise his dignity by protecting an institution fallen into disrepute.

National literature had not remained absolutely stationary in the re-conquered provinces; it had received an impulse in Flanders and Brabant, and, in spite of the ostensible favours granted to Belgian Latin works, the genius of the nation still struggled nobly in its distress. It is not permitted to tyranny to curb suddenly a generous tendency, and a nation does not pass immediately from liberty to the yoke of servitude, any more than slaves at once take the stamp of a free people. The progressive work of civilisation was evident everywhere: in the fine arts, in the sciences, and even in those hybrid productions, sad echoes of the lays of Rome, chanted in honour of other men and of other creeds. In the midst of this general stir, the basis of the movement, patriotism, could not remain in a state of immobility. In spite of the forced separation from Holland, in spite of the limited communication between the conquered provinces, and the want of a literary centre, the new modification in the grammatical and prosodical forms showed itself simultaneously everywhere. Daniel Heinsius, following the steps of Van der Noot, had restored

to the Alexandrine verse a character more conformable to the genius of the Flemish language. About the same time, similar attempts were made by a native of Ypres, Jacques Ymmeloot, lord of Steenbrugge. In 1614, this author published a poem on the advantages of peace, with a preface in which he speaks of the harmony of the iambic verse. At a later period he developed more fully his ideas upon the metre, in a work, the French title of which is *La France et la Flandre réformées ; ou traité enseignant la vraye méthode d'une nouvelle poésie françoise et thyoise, harmonieuse et délectable.* Ypres, 1626. Considered from the point at which Flemish versification has now arrived, the theory of Ymmeloot is very defective, but it is, nevertheless, true that his verses are harmonious and full of vigour. According to him, the cause of the preference shown by so many poets to the Latin rather than to the Flemish language, is to be attributed to the fact, that the latter was without rhythm. Some from fear, others from adulation, pleaded this pretext to cover their defection from the national cause. With every nation that is impressed with a sense of its own dignity, language is a ductile and malleable matter, not a dead body on which the galvanism of genius is powerless.

The success and the example of Ymmeloot were productive, however, of great results for Ypres.

This town was for a time the centre of the literary movement in Flanders, as Audenarde had formerly been under Casteleyn. Ymmeloot asserts, that his example produced in his native town alone as many Flemish poets as appeared in all the other parts of the Spanish Low Countries. This exaggeration would rather prove a general mania for turning everything into verse, than the fact of a steady progress in literature. However that may be, the example of this noble innovator was fruitful in this part of Flanders, of which the city of Ypres was the central point. Ymmeloot found formidable rivals in the lord of Terdeghem, near Cassel, in Jean Bellet, and in Claude de Clerck.

In a wider circle than the precincts of Ypres, the latter might have distinguished himself preeminently, for the distrustful measures of the Spanish government had brought about the isolation of the various central points of civilisation. His style was fluent and full of wit. Chronicles assure us that Cats held him in high estimation; that from the extremity of Holland, this great man came to Ypres to pass three days with the man of the people; that he entertained him in a worthy manner, and that these three days were spent in a continual exchange of poetical improvisations. This anecdote rests, chiefly, upon the popularity of Cats, the model poet of the Spanish Low Countries, who

surpassed Vondel in the ideas in vogue at this period among the Belgians. "You will one day equal Cats," wrote the Archbishop of Malines, in his pious simplicity, to the prince of our poets, who had just dedicated to him *The Secrets of the Altar*. At that time Vondel was at the zenith of his fame, and had published *Lucifer*, *Palamedes* and *Jephtha*, with several other masterpieces. But from a false interpretation of the moral aim of poetry, no merit was recognised except in didactic poems, which presented in their versification a simple and even a somewhat trivial form. The verses of Vondel, vigorous and concise, demanded deep reflection on the part of the reader, and reflection, in those days, was suspected of leading to heresy and revolt. No poet was better fitted to be set up as a model than the amiable author of *Zorgvliet*, and those who gave to their imagination a more ardent flight, saw themselves neglected, although they followed the general current of ideas. It must also, in justice, be acknowledged, that in the Spanish Low Countries the cultivation of the language was already at too low an ebb to admit of the favourable reception of a clear and concise style. The poet was incompetent to execute, and the people incapable of appreciating. We find a striking instance of this in Guillaume Caudron d'Alost (born in 1607, died in 1692). He was called the Poet Laureate, on account

of the laurels he had gained in many literary assemblies in Flanders and in Holland. An enemy to uncouth words, he tortured his own language and wished to walk in the steps of men who were better versed in its knowledge. His study of the poets was devoid of criticism, for in his works, to which we cannot refuse a certain amount of merit, there is less of Vondel than of Jean Vos. This Jean Vos was a glazier of Amsterdam. To a great deal of talent he united excessive exaggeration; of a presumptuous character, he showed himself envious of Vondel, whose defects he caricatured, without attaining the sublime beauties of this great master. Those who aimed at the grandiose in style, followed, indiscriminately, these two poets. Caudron thus acted; he translated the *Rosamunda*, a Latin tragedy of Zevecote, and composed an original poem, entitled, *The Life of St. Catherine of Alexandria*, patroness of the Society of Rhetoric at Alost, of which society he was probably the poet. But poet laureate though he was, and notwithstanding the halo which surrounded him, Caudron did not induce his countrymen to admire his works: they remained unpublished until a change had taken place in the national feeling, that is to say, towards the middle of the eighteenth century.

Becoming from day to day more exclusively didactic, and even dogmatic, the literature of the

Spanish provinces fell under ecclesiastical influence. The cloisters especially furnished a number of poets and prose writers, uniting to the didactic a mysticism sufficiently agreeable to the mind, if it had not been vulgarised so as to become a type of its own century. The first among these poets who presents himself to our notice is Juste Harduyn, an esteemed pupil of Juste Lipse, and cousin of Zevecote. Born at Ghent in 1580, Harduyn embraced the clerical profession, and was appointed priest of the village of Andegem, near Termonde. He is in general only known by his translations; but his style is superior to that of most of his countrymen who published original works. The most popular of his writings is a collection in prose and verse, entitled *Goddelyke Wenschen* (Pious Wishes), translated from the Latin of the Flemish Jesuit, Hugo. They are the aspirations of an ardent soul towards Jesus, uttered in passionate language, which betrays an affection somewhat terrestrial. These effusions were very agreeable to devout and contemplative minds, retired in cloisters and convents, fatigued with the vicissitudes of life at this period of political disorders. Poetry especially encouraged this tone of feeling; and if the name of the Son of God did not occasionally undeceive us, we should imagine that we were reading the most ardent amatory verses.

But this worldly colouring soon disappeared from ecclesiastical poetry. It is found neither in Van der Elst nor in Gheschier. The first, who was vicar at Bouchout, in the "*polders*" of Flanders, published at Antwerp, in 1622, a selection of sacred poetry (*Gheestelycke Gedichten*), in which he passes in review the different grades of society, and the duties attached to each, as well as the vices which disordered them. The other, who was curé of the Convent of Beguins at Bruges, published a work in verse at Antwerp (1643), entitled *Des Wereldts Proefsteen* (The Touchstone of the World), a free translation of a Latin work of *Antoine a Burgundia*. Gheschier is wanting in sublimity; but Van der Elst has much taste and feeling, and it is evident that he caught his inspiration from his favourite models, Heinsius and Cats.

The lay poets of this epoch gave themselves up for the most part to the didactic style. Such were Olivier de Wrée, born in 1597, died in 1652, better known as a historian, and his protégé, Lambert de Vos, both lawyers of Bruges. These two men, renowned for their erudition, preferred the facetious and satirical style, as possessing more vigour than that to which Flanders was accustomed. In Brabant, the Louvain professor, Van der Born (Erycus Puteanus), and the first lawyers of Brussels, such as Walhorn, Van der Borcht, and others, distin-

guished themselves in this species of composition, so well received by the people. The latter of these poets was scarcely twenty years old when he published a work remarkable for the accuracy of its language and ideas. *The Mirror of Self-knowledge* (Der Spieghel der Eighen-kennisse) places the young author at the head of the poets of his time. Two years previously, in 1641, he had published *The Brussels Garden of Cupid* (Den Brusselschen Bloemhof van Cupido). Deprived of freedom of thought, literature, when it passed from the didactic, became of necessity personal. The theatre remained, but in the Spanish Low Countries it was subjected to a blind censorship which suffered vice to pass free, and fettered all progress.

The classical drama was not suited to the taste of the Belgian people, accustomed to see the nobles constantly mixing among them, and regarding as foreigners and aliens all those who did not fraternise with the middle classes. It was necessary that the theatre should become romantic, either by a direct emanation from the drama of the Middle Ages, or by borrowing from other nations. We have already seen the manner in which Bredero and those of his school conceived their art; others mingled the styles of Bredero and Vondel, until the chorus was entirely given up; then tragi-comedy reigned for a time. At Antwerp, where scenic en-

tertainments were chiefly cultivated, during the first half of the seventeenth century, various representations were successively in favour. From 1617 to 1628, Van Nieuwelandt put upon the stage, tragedies with choruses, sometimes entirely after the manner of Vondel, at others presenting the most extravagant union of the classic and the romantic. About the same period, Ysermans brought into vogue the Pastoral and the Opera. About 1635, De Coninck imitated Lopez de Vega, while Strypen, Van den Brande, and Van Engelen, kept to a style which approaches that of Calderon.

The pastoral of the Italians is the eclogue of the ancients dramatised. It is a picture of indolence, of indifference towards all elevation of feeling and idea, of sentimentality, and of egotism,—subjects well chosen for a people whom it is desirable to lull to sleep. Nevertheless, the Low Countries have produced very few pastorals, and Ysermans has only published the principal airs of his pieces. In Flanders the epoch was unfavourable to pastoral poetry, notwithstanding the efforts made by several writers to render it predominant.

Messire Frederico de Coninck walked in the steps of Lopez de Vega. As the Spanish poet divided his pieces into three days, even when the action included whole years, so our poet of Antwerp separated his comedies into three parts. The

denomination "comedy" is used by him in the more extensive sense of drama, in the same manner that the Flemings still attach to this word the idea of play or spectacle. The comedies of De Coninecq are constructed upon the Spanish form, or what the French call "comédies de *cap et d'épée*;" the subject is well carried out, and they fix the attention of the spectator. Like the greater part of the romantic school of those days, he produces a false meretricious effect, by a play upon words truly ridiculous. The distinguished personages declaim in majestic Alexandrine verse, the subordinates speak in doggerel, the valet plays the part of buffoon, and the people, with their Grub-street philosophy, replace the poetical action of the chorus. As Vondel had endeavoured to reproduce on the stage of Amsterdam the purity of the Greek theatre, so De Coninecq wished to transplant into Flemish soil the Spanish comedy, with all its various characteristics; influenced, probably, by the idea that a homogeneous literature was suitable to all the countries belonging to the crown of Spain. He was, as may be supposed, a clever courtier. He was the first to give a foreign aspect to his Christian name, convinced, doubtless, that the Flemish nobility ought to identify itself with that of Spain. Thus the contrast in the representations was most singular. The action takes place in Spain: everything is

according to the Spanish fashion,—nocturnal visits, abductions, outrages upon chastity, dagger-thrusts, robbery, bravado, &c.,—and in the midst of all this, the veriest rabble of Antwerp declaim, in patois, allusions to the events of the day. It is true that we meet with this variety in Bredero; but with him, as later with Calderon, the characters have nothing foreign but the name; and therefore there is less medley of the serious and the comic. This confusion may, however, exceed all bounds, as in the *Rosalinde* of Gérard van den Brande, in which the comic scenes are drawn out to such an extent that they form of themselves a separate piece. In the comedies of De Coninck, intrigue predominates to the detriment of sentiment, but the contrary is the case in the dramas of his compatriots, Van den Brande, Strype, and Van Engelen: unfortunately these three writers are only known by one piece each. At this epoch a dramatic author met with more difficulties than encouragement; the unanimous complaints against the "zoÿles," and the usual relinquishment of all effort after a first, or at most a second trial, render it very probable that a spirit of indolence impeded the progress of a civilising literature.

The religious dramas, since then so multiplied, bear the visible impress of the intolerance of that epoch. This spirit manifested itself most forcibly

in Holland, where all mental excitement was especially carried to extreme: we may convince ourselves of this, by reading the tragedies of Oudaen. This influence contributed rather to brutalise the morals than to ennoble them. But people then were not so scrupulous; coarse manners were not yet confined to the lower classes, nor were delicate ears closed to discourse which would now offend every man having any pretension to the quality of refinement.

Ogier went still farther; he introduced upon the stage the coarsest language, and he made the entire action to consist of that which with Bredero was only a passing scene of gossip between common people. The poet of Amsterdam excused himself, by pleading the necessity of making every one speak according to his station, and appealed to the example of the ancients. The poet of Antwerp arrived at the same result by opposite reasoning. "It is necessary to represent vice on the stage," said he, "as the Romans formerly on certain days intoxicated their slaves and showed them to their children, in order that they might at an early age become inspired with a disgust for debauchery." And in order that his *Comedy of La Paillardise* should not produce a bad effect, the poet takes care to represent "the most dangerous and contemptible characteristics of this vice." He hopes that the

ladies, married or single, will not be alarmed at seeing libertinism chastised, even when it wears the garb of virtue, since it only serves to give a brilliancy to chastity to contrast it with vice, as when one places the diamond by the side of glass. In finishing his prologue, he begs the public to use his work as a mirror. Ogier was aware that the theatre ought to be a school of morals, not so much for hearing virtue commended, as for exciting the love of moral beauty by placing it side by side with the hideousness of vice. It is in this that the difference between the theatre and the pulpit consists. "It is not an evil," he continues, "to look at vice face to face; on the contrary, it is the means of deterring men from committing it." Undoubtedly, this proposition may be true for civilised man; but in order to arrive at this result, a higher degree of moral feeling is requisite than is possessed by the masses, who commonly, like untutored children, accept with enthusiasm all that is most reprehensible. In fact, there is much truth in the view which the dramatist of Antwerp takes of the subject; and the application he has made of it militates much in his favour. The stage demands action and vivacity, but the sublimest representation of morality leaves the spectator cold and indifferent. The greater, on the other hand, the sufferings of virtue, the more does the spectator applaud her

triumph. Even he who is under the dominion of the actual vice represented on the stage will feel himself touched and softened, and even if he be not corrected, he will be surprised into a disavowal of the vice, both in his heart and by his lips. But that which we cannot expect from the stage is a school of morals in which virtue is dogmatically taught. The mission of the theatre is in truth that indicated by our author.

In whatever light we regard the works of Ogier, they are to be numbered among the most remarkable and meritorious of the epoch. As dramas, they are distinguished by vivacity and by a continued vein of interest, and by their fidelity in depicting the life of the people, devoid alike of exaggeration and of extenuation. On the other hand, the criticism of the follies of the day is at all times so appropriate, that this author may justly be called the censor of the people.

The liberty he took of dividing his pieces into an indeterminate number of scenes, instead of separating them into three or five acts, gives them a peculiar character which is not without its charm. The plot is weak, and turns usually upon a misunderstanding; but here again the master mind is apparent, which so well comprehended the men of the age. It would be wrong to expect from Ogier an intrigue skilfully woven. It was not for

courtiers that he drew his pictures, but for honest Flemish citizens, for those who encouraged Teniers and Ostade. And that, moreover, which denotes the excellence of his taste in the midst of apparent irregularities, is the care he takes to avoid that puerile play of words which was extolled around him under the name of poetry.

Born at Antwerp in 1619, Ogier was seventeen years old when he composed his first piece, *Gluttony*. He exposed upon the stage, each in their turn, the divers social leprosies of the age, and published, towards the end of his days, a collection, the piquant title of which, *The seven mortal Sins* (De seven Hooft-sonden), sufficiently indicates the nature of the subject. In his first pieces he had made use of an uneven metre, after the example of Bredero; but *Idleness and Avarice*, written many years after *Gluttony*, are in Alexandrine verse. This is a change worthy of remark, it appears to us, and by no means favourable to originality in comedy. As soon as valets, peasants, or shopkeepers began to express themselves in so regular and heavy a rhythm, it was to be expected that the light style, which, during half a century, had constituted the soul of the theatres of Amsterdam and of Antwerp, should disappear. The master affected the largest amount of gravity, the valet imitated his master, the peasant imitated the valet, and that gay open-air life of the

people was forced to retreat before the measured discourses of the ante-chamber. The French theatre slowly sapped the foundations of the national stage.

After the example of De Coninecq, Ogier called his pieces comedies; but he used this word in its most enlarged dramatical sense, and distinguished it from tragedy by the lower tone of the subjects chosen. In reality these pieces have nothing in common with what is called comedy or farce; they represent vice in all its deformity. But if the justification of an author is found in the applause of the public, which after all is the fairest test of dramatic talent, we ought, at the same time that we are severe upon Ogier, to grant him our earnest attention.

It is not rare to see a dramatist draw to himself a momentary popularity, the spirit of which is not in accordance with the general taste of the nation. Such was not the fate of Ogier; his comedies not only formed the delight of the Brabanters and the Dutch during half a century, but after his death they were read with avidity, and represented throughout the whole of the Low Countries. More than this, one of his pieces, *Anger*, under the title of *The Dissolute Sailor* (De Moedwillige Bootsgezel), maintained its reputation upon the stage of Amsterdam, even among the masterpieces of the French school. Bidloo considered Ogier worthy to

be placed among the great poets of the Netherlands; after such an opinion, we cannot admit that the impression produced by his pieces was unfavourable. Such a justification, emanating from estimable critics, and confirmed by the public, ought to be accepted; it is of more value, in our opinion, than the dry dissertation of a pedant.

CHAP. V.

INFLUENCE OF FRENCH LITERATURE.—ITS OPPONENTS.—JEAN LAMBRECHT. —ANTONIDES.—DESCARTES.—SPINOSA.— VAN DER BORCHT. — ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A THEATRE AT BRUSSELS.— DRAMATISTS.— PEYS, ETC.— DIDACTIC POETRY. — POIRTERS. — VLOERS, CROON, ETC. — RELIGIOUS POETRY. — DUNKIRK CHAMBER OF RHETORIC. — PELS. — DE SWAEN. — POETS OF BRUGES. — LABARE. — PASTORAL POETRY. — WELLEKENS. — POOT. — LITERATURE OF THE SOUTH. — POETRY OF HOLLAND. — FEITAMA.—THE BROTHERS VAN HAREN.— PROSE WRITERS.—PHILOLOGY. —MEYER.—STEVENS.—TEN KATE.—HUYDECOPER.

We enter upon a most whimsical epoch, a real period of confusion. The French spirit, favoured by the most contradictory statements, makes its way upon all points; on the other hand, the people in Belgium are constantly deterred from every effort towards a progressive civilisation; we see two opposite elements meet, and contribute involuntarily to fetter the development of the public mind. France was on the watch to take possession of the Belgian provinces; the continual military occupation of our country by her armies, propagated the French language among the middle classes, and the marriage of Louis XIV. with the daughter of the sovereign of these countries, gave rise to more amicable relations between the French and the Flemish. Meanwhile the United Provinces received thousands of

refugee families, driven from their country in consequence of the Edict of Nantes, which prohibited the free exercise of the reformed worship in France. These exiles were welcomed with open arms, and churches were allotted to them, known under the name of Walloon churches, in which their worship was performed in their own language. Like the soldiers and servants of King Louis, the refugees favoured exclusively French literature, which at this period was really at its zenith, and eclipsed all others in grammatical construction and refinement of expression. Monastic ideas, which had become more rigid since all apprehension of danger from the Reformation had passed away, acting in concert with French influence, stifled the spirit of romance in Flemish literature. Besides, these ideas spread without difficulty among the people. The love of a peaceful fireside existence is a fundamental trait of the Flemish character; it was only necessary to ennoble this existence, and to supply it with more elevated means of enjoyment. The French spirit met with great resistance, it had to contend with two secondary influences, all-powerful over the people, Farce and Song; even the clergy, foreseeing the danger of French ascendency, withstood it seriously. Among those who in Flanders wished to raise a bulwark against France, Jean Lambrecht deserves to occupy the first place. Residing at

Bruges, he was present at the Hague in a diplomatic character during the Treaty of Munster; he even appears to have entertained the exiled King James II. of England. Among his works, Lambrecht published a series of poems on the peace between Spain and France, interspersed with short satirical theatrical pieces against the Gallo-mania, which went on increasing from day to day. Holland also, whose spirit of independence, it might be imagined, would keep her aloof from pernicious contact, Holland imbibed still more deeply the influence of French ideas. Antonides, the worthy pupil of Vondel, combated ardently against this ascendency, which weighed not only upon the cultivation of the *belles-lettres*, but also upon sound philosophical criticism. Descartes had resided in Holland during the best years of his studious life, and had formed there a great number of pupils and friends. This little country was at this period especially distinguished by the study of natural and philosophical sciences. After the gloomy system of Van Helmont, imprisoned in Belgium as a heretic, and whose Flemish works were printed in Holland, Descartes introduced his rationalism, and of all the systems which succeeded each other in the course of this century, his perhaps found the greater number of disciples. Spinoza followed him. His works were originally written in Flemish, and printed in our

language in 1677 (the year of his death); but they were not openly acknowledged, and his writings appeared only with his initials, and without the name of the publisher.

The struggle against the ascendency of French ideas was vigorously maintained at Brussels, where Flemish literature was successfully cultivated; among its opponents were Godin*, the lawyers Broomans, Walhorn, Van der Borcht, De Condé, and the brothers De Grieck, all united by bonds of friendship as well as by a kindred love of art and patriotism. The greater number of these authors devoted themselves to the drama; and Van der Borcht was on the point of witnessing the success of his plan for establishing a permanent theatre in the capital of the Belgian provinces. It was the first attempt of this kind since the erection of the stage at Amsterdam; for, in all probability, the theatre of Antwerp was not prior to the year 1663, when the reunion of the two chambers of rhetoric of this town, the *Wallflower* and the *Olive Branch*, took place. Van der Borcht laboured at his plan even before 1650, and was powerfully assisted by Jacques de Condé, and Claude and Jean de Grieck. Claude de Grieck brought out several pieces; he

* He is the first who made use of the insulting term "Fransquillon" to indicate a Frenchman, who, in a foreign country, arrogates to himself the right to assume the tone of a master.

showed himself a man of taste and tact in endeavouring to unite the romantic drama with the modern French tragedy. If Van der Borcht's plan had succeeded, Brussels might have had the honour of endowing the country with a national drama. If one may judge from *Zenobia*, that which was too vivacious in the romantic drama would have been moderated under the more dignified forms of French tragedy; the horrible and the licentious would have given way to less hideous pictures; but, on the other hand, a tame and inanimate love would not have been substituted for a free and ardent passion, nor a cold and chilling recital for brilliant and striking action. This reform would even have had a salutary influence upon comedy; it would have purged farce of its coarseness without on that account forcing the Flemings to accept a style repugnant to their manners and their habits.

Nothing then remained but to copy or to translate the French authors. One of the first who applied themselves to the translation of the French drama was Adrien Peys, a poet of Antwerp, whose earliest dramatic production appeared in 1661. He translated some pieces of Rotrou, of Corneille, and, above all, of Molière. But Peys did not possess a feeling for the beautiful. Incapable of appreciating the gems contained in his models, he rarely fixed upon the masterpieces; in his original compositions

he either followed the old school or else he wrote fairy tales. In general, the French theatre was imitated more from fashion than from conviction. For some length of time, pieces of every form and description were represented on the stages of Amsterdam and of Antwerp; some comic authors, such as Alewyn, who remained faithful to the old system, attained great success; and Messire van den Brant, the rival of Peys, and who appears to have best understood the French theatre, sought to excite emotion by a representation of all that was most horrible.

Some of these dramatic writers are no less distinguished by their didactic works. Van der Borcht, for instance, had been little known until now, except by his *Mirror of Self-knowledge* (Spieghel der Eyghen-kennisse), 1643, a poem partly satirical, partly elegiac, and of undeniable merit. Godin is known by his *Adages* and other fugitive pieces, written in a moral and ascetic style. Walhorn only produced his *Poetical Medley;* and the brothers De Grieck published several works anonymously. This exclusive infatuation for didactic poetry was singularly influential in the propagation of what may be termed monkish or monastic literature; it was narrow-minded, without heart, without elevation, cold, and sacrificing the cheerful aspects of life to an exaggerated asceticism. Works of this

class especially, with some few exceptions, checked the intellectual development of the people, urging men to mortification of the mind, to religious fanaticism, and even to superstition. We shall now pass in review the principal writers of this class.

The first, and without dispute the most remarkable, is the Jesuit Adrien Poirters, born at Oosterwyk, in the diocese of Antwerp, in 1606, and who died at Malines in 1675. Added to a prodigious activity, Poirters possessed great fluency of speech and an inexhaustible poetical *verve*. Endowed with a sagacious and penetrating mind, he had such an intuitive perception of the ways and usages of the world, that his descriptions might be taken for pictures from life. Destined for the pulpit, which resounded with his fervid eloquence during thirty years at Antwerp, Malines, and at Lierre, he was unable to give himself freely to his natural taste for poetry. Nevertheless, he bequeathed to his country several volumes, which among Catholics made his name almost as popular as that of Cats. Father Poirters devoted his mind and attention chiefly to the moral improvement of young girls. His principal work, *The World deprived of its Mask* (Het Masker van de Wereld), which has already passed through forty editions, and which served as a model for several other works, is a series of pictures representing the vices of women, and

the dangers to which the fair sex are exposed. At this time an unbridled luxury pervaded all ranks of society: the citizens rivalled the nobility, and the country-people clad themselves in velvet. The sage has said, "all is vanity." Father Poirters developed this maxim with much talent. His book is a series of allegorical engravings, explained by short poems; then follow, partly in prose and partly in verse, allocutions to the devout soul, and epilogues, the whole accompanied with stories, witticisms, and reflections, the style of which is easy and fluent. It is a curious mixture of wit and simplicity. This work has, without doubt, contributed to check the licentiousness of manners; the only reproach that can be made to it is that it is sometimes weak and vulgar. In the other writings of Poirters we meet with the same merits and the same defects. Everywhere there appears a tendency to portray happiness as consisting entirely in self-mortification and compression of the soul. This was an admirable doctrine for a people strongly attached to domestic life, but dedicated to slavery, and who, in despair, had only to choose between an abyss of vice and complete self-annihilation.

In his attempts to reduce existence to a purely passive state, Poirters at least gives evidence of much intellectual power; he depicts, with talent, the happiness which is derived from inward peace.

There is an infinite distance between him and Father Vloers, of the order of the Dominicans, who was also born in Brabant, and died in 1663, at the age of sixty. Vloers possesses the miserable distinction of being the poet, or rather the rhymester, of superstition. His works made sufficient noise, even in those sad decrepit days, to draw from the extremities of Holland the shafts of ridicule against the author of worthless stories, who accredited them as miracles. The first work of Vloers is entitled, *Wonderful Miracles of the Rosary described in Verse* (Wonderbare Mirakelen van den Roosenkrans): Antwerp, 1656. The title of the second is, *Nosegay of Spiritual Roses* (Geestelycken Roosen-tuyl): Antwerp, 1661. This nosegay is a collection of wonderful stories upon the efficacy of the rosary: in one place it is a wicked woman raised from the tomb, in another a soldier condemned to death and snatched from the gallows; or else a woman whom the rosary has saved from a watery grave, stolen property recovered, a mad bull pacified, a murdered man recalled to life, and other similar recitals, the whole illustrated by analogous engravings. The works of Father Vloers passed into the hands of the multitude under the protection of three ecclesiastical benedictions; fortunately they have become curiosities in literature.

By the side of Poirters, we may place Father

Croon, a canon of the church of St. Martin, at Louvain, who died in 1683. The five volumes of this poet contain, almost exclusively, emblems applied to everything that struck his mind; the various professions, the different implements in use, all appeared to furnish him with an appropriate subject for moral lessons. To an easy versification Father Croon unites the talent of plunging his reader into the profoundest meditation on subjects apparently the most simple.

J. Jacques Moons, a canon of the order of the Prémontrés of the Abbey of St. Michael, at Antwerp, and who was still alive in 1689, composed some hundreds of fables, enriched with moral instruction, the principal merit of which consists in their ease and fluency. Jean de Leenheer, of the order of the Augustines, who died in 1691, about the age of fifty, the author, among other works, of a *Theatre of Madmen* (Tooneel den Sotten): Brussels, 1669, pleases by the free construction of his verses. Pierre Mallants, a Carthusian friar, of Lierre, whose *Life of St. Brunon* (Antwerp, 1673), and *The Path of the Cross* (Antwerp, 1691), are well known, has imitated Cats with much cleverness. The Carmelite, De Crock, who died in Brussels in 1674, has occasional happy inspirations, but affords a striking example of the decline of good sense at this period, and makes a confused mixture of the heathen gods

with the most sacred subjects of the Christian religion. The minor brother, Joannes A. Castro, published several volumes between 1686 and 1694, in which he imitated Poirters with tolerable success. Several other monks distinguished themselves in the same career; the best known are Josse van der Cruyce, Nerrinck, Vichet, Scholten, Van de Bempde, and De Busschere. The greater number of these poets inserted prose, more or less elegant, into their poetry: this was in order that the reader should not be fatigued by verses often monotonous, and to which this change of form gave a certain degree of relief.

The monastic orders also reaped great advantages from song. The collections of ascetic lays had considerably multiplied since the popular ballad had perished amid the religious troubles of the sixteenth century. Neither of the two parties in the Low Countries had, in this respect, any cause to envy the other. In the United Provinces there was scarcely a poet who did not exact from his lyre some religious lay, either for public worship, or more especially for social meetings. Even at the present day, it is no rare thing to see, in the northern part of the Low Countries, usually on Saturday evening, all the family collected to sing the praises of the Lord, and to give thanks to Him for His benefits. Thus our literature abounds in songs of this

kind. The Belgian provinces are no less rich in this respect; but there is a difference in the general tone of the productions of the two countries: this difference arises from a disparity in religious ideas.

In Holland, the songs are for the most part imbued with a gloomy character; in Belgium, they are in general distinguished by their simplicity and even their gaiety. The productions of the Fathers Bolognino, Van Loemel, Lixbona, Bellemans, Van Sambeck, Harts, and others, have a mild and contemplative tone, through which, however, a didactic and rather a severe spirit is perceptible.

The same literary taste then reigned both in Belgium and Holland. In the latter country, exclusively of the theatre, and with the exception of some amorous pieces, of which those of Starter, of Jonctys, and of Jean Luyken are reckoned among the prettiest and most original, it was the voice of religion which made itself heard among the people. The distinction that we have endeavoured to establish between the songs belonging to the two divisions of the Low Countries, is equally applicable to the productions which were not composed for music: of this we may be convinced by reading the poems of Pierre de Groot, the son of Hugo Grotius, of Anslo, of Vollenhoven, and of Dullaert. All these authors evince a great taste for the sublime, the indisputable result of the study of Vondel.

Before them Krul, Jean de Bruine the younger, and others, wrote after the manner of Cats, and gave themselves up to that caustic gaiety, so frequently observed in the Belgian poets, among whom it is fitting we should mention Gérard van Wolschaten, of Antwerp.

We have already shown how French influence absorbed Flemish literature in the north, as well as in the south. This influence was singularly promoted in Holland by a kind of languor visible in the greater number of the productions, and, it must be also confessed, by a licentiousness which disgraced many of the theatrical pieces and poetical collections. One of the most devoted admirers of French literature was Pels, who published, in 1667, an imitation of the *Art of Poetry* of Horace. A man possessed of more vanity than genius, Pels had the satisfaction of seeing his opinions on matters of taste propagated in opposition to Antonides and Vollenhoven, worthy successors of Vondel. He placed himself at the head of a society to which he gave for a motto *Nil volentibus arduum:* some members, indeed, endeavoured to perfect the national, without servilely copying the foreign drama; but they soon confined themselves to translations, and the French theatre was proclaimed the only one conformable to good taste. Several other societies, or rather literary clubs, rendered themselves

conspicuous, and the whole of Flemish literature became only a pale reflection of that of France.

It was only towards the end of the century that the Belgian provinces followed, without reserve, in the same path. A conquered city gave the example. Dunkirk, under the Spanish rule the rival of the Dutch ports, when it passed under the sceptre of Louis XIV., gave a Jean Bart to this fortunate conqueror. Prosperous through its naval resources, it cultivated, successfully, the arts and sciences, and especially poetry. Its chamber of rhetoric stood at this time at the head of the literary institutions of the whole of West Flanders, and it possessed in De Swaen a true poet. For a moment the society indulged in the delusion that the French government, although, by its nature, centralising and exclusive, would yet deign to encourage their noble efforts to revive Flemish literature. De Swaen translated the *Cid* of Corneille, and afterwards produced an original piece, entitled, *The Abdication of Charles V.* His translations are very poetical; his original drama is indisputably one of the most perfect, according to classic rule, which was composed in Belgium and Holland at this period.

The drama, however, does not appear to have seriously occupied the genius of De Swaen. He devoted himself, with greater partiality, to sacred poetry; his talent places him at the head of the

Belgian poets of this epoch; his principal work, the poem *Of the Death and Life of Jesus Christ*, is a series of fifty meditations on the life of our Lord, and on the mysteries which preceded His birth and followed His death.

The impulse which De Swaen was enabled to give to the compositions of the society of Dunkirk, and still more his great poetical talent, exercised a salutary influence over the whole of West Flanders. Bruges rivalled this celebrated seaport, and could boast of several poets of great merit,—among others, Smidts and Labare. The first wrote two tragedies, *The Death of Boëce* and *Eustache*. Labare is better known as the legislator of the Flemish Parnassus. He published, in 1721, an imitation of the *Art Poétique* of Boileau, whom he nevertheless refuted on certain points,—among others, on the unity of time and place, which the French, after the example of the Greeks, had introduced upon their stage. At the same time that he paid homage to the preference of the nation, he refused to be bound by the fetters which French poetry imposed upon literature.

Labare showed himself superior, in point of taste, to the imitators which the French school found in Holland. In the northern Low Countries, literature appeared to be suddenly struck with sterility; the theatre existed almost exclusively by transla-

tions and by copies, more or less imperfect. Langendyk acquired a certain reputation in comedy, Rotgans in tragedy. The latter published, also, a short descriptive poem, *La Kermesse de Village*, a masterpiece of satire, which has remained classic, and an epic poem, entitled, *William III.*, of which the versification is pleasant and the style vivid, but there is a too frequent abuse of the Grecian mythology.

This mania for adopting ideas entirely foreign to modern nations, as well with regard to religion as to national associations, was then very prevalent, and from imitation to imitation, an infatuation for the Eclogue ensued. A Flemish artist, endowed with a certain poetical genius, Jean Baptiste Wellekens, born at Alost in 1658, made a journey to Italy, where he acquired a taste for pastoral poetry. Settling at Amsterdam, he distinguished himself by works of this class and fishermen's songs: these songs caused a lively sensation among the rich citizens of Holland, and Wellekens soon found himself surrounded by a crowd of fortunate rivals. This style of poetry could not fail to be pleasing to a people who were surfeited with riches, and who, after long days of preoccupation, delighted in the sweets of repose. It is not that rural poetry had not been cultivated in the Low Countries before Wellekens; since Hooft, many poets had devoted

their leisure to it, and the great Vondel may even be cited as the originator of the Bucolic drama. The most celebrated country-houses of Holland had their poets or singers, who were themselves often the lords of the manor. *Zorgvliet* was immortalised by Cats, *Hofwyk* by Huygers, *Ockenburg* by Westerbaen. Among the contemporaries of Wellekens, those most worthy to be cited for their pastoral songs are Moonen, Langendyk, Brockhuizen, and especially Vlaming, the intimate friend of the poet of Alost.

At this period there lived in a hamlet near Delft, a countryman gifted with a remarkably poetical genius, embodying in language the sublime effusions of a noble heart. Poot, while cultivating the soil, worshipped nature with the enthusiasm of a deep devotion. Drawing his inspirations from within, his poems, by their artlessness, elevated the simple peasant as far above his contemporaries as there is distance between originality and imitation. Well would it have been for Holland, had she given more encouragement to genius like that of Poot. Well, indeed, if she had not crushed such genius in its vigour, to make way for a sickly and artificial erudition. Poot, in the zenith of his noble career, allowed his muse to be sullied by the meretricious adjuncts of mythology,—a sad Harlequin's dress, thrown over the broad shoulders of a child of

Germany. But in spite of these defects, which disfigure a few of his pieces, the nursling of *Abtswoud* will always remain one of the ornaments of the Flemish Parnassus.

Whilst in the north Literature expressed only the *dolce far niente*, she pursued in the south her didactic and religious course. About the commencement of the eighteenth century, even the theatre followed more exclusively in this line, as is evident from the works of Plas, of Brussels, and of the Flemings, De Muyn, J. B. Hendrix, and P. Justinus. A stranger will learn with surprise that several chambers of rhetoric reckoned among their members, even among their heads, priests, several of whom composed theatrical pieces. The priests Kockaert of Brabant, and De Pape of Courtrai, wrote mysteries; Van Solthem, a canon of the Abbey of Grimberghe, and J. F. van der Borcht, at Lierre, wrote tragedies. The latter published, between the years 1735 and 1742, some pieces, among which were *St. John the Baptist*, and *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, in which we observe much energy and imagination, indicative of a profound study of Vondel. For a long time unappreciated in all the Low Countries, the latter regained his rank in Belgium as the prince of the native poets of that period.

This disposition towards a more vigorous style

then became sufficiently general in the Austrian Low Countries, and with it was united a more careful, if not a more profound, study of the language. The Jesuit Liévin of Meyer, born at Ghent in 1655, published, in 1725, a didactic poem in three cantos, entitled *Anger* (De Gramschap), an imitation of his own Latin work, *De Irâ*. The richness of its construction enhances the depth and wisdom of its sentiments.

Whilst in Belgium a tendency to poetical energy was manifested, Holland, on the contrary, only lent an ear to that which was polished and precise. Feitama appropriated to himself the sceptre of Pels, and became the oracle of the Dutch Parnassus. He was an elegant versifier; he confined himself to the translation of the French classics, and wasted twenty years in turning the *Telemachus* of Fénelon into verse. This love for high finish was the cause of a great act of injustice towards two contemporary poets. The brothers Van Haren, noblemen of Friesland, and celebrated statesmen, had lived far removed from literary clubs. What congeniality would they have found in these circles devoid of talent, animated as they were by a lively patriotism and an ardent poetical enthusiasm? The principal work of the elder, Guillaume van Haren, is the epic poem, *Friso*, who was supposed to be the first king of the Frieslanders; that of the younger,

Onno-Swier, the lyric poem, in twenty-two cantos, entitled *The Beggars*. All that issued from the pen of these two brothers bore the impress of true genius; but the imperfection of their language caused their works to be condemned by those who assumed the office of regulators of literary taste. It happened to the Van Haren, as it always happens to poetical genius when half cultivated: mediocre and envious minds seized upon defects mostly conventional, and confounded in the same sentence of reprobation both soul and body.

Prose also at this period took a retrograde movement. Energy of style gave way to artificial forms. In several Dutch works, however, belonging to the second half of the seventeenth century, there exists still an admirable depth of thought, which renders them worthy of the days of Spinoza and his antagonist Nieuwentyt: certainly the language showed no deficiency when it was required for philosophical investigations; the proof of this is in the writings of these two great men. But in the north, the energy of the nation had become impaired, and in the Belgian provinces, the Jesuits, who there took the lead, rather courted a trivial style, more in harmony with a civilisation which they deemed better suited to the uncultivated mind of the people. In Holland, however, pulpit eloquence found worthy orators in Vollenhoven, cited above as one of the

successors of Vondel, and in the three sons of the celebrated historian Brandt. But about the end of the century, religious influence sensibly declined in the Low Countries of the north, and it became necessary to seek elsewhere for a restraining power on the vices of society. The works of Addison and Steele passed from England to the Continent; soon a taste for the *Spectator* pervaded Holland; Van Effen, among other works, published weekly, from 1731 to 1735, the *Dutch Spectator* (De Hollandsche Spectator), a selection sometimes literary, and sometimes dedicated to moral subjects; the style either simple or noble, according to the matter treated of, and manifesting at each page the honest man and the patriotic philosopher.

But at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the science of languages had the honour of contributing to the development of literature. After the golden age of Hooft and Vondel, philologers sought for rules of grammar in the writings of these great men, taking care for the most part to compare their precepts with the various dialects of the common language. The work of the Lambrechts, the Spiegels, and the Heuiters, was nobly carried on by Moonen, Verwer, Sewel, and others.

Precision of expression was a subject worthy of exciting the investigating spirit of the scholars of this epoch. Louis Meyer, known on the stage by a

few tragedies, completed a work of Jean Hofman, entitled, *Nederlandschen Woordenschat* (Treasure of the Flemish Language); it is an explanatory list of spurious terms, technical words, and antiquated expressions. This esteemed work has remained incomplete, although, even in our age, its republication has been considered desirable.

In the Belgian provinces, also, a sudden change manifested itself in the language. A very curious work, and undoubtedly the most national which appeared in Flanders at the commencement of the eighteenth century, is the book written by André Stevens, entitled, *Nederlandschen Voorschriftboek.* Stevens was a schoolmaster at Cassel, and wrote this work about the end of the reign of Louis XIV. The precepts on language given in it are few; they treat especially of pronunciation, orthography, and style. The author dwells earnestly on this latter point, complaining bitterly of his countrymen, who, through indolence, cast away their birthright. These sallies of Stevens are remarkable. Living in a town subject to the King of France, he appears to regard this prince as a foreigner. The work of the estimable schoolmaster of Cassel has been preceded by a grammar entitled *An Essay on Flemish Grammar* (Ontwerp van eene Nederduytsche Spraekkunst, door E. C. P. Meenen, 1713). This book was considered by Bilderdyk to be of great utility.

But the philologers who at this epoch carried the science of the Flemish tongue to its highest point of fame are Ten Kate and Huydecoper. The former ought, in justice, to be called the prince of Flemish philologers. He was the first to point out the inherent beauties of the language, and to make, on a methodical and extensive scale, a comparative study of the national idiom with the congenerous languages. He began, in 1710, by a small treatise upon the relation between the Gothic and the Flemish tongues (*Gemeenschap tusschen de Gothische Spraeke en de Nederduytsche*). This valuable result of profound study gave rich promise of an intellect destined to operate a complete revolution in Germanic philology. To Ten Kate belongs the honour of originating a new era, not only for the study of the Flemish idiom, but for all the Germanic tongues, as well ancient as modern. His chief work, *Introduction to the Knowledge of the best Points of the Flemish Language* (Aenliding tot de Kennis van het verhevene Deel der Nederduitsche Spraeke), serves as the groundwork to a system of etymology, followed by the great modern philologers of the Low Countries and of Germany.

Balthazar Huydecoper, although he has not bequeathed to us any systematic composition, is not the less worthy of our esteem, as having deeply scrutinised the source of the Flemish tongue. His

remarks upon the ancient chronicler, Melis Stoke, and those upon the translation of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid by Vondel, render him worthy to be ranged by the side of Ten Kate. These two men gave a fresh impulse to a searching study of the idiom. They inspired men with a taste for the ancient monuments of the national literature. Like a luminous beacon, they guided that glorious phalanx of philologers to whom Flemish form of speech owes, in a great measure, its perspicuity and its delicacy.

CHAP. VI.

BRUSSELS ACADEMY OF SCIENCE FOUNDED. — FAVOURS FRENCH LITERATURE.—LUCRÈCE VAN MERKEN.—SIMON VAN WINTER.—INFLUENCE OF THE OPERA.—NEYTS.—CAMMAERT.—PHILOLOGY.—LEYDEN.—KLUIT.—BELLAMY.—"LITTLE ROSE."—NIEUWLAND.—VAN ALPHEN.—FAILURE OF BLANK VERSE.—INFLUENCE OF THE REVOLUTION.—UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN.—EFFECTS OF FRENCH DOMINATION.—DECREE AGAINST THE OFFICIAL USE OF FLEMISH.—STRUGGLES IN FAVOUR OF THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE.—VERHOEVEN.—VAN DAELE.—THE FLEMISH STAGE.—HOFMAN.—INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT IN HOLLAND.—SIEGENBECK.—WIELAND.—VANDER PALM.—BORGER.—FORENSIC ELOQUENCE.—MEYER.—INFLUENCE OF GERMAN LITERATURE.—FEITH.—TOLLENS.—HELMERS.—BILDERDYK.—KINKER.—FLEMISH REESTABLISHED IN THE COURTS.—OBSTACLES TO ITS PROGRESS.—WILLEMS.—LEDEGANCK.—CONSCIENCE.

After a lethargy of more than a century, Belgium was at length seconded by the Government in its intellectual movement. Maria Theresa established at Brussels an academy of science and belles-lettres. Unfortunately, the men who planned and organised this institution were unacquainted with Flemish; they were ignorant of the advantages which would accrue to civilisation by adopting the language of the majority of the country. The academy itself took no other note of our idiom than by some prize memoirs published in its annals. Flanders was under the rule of those German barons, who, far from paying the least attention to the language of the greater part of Belgium, cared

but little for their own. It was the fashion with the German aristocracy, as well Austrian as Prussian, to affect an exclusive predilection for French. Frederick the Great was an august example to those who disdained their own tongue, as being inadequate to the wants of the higher classes. Fortunately for Germany, it possessed Klopstock and Gellert, and these writers had the courage to address themselves to the sovereign himself, to protest against the false direction given to the public mind. But Belgium, still under the lethargic influence of the age, was inspired by no patriotic genius, like the great men beyond the Rhine, or like Mdlle. de Launoy in Holland, who scourged with her wit the Gallo-mania of the courtiers of the Hague; had there even been found among the Flemings some of these noble spirits, there were no men at the head of affairs capable of appreciating the boldness and courage of such demonstrations. In fact, the essentially Platonic voice of *The Blind Man of the Mountain* of the bishop-philosopher, Nelis, was not calculated to dissipate the prejudices of the nobles, and of the foreigners who governed them, against a language which they had not yet forgiven for having humbled the pride of the Spanish king. These dominant influences had for nearly two centuries successively weakened the national spirit to such a degree, that with the exception of the Jesuit, Van den Abeele, and some

grammarians, we should be embarrassed to cite a single Belgian author capable of writing his own language correctly. What a contrast with the literature of the United Provinces at that time! From the attitude assumed by Flanders at the beginning of the century, one would have thought that she was about to outstrip Holland in the literary career; it was but a flash of lightning, an isolated effort of a few men, whose ideas had not time to penetrate the masses. It is true, the societies of rhetoric were considerably multiplied in the towns and villages; these bodies, properly directed, would not have failed to carry on the impulse given by the Labares, the De Meyers, and the Stevenses. In Holland they published periodical works, in which learned discussions were entertained in presence of an intelligent and impartial public.

At this period the literary movement in Holland became remarkable under the influence of a female poet, Lucrèce van Merken, born at Amsterdam in 1722, and who died in her native town in 1789. She was the consort of a writer equally gifted with genius, Simon van Winter. Possessing a considerable fortune, this couple gathered around them all the wit of the capital of the United Provinces. Endowed with as much tact as taste, Mdme. van Winter had the art of distinguishing from amid the crowd, those youthful geniuses who were destined at a later period to restore to litera-

ture its former splendour. This celebrated woman published several poems and tragedies, which all indicate a truly patriotic spirit. Her poem, *On the Use of Adversity* (Het Nut der Tegenspoeden), may bear a comparison with the best productions of this class. She tried her strength in the epic style by two other poems, one entitled *Germanicus*, the pacificator of Germany, the other taken from the Bible, and celebrating the glorious deeds of King David. We have already had occasion to remark, that, from the early time of the Reformation up to Vondel, the history of the Bible had been represented on the stage. Hoogvliet having published, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a poem entitled *Abraham*, which was much in vogue in Holland and Belgium, several poets turned their epic lyre to subjects taken from the sacred writings. *David* is a very successful essay of this description. As for *Germanicus*, the author may be reproached with having chosen for a hero the conqueror of our ancestors, instead of one of those bold Germans who struggled successfully against Rome for the independence of his native land. Perhaps, however, in consequence of the epithet of barbarians, commonly applied to the Germanic nations in the time of the Romans, the author meant to celebrate the accession of a new civilisation. Throughout her poems, Mdme. van Winter displays an energy and force uncommon to her sex. These qualities were

far surpassed by some poets who succeeded her; but in this woman every impulse was noble, her whole life was a reflex of the artistic enthusiasm and patriotism which were her ruling principles. She ushered in that great epoch, the future actors in which already began to rival her. The theatre, especially, profited by the noble direction given to literature by the circle of Van Winter; the genius of the poets was admirably encouraged by the great tragedian Punt and his wife, as well as by his rivals Duim and Corver. But the mania for translation had taken too deep root in the national mind to yield entirely to the influence of Mdme. van Winter. Art had become a simple relaxation to some, a poor means of livelihood to others. One other cause injured the theatre of the Low Countries,—the opera definitively established itself in Flanders, and had soon an extensive repertory. Jacques Neyts, of Bruges, formed, towards the middle of the century, a company for the comic opera, with which he travelled through Flemish Belgium and Holland, receiving everywhere the most clamorous applause. The curiosity of the court of Brussels was awakened. It was the first time that a dramatic company, properly so called, had been seen in Flanders. At Amsterdam, Neyts was playing in the Grand Theatre, when, on the 11th May, 1772, during the representation of the

Deserter, this superb building became a prey to the flames. This terrible accident cost several persons their lives, and caused the ruin of the actor Punt, who, as well as Neyts, resided in the building. The latter returned to Belgium, but his enfeebled company had to carry on a disastrous competition with the societies of rhetoric; these had risen up on all sides of Flemish Belgium, in consequence of the impulse which Neyts himself had given to theatrical song.

Had it not been for the catastrophe which destroyed the fortune of Neyts, this man would perhaps have brought about a revolution in the phonic branch of the language. The members of his company, who belonged to West Flanders, made use of their own dialect, softer in some respects than the spoken language generally received, and which was much relished by the dilettanti and the ladies of Amsterdam; but the definitive retreat of the Flemish company soon restored to routine and to local prejudice all the salutary influence which a more prolonged predilection might have exercised over the national song. The triumph of the softer accent would also have had the effect of restoring vocalisation to its pristine harmony, which harmony had been seriously injured since the secondary accent of the *ij* prevailed over the primitive.

Nevertheless the opera did not desert Holland

with the company of Neyts. Ruloffs, Pypers, and others, after the example of the poet of Bruges, but with better taste, translated French pieces; whilst Uylenbroek made a fortunate essay for the Grand Opera by his *Œdipus at Colonus*. In Belgium Neyts found a competitor in Cammaert, who, on his side, translated for the theatre of Brussels a portion of the pieces selected by the itinerant poet for his repertory. Cammaert had commenced his dramatic career by some tragedies, the first of which was represented in 1745. He was a very prolific but a very ordinary poet; occasionally, however, we find in his original pieces passages which denote a poetical talent capable of soaring high, if, with less presumption and more study, he had sought out the secrets appertaining to art, and the merits inherent in the language. A single fact will point out the deplorable state of the study of Flemish at Brussels; this Cammaert, who betrays at each step a profound ignorance of the principles of the Flemish tongue, constituted himself a legislator of Flemish poetry, by reproducing in wretched verses the *Art Poétique* of Boileau.

As in Holland, so in Belgium, they began at this time to occupy themselves especially with the theory of art. Although they confined themselves to essays, these efforts were not the less salutary by directing attention to the masterpieces of the pre-

ceding century. The works on grammar were far from remarkable, either for depth of insight or research. Des Roches, who became afterwards the zealous secretary of the Academy, carried his complaisance for routine so far as to refrain from proposing a return to certain proprieties of language which had fallen into neglect for nearly a century, especially in Belgium. The force of inertia prevented the profitable results which might have ensued from the labours of the Hinlopens, the Alewyns, the Fortmans, the Kluits, and the Lelyvelds, who worthily carried on the works of Ten Kate and of Huydecoper.

The greater number of these laborious scholars were members of the literary society instituted at Leyden. Founded nearly about the same time as the Academy of Brussels, this society, which received no assistance from the Government, soon acquired a high degree of consideration. At a later period, neither the literary Dutch society, instituted under the auspices of the Government, nor the *Institut de Hollande*, founded by King Louis Bonaparte, after the model of the *Institut de France*, were able to tarnish its splendour. It occupied itself especially with the study of the language and the art of poetry; most of its members, however, were not strangers to philosophy and history. Kluit especially, one of the most eminent

names claimed by the University of Leyden, has acquired a distinguished place among modern historians. He was, moreover, a sagacious critic and a profound politician.

The epoch in which Kluit lived was fertile in distinguished historians: linguistic and historical investigations seemed to go hand in hand. Wagenaar published his history of the Low Countries of the north, a colossal work, estimable in all that regards style and research, and which was afterwards continued by Stuart. Simon Styl wrote a profoundly philosophical book upon the causes of the greatness of the United Provinces, which was destined to remain a valuable literary monument. Bondam, Van den Spiegel, Te Water, and others, collected documents to give a better appreciation of the basis on which the actual organisation of the country rested. Everything announced an approaching intellectual revival. The *belles-lettres*, properly so called, were not long in participating in this great work of regeneration. Patriotism was rekindled by the interest inspired by the North American war of independence against England, the rival of Holland, a war in which the nation soon took an active part. On the other side, Germany paid back with interest to Holland that which she had borrowed in a former century from the school of Heinsius. Three men, born about the

middle of the century, were remarkable examples of this Germanic spirit: they were Bellamy, Nieuwland, and Van Alphen. The first died in the flower of his youth, at the moment when his studies had procured for him the situation of pastor of a village. A man governed by the impulse of his heart, Bellamy devoted himself to love, to friendship, and to his country. By his simplicity, he works upon the feelings, and in his patriotic poems he knows how to touch the inmost recesses of the heart. His romance entitled *Little Rose* (Roosje) is a masterpiece of simple tenderness. Bellamy had every quality necessary to become one of the greatest poets of his country, he failed only in that depth of thought which is the fruit of maturer age.

The story of *Little Rose* is worth telling. She was a young maiden, sweet and blooming as the spring. Her mother dying at her birth, she was brought up by her father, amid the love and admiration of all who knew her. No sooner had a flower burst into beauty, than it was plucked for little Rose. Every summer, on that coast of the North Sea where she lived, the tide carries up a peculiar and beautiful sort of fish, which buries itself in the sand, and the young people make pleasure parties to discover and capture it as a delicacy. Little Rose had joined one of these parties, and as the tide was very low, they had gone out far beyond the

usual distance. Digging up the little fish, throwing water at one another, and gambolling on the sands, maidens and young men were full of merriment, and little Rose was chased even to the edge of the waves by one of her companions. "A kiss, a kiss!" exclaimed her pursuer, "or I drive you still farther." She runs on, to escape him. A scream is heard, and Rose disappears in a quicksand. The young man who follows disappears also, and is swallowed up. The rest of the party rush forward to give assistance, but the tide is rising rapidly, and they must fly. The waves roll cruelly over the two victims, and the silence of death succeeds to the sounds of laughter and of song.

"All silently they looked again,
And silently sped home,
And every heart was bursting then,
But every tongue was dumb.

"And still and stately o'er the wave
The mournful moon arose,
Flinging pale beams upon the grave
Where they in peace repose.

"The wind sighed o'er the voiceless sea,
The billows kissed the sand,
And one sad dirge of misery
Filled all the mourning land."

Nieuwland, a child of the people, like *Bellamy*, and who also died in the flower of his age, was a

prodigy in the knowledge of the exact sciences, but this in no way interfered with the sublimity of his poetical genius, as is testified by his beautiful ode entitled *Orion*, and his touching elegies on the death of his wife and child. *Van Alphen* united practice with theory. After having inspired his countrymen with a taste for the melody and grandeur of his poetry, he was desirous to initiate them into the secrets of the art, which he handled in a manner peculiar to himself. In his poems adapted to childhood a peculiarity of Flemish literature is perceptible, that didactic spirit which has manifested itself in all the epochs we have passed through. Van Alphen has had several imitators among numerous poets of both sexes; and national education owes its most brilliant results to this style of poetry.

Dr. Bowring has said of him: "Van Alphen's poems for children are among the best that were ever written. They are a precious inheritance for the youth of the Netherlands. They teach virtue in simple eloquence, and are better known in that country than are the hymns of Dr. Watts or Mrs. Barbauld here." Born at Flessingen, 1797, he died before he had reached thirty-three years of age.

When from any cause art has declined, he who traces out for himself a new route is from this very circumstance a remarkable man, and is certainly

deserving of gratitude, even should his efforts remain without any apparent result. The three abovementioned poets, indignant at the deplorable state in which national poetry had fallen among the so-called *beaux-esprits*, gave some specimens of blank verse, until then but little cultivated in Flanders. Stript of its magic mantle of rhyme, poetry was forced to pay more especial attention to accuracy of expression and elegance of construction; and if, in the long run, blank verse could not maintain the contest with rhyme, either on account of the prejudice engendered by long habit, or that the accusation of monotony applies with justice to most of the attempts of this description made by the Flemish, certain it is that it contributed much to restore to poetry that superiority which it had lost since Vondel had laid aside his lyre.

In these memorable days a social revolution was effected in Holland and Belgium, but in both countries it was for a while repressed by brute force. The men most implicated in it sought refuge on the French territory, soon to serve as guides and auxiliaries to the soldiers of the republic. The two countries were conquered in the name of liberty, but at the price of some millions; Holland purchased only a phantom of independence, and Belgium was forced, at the point of the sword, to ask to be incorporated with France. This state of war-

fare was very differently represented in the literary productions of the two countries. While in Holland everything denoted the happy result of solid intelligent labour, in Belgium literature betrayed the feverish efforts of a worn-out frame. In Holland public instruction was national; if in the universities the language of the country did not as yet form a prominent part of the teaching, at least some professors suitably supplied the omission by their publications. On the other hand, education was provided for by the establishment of a society for the public weal (Maetschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen), which owed its foundation to the philanthropic and patriotic views of the pastor Nieuwenhuyzen; and the sacred music of the Reformers improved at length under the influence of a progressive literature.

In Belgium nothing of this sort existed. The University of Louvain was absorbed by scholastic disputes and domestic occupations, so that its professors could give no serious thought to public progress and welfare. The instruction produced no result testifying to a searching study of the language. The Jesuits had made use in the Low Countries of a mixed pronunciation, peculiar to themselves, and generally well received. After the destruction of this society, the preachers adopted, for the most part, the local dialects. How was it

possible that amid this indifference, both for the written and the spoken language, joined to a complete absence of criticism on literary productions, how was it possible that any works of merit could issue from a people unaccustomed for so long a period to see anything else in the literary career than an agreeable pastime without any essential aim or object? Thus when the revolution in Brabant broke out, the poetical productions were by no means worthy of a nation inflamed with a spirit of independence. Prose, however, revived under better auspices, and showed symptoms of putting forth an equal degree of power to that it had already manifested in the Low Countries of the north. Verloo and Vonck, the leaders of the patriotic party which bears their name, gave promise by their writings of the brilliant future awaiting the successful results of the revolution. But after the fatal conclusion of the struggle with Austria, most of the liberals became exclusive partisans of France, and, under the safeguard of this powerful protector and ruler, deemed themselves dispensed from any ulterior efforts towards national emancipation. Everything fell into disorder; and as a consequence of the defection of the educated classes, the ignorance of the language continued to increase. The arbitrary measures of the French Government against the official use of Flemish were no less fatal. A decree of

the 14th Prairial, An XI. (13th June, 1803), says: "In a year, reckoning from the publication of the present ordinance, the public acts in the departments once called Belgium . . . in those on the left bank of the Rhine . . . where the custom of drawing up acts in the language of these countries may have been preserved, they are from henceforth to be written in French." It was thus they enacted laws in the name of liberty and humanity. These vexatious measures of the republic were surpassed by an imperial decree of the 22nd December, 1812, by which it was enjoined that all Flemish papers should appear with a French translation. After some opposition, Brussels submitted to these humiliating conditions; the ancient capital of the country laid aside its national spirit. Everywhere else, however, a better feeling was awakened, and this struggle of moral force against the absolute will of a foreign government maintained itself valiantly against the decrees of the republic and of the empire. West Flanders, especially, beheld the defenders of literature form themselves into organised bodies. Several towns and villages gave fêtes, at which were celebrated all the recollections of Flemish nationalities, and the victors received homage for their patriotic efforts. In 1809, the Society of Ypres proposed the composition of a poem upon any celebrated Flemish

hero. The following year that of Alost selected, as a subject for competition, *The Glory of the Belgians*, and a man of letters who had already, under the Austrian dominion, distinguished himself as a historian and poet, Verhoeven, of Malines, wrote an epic poem, in fifteen cantos, entitled *Belgium*, which remained unpublished for want of encouragement. Some men deluded themselves with the idea that the French Government would at least, through the medium of its prefects, lend a helping hand to the mother tongue of Flanders. At Ghent, it is true, they succeeded in evading the prohibition to give theatrical representations in Flemish, and even Napoleon gave his consent to the meeting of the *Fontainistes* of that town, after having ascertained the favourable intentions of this society towards the Government.

One author, especially, sought to induce the local rulers to interpose in the Flemish cause; this was Van Daele, of Ypres, the first who published a literary review in these provinces. His chief merit consists in having contributed to the improvement of the style and the construction of the versification which was so lamentably neglected. There was an evident progress in Flemish poetry after the publication of his periodical work and his new edition of the free translation of the *Art Poétique* of Boileau, by Labare. This progress was powerfully

assisted by the more intimate relations established with Holland, which had also become an integral part of the French empire. Some Dutch poets took part in the literary assemblies in Flanders, and the first actors on the stage of Amsterdam gave utterance to the national accent there, where the chambers of rhetoric had been forbidden to speak the ancient idiom of the country. In spite of persecution, the Flemish theatre struggled on courageously. Belgium, perhaps, has never counted so many good actors and actresses as at that time. Among these, the most distinguished was Wattie, who died in the flower of his age, at Ghent, his native city. Among the dramatic authors of this epoch, Hofman, of Courtrai, deserves honourable mention. This man owed everything to himself, and under circumstances more favourable to public education, he would have become, without doubt, one of the brightest ornaments of Flemish literature. Hofman wrote several tragedies for the people, a few comedies, and one or two comic operas. With a genius eminently poetical, he possessed, in a high degree, the faculty of improvisation, and several of his dramatic pieces have been written with a rapidity of which the literary annals of Flanders afford few examples.

It is now time to take a retrospective view of the north, where an extraordinary intellectual move-

ment agitated the whole nation. We have just seen, that about the end of the eighteenth century, the reverend Nieuwenhuyzen laid the foundation of the society *Tot Nut van 't Algemeen*, a society whose object was to popularise the different branches of human knowledge, and which from the early days of its existence might boast of the most successful results. At the revolution of 1795, the reformed worship ceased to be the religion of the state; and the members of other religious communities were declared admissible to public offices. This was a great event for a country like Holland, where there are such numerous sects, and which comprised within its territory departments governed like conquered countries. Moreover, the new representative organisation developed the power of oratory, at the same time that it drew together men of different dialects. This popular administration was not long in removing the fetters which until then had opposed the progress of literature. Professorships were established in the Universities of Leyden and Franeker; in accordance with the wishes of the society *Tot Nut van 't Algemeen*, the Government undertook to put an end to the irregularities which still existed in the orthography of the language. The Professor Siegenbeek was charged with this difficult task, and, considering the circumstances, acquitted himself of it in a praiseworthy manner.

Wieland, on his side, in concert with other philologists, published a dictionary of the language, and one of synonymes, works which were much required; moreover, this author published a grammar which was officially introduced into all the institutions of the state. This orthography, *quasi* official, found in Holland violent antagonists, among whom it will suffice to mention Bilderdyk. But the system of Siegenbeck, supported by Vander Palm, triumphed over all obstacles; this was a real boon to letters, as from that time attention was no longer limited to mere form.

We have just spoken of Vander Palm. He was a Protestant minister and professor of Oriental literature at the University of Leyden, when the revolutionary movement placed him for some time at the head of Public Instruction. He was the first clerical orator and prose writer of his day, and in both these capacities conferred immense obligation on Flemish literature. About the middle of the seventeenth century, prose had insensibly lost somewhat of its force, of its Flemish characteristics, and it was only at the end of the last century that it recovered itself. But had it not been for the newly founded courses of lectures upon national literature, there is reason to believe it would have been limited to some masterpieces of pulpit and parliamentary eloquence, leaving to

poetry the position of honour. It is to Vander Palm that the Flemish prose of our century owes in a great measure its halo of glory. His numerous writings bear at every page the impress of that vast genius which knew how to unite the severest logic and the deepest research to a style varied, rich, and free in its construction. A considerable number of sermons, dissertations, and academical discourses, some more remarkable than others, were the production of the indefatigable pen of this celebrated professor. He devoted especial attention to the Bible, and published a translation of the Scriptures, enriched with notes; his extensive acquaintance with Oriental antiquities makes it perhaps the first work of the kind in the literature of any nation. He also published a Bible for the use of youth, and paraphrases on the Proverbs of Solomon, a real treasure of wisdom. Vander Palm shone among a crowd of men who were remarkable in the various branches of literature which he himself cultivated; pulpit eloquence reckoned many celebrities in all the Christian communities. Borger, Kist, Ypey, Clarisse, Muntinghe, Stuart, and many others, distinguished themselves as reformed preachers. Borger especially might have disputed the palm with the celebrated professor of Leyden, if his career had not been brought to so early a close. Descended from

Friesland citizens, his mind was as powerfully tempered as that of any of his countrymen. His vast genius made him the absolute master of all the sciences to which he applied himself. Before he had attained the age of manhood, he produced several masterpieces of eloquence and philosophy, among which his *Treatise on Mysticism* merits particular mention.

Forensic eloquence, like that of the pulpit, soon experienced the beneficial influence of the national awakening, and Holland might feel convinced that she had no longer any cause to envy other nations, when the eloquence of such men as Kemper and Meyer took up the cause of adversity. Meyer is sufficiently known in the learned world by his work, published in French, *Esprit, Origine et Progrès des Institutions judiciaires des principaux pays de l'Europe;* but his eminent qualities were no less resplendent in his Flemish writings. Possessing a universal fame, he remained, nevertheless, almost isolated in his own country; an exclusive partisan of the French codes, he would make no concession in this respect to the self-love of the nation. This line of conduct irritated his countrymen, and the more so as Meyer, being a member of the Israelitish communion, might be supposed a cosmopolite in his ideas. However that may be, the Flemish writings of Meyer are strongly tinged with French

phraseology; they merit particular mention, both on account of their construction and spirit. They denote that powerful mental energy which may be observed in many authors of this epoch, and which makes itself felt in every branch of human knowledge.

The impulse given to poetry by Bellamy, Nieuwland, and Van Alphen, seconded by causes already mentioned, stirred the Batavian lyre with a force which scarcely permitted a recollection of the limited territorial extent of the country, and of the ruinous influence of the republic over the destinies of Europe. It was symbolic of a desperate struggle maintained by a nation on the eve of perishing. This energy saved Holland; for after the fall of the ephemeral kingdom erected by Napoleon in favour of one of his brothers, Holland became incorporated with the French empire, and was in a condition to sustain, without being crushed, the overbearing administration of the conquering powers.

In a literary point of view, Germany had a special influence over Holland towards the close of the last century. A dreamy and sentimental literature had at all epochs sprung up on Flemish soil, but it had only unfolded itself to a certain extent when the novels of Richardson, and the poetry of Ossian and of Young, crossed the Northern Ocean. Equally prepared with Germany for English literature, Hol-

land received with enthusiasm the *Werther* of Goethe. Feith was the apostle of the new school; he gave a direction to the leaning towards sentimentalism by some of his letters, (*Brieven over verscheidene Onderwerpen,*) by his novels, and his poems, *The Tomb* (Het Graf) and *Old Age* (De Ouderdom). A taste for the gloomy, and an extravagant sensibility, were the distinctive characteristics of this school. Republican virtues were associated in tender minds with poetical reveries, embracing, in a Platonic love, the whole of nature; sentimentalism was sensuality under a religious garb, coupled with vague tendencies towards pantheism; an earthly Paradise was the dream of the philosophers of the eighteenth century. But if the tendency of this school endangered energy of character, it served, at least in the Low Countries, to discard from literature those obscene works, the influence of which made itself felt even on the stage.

The school of dreamers may claim the honour of having guided the first steps of men who in later years became bright ornaments in the great crowd of poets. Besides Feith, their leader, who was also one of our first lyrics, and who wrote some classical tragedies of great merit, it will suffice to cite the name of Tollens.

This amiable author, born at Rotterdam, whose

parents were of Ghent, is perhaps of all our modern poets the one who has best sympathised with the lower classes. In general, the Flemish minstrels make too great a parade of erudition: a serious defect in a small nation, where already the number of readers is sufficiently limited. Tollens is the poet of the people, — a title decreed by the unanimous voice of the public, as well in Belgium as in Holland. This popularity Tollens owes to his Flemish characteristics. A poet of the fireside, his verses breathe the pure enjoyment of life; whether he celebrates family events or recites a ballad, or whether his enthusiasm be kindled at the glory of his ancestors, or whether he advocates religious and political tolerance, he sheds on all encouragement, consolation, and cheerfulness. These qualities are heightened by a brilliant imagination, a correct style, a versification easy and yet without monotony. Thus the poems of Tollens constitute the delight of all classes of society; and in a country moreover reputed as but slightly favourable to the cultivation of *belles-lettres*, a second edition, encouraged by 10,000 subscribers, has been closely followed by a third and a fourth.

The poems of Tollens date from the existence of the kingdom of the Low Countries. *The Dutch Nation* of Helmers was published in 1812, when France pressed upon Holland with its whole im-

perial weight. The work of the poet of Amsterdam, who was saved only by death from prison, is of a mixed style, between the epic and didactic. He celebrates the glory acquired by the Batavian people by land and by sea, in science, literature, and the fine arts. It is worthy of remark, that *The Dutch Nation* appeared nearly at the same time as the prize pieces in the city of Alost, in Flanders, on *The Glory of Belgium;* and we are inclined to think that the Flemish Assembly, prompted by a people unwilling to perish, may have inspired the Dutch poet. We may perhaps attribute to this cause the early circulation of the poem of Helmers in Belgium. This masterpiece has, if we may say so, opened the gates of Flanders to the modern poets of Holland. Helmers justly merits this honour, for, with the exception of some high-flown passages belonging to the character of the poem, and to the epoch in which it was written, he is remarkable for the vigour and grace of his descriptions, and he will always remain one of the noblest ornaments of this period, so rich in masterpieces of every kind.

Loots, the son-in-law of Helmers, was, like himself, destitute of literary education, but a sublime and true poet. He is more correct in style, and is not tainted with the sentimentality which in some degree detracts from the poetry of Helmers. Holland then possessed several distinguished men who

were debarred from a regular course of study. Such are the two brothers, Klyn and Messchert. In the absence of the ancient writers as models, many of them took other means to arrive at the brilliant position attained by the modern authors of England and Germany. The ballad and the romance, once passionately cultivated in the Low Countries as well as in the entire north of the Germanic provinces, were restored to their place of honour, and Tollens especially showed, by his happy imitations, all the simplicity and softness existing in this class of poetry which had been so unjustly consigned to oblivion. If this does not form one of the chief merits of Tollens in the eyes of his countrymen, we ought to render him more justice, for it is owing to him essentially that song and fable have recovered much of the ground which they had lost for two centuries. Their restoration to public favour will be only productive of results, when poetry and music shall unite to restore to the Flemish language that sweetness of which it still boasted in the days of Hooft. Besides, the mission of poetry is not to serve especially as a vehicle for the lucubrations of the student. The poet belongs to the entire nation, and it is by enlarging as much as possible the circle of his auditory, by addressing himself to every hearth and home of his fatherland, that he earns

the right to be styled national. It is in this manner, by depicting social life in small narrative poems, that poets, removed from the sphere of the masses, by their erudition as well as by their position in life, have succeeded in acquiring a certain amount of popularity. We will only cite Staring, who, at the end of the last century, was one of the first to produce the national ballad. Nervous and caustic in expression, he transposed into verse the history and customs of his native country, Guelders, the land of the warriors and minstrels of the Middle Ages.

We will pass over in silence many remarkable poets, in order that we may dwell somewhat longer on the greatest of them all — the illustrious Bilderdyk.

Dying in 1831, at the age of seventy-five, nearly at the same period at which two other great luminaries extinguished their light, Walter Scott and Goethe, William Bilderdyk held the sceptre of poetry for more than half a century. Nurtured in the school of the ancients, of an upright mind and a brilliant imagination, he had at his disposal all the resources which language can offer to an author. Initiated into the accurate sciences, moral, political and natural, as well as the fine arts, familiar with the classical languages of the East and West, and most of the modern tongues of

Europe,—in a word, endowed with a gigantic intellect,—he represented rather those ancient United Provinces, towering over all the earth, than the Batavian Republic, struggling in its last convulsions, or that kingdom of Holland, created for the most pacific of the Bonaparte family. Everything in this man was great, his personal misfortunes as well as his literary success, his faults and his virtues. Ostracised by his countrymen, he was recalled, after ten years of exile, by a foreigner, and after having enjoyed all the honours due to so transcendent a genius, he was more than once on the point of dying of hunger under a national government. In domestic life he was scarcely more fortunate than in his public career. He was stretched upon a bed of sickness up to the age of fifteen, and experienced nothing but affliction in his first marriage; and when, after a divorce, Heaven seemed to have granted him a companion more congenial to his disposition, the unhappy father mourned, successively, the loss of a numerous offspring. More than 150 volumes are the produce of this agitated existence, all indicating that masculine vigour which makes a whole people bend under the despotism of genius. As a poet he is often equal to Vondel for elevation and boldness, and is always his superior in accuracy. He essayed every style except comedy, and in all produced

masterpieces. Amorous poetry, religious poetry, satires, didactic and epic poems, tragedies, all that issued from his fertile pen, excited general admiration. His numerous imitations of the principal authors of ancient, oriental, and modern literature equal his original poems, and form a selection of quite a peculiar character. With the exception, perhaps, of the smooth verses of *Anacreon*, the softness of which, in our opinion, is lost when passing under the pen of Bilderdyk, his translations, or rather his free imitations, bear an advantageous comparison with the originals: of this we may convince ourselves by reading his version of *L'Homme des Champs*, by Delille. Bilderdyk, who, from his first entrance upon a literary career, gave indications of favouring a monarchical government, became, at a later period, an advocate of divine right,—a system which he maintained to an extreme length, inveighing freely against the opinions of the age. Bilderdyk thus drew upon himself the anger of his political opponents, and from that period (1808) his works ceased to find any favour. It was at this time he commenced writing for the theatre, and was prevented by the cabal from representing his pieces. The favourable position he occupied at the court of Louis Bonaparte gave him leisure to begin an epic poem on the Deluge (*De Ondergang der eerste Wereld*); the

abdication of the king, and the consequent ruin of Bilderdyk, deprived the latter of energy to continue his great intellectual work. His enemies ironically reproached him with this impotent effort; and when later he consented to publish the five books which he had finished, — astonishing the reader by the grandeur of the poetry,—they attacked the political opinions of the author. Even his works upon the science of language, which he then began to publish, and which gave rise to a revolution in the appreciation of the Flemish tongue, occasioned him some sharp combats. These combats, it must be confessed, he himself provoked. Driven from his native land for opinions which were not the fashion of the day, they gathered fresh strength on a foreign soil, and his own misfortunes, added to the decline of his country, were little calculated to inspire a disposition at once irritable and haughty with indulgence for ideas contrary to those he himself held. Thus the most deplorable quarrels ensued with many of the eminent men of the period, Vander Palm, Kinker, &c., which give to certain of his writings a grievous acerbity. But such is the ascendancy of genius, such the prestige of those giant-thrusts, that we, placed upon neutral ground, and removed from his violence, remain astonished in the presence of that depth of thought, that

severe logic, and those bold assertions, clad in the sparkling garb of the richest poetry.

Bilderdyk was essentially a Fleming, and his patriotism, sometimes carried to fanaticism, made him attack successively England, France, and Germany. Hence his judgments, often so dissimilar, on Napoleon, whom at one time he invokes as the liberator of Europe against the mercantile despotism of aristocratic England, and at another overwhelms with the thunderbolts of his indignation. Germany in its turn experienced the fire of his attacks. Here, however, there was no question of an enemy menacing the independence of the mouths of the Rhine and Meuse, or preparing a sudden blow at the fleet or the colonies; that which irritated him was the unpractical nature of the German mind, against the influence of which he thought the good-nature of his countrymen too little protected. The progress of modern philosophy and the taste for romance, kept him constantly on the alert; on one side Christianity, on the other classic literature, seemed to be menaced. In fact, it cannot be said that he was entirely wrong in his apprehensions, only that he carried his impetuous resistance too far. Goethe and he are the two contrasts in the modern struggle of intelligence: to make use of a common simile, the German poet resembles a fiery courser in full career, while the Dutchman is the

bold rider who wishes to control his steed. He was quite aware of his power, but his impetuosity prevented his bringing any system to maturity: his wounded self-love destroyed his calmness, and prevented his treating subjects relating to language with all the care and accuracy of which he was capable. The same may be said with regard to national history, which he taught during several years, and which he treated in a way to suit his own political and religious opinions. His adherence to the rules of Aristotle made him an exclusive partisan of the French theatre. This is not, however, the cause of the failure of his tragedies, for nowhere has the French theatre been imitated so generally, and with so much success, as in Holland. It was his system of philosophy which showed itself throughout, and was rejected, as an obstacle to the progress of civilisation. Nevertheless this great genius founded a school of history, and even of philosophy, which produced men of great talent, who each in his peculiar branch disputed the palm with his master.

A parallel has been attempted to be drawn between Feith and Bilderdyk. As men of genius and even of learning, this is absurd. Feith is a correct poet, there are even occasional signs of inspiration in his odes, and he has written agreeably on the theory of the art; but he only skims the surface

of things, while Bilderdyk treats the subject thoroughly. If we compare *The Tomb* of the one with *The Disease of Wise Men* of the other, the best pieces of Feith with the *Ode to Napoleon* of Bilderdyk, the *Mucius Scevola* of the republican with the *Floris V.* of the absolutist, we must, at the same time that we pay homage to the talents of Feith, and to the services he has rendered to literature, be convinced of the enormous distance which separates these two authors.

If among the literary celebrities which shone at the beginning of our century there is any one able to stand a comparison with this intellectual giant, it is, indisputably, Kinker. We even think that the study of the works of the professor of Liege follows as a necessary consequence those of Bilderdyk. Both of them poets, grammarians, and philosophers, they have continually found themselves opposed to each other on the same ground. Kinker represented the philosophy of Kant and Fichte; he even wrote a pantheist poem entitled *Soul in the World* (Het Alleven of de Wereldziel). It was entirely in opposition to his antagonist, who made a long dissertation on grace and original sin. Bilderdyk never encountered so rough and so firm an adversary, as may be seen by the argumentative criticism on his grammar; they occasionally met on the theory of art, a subject which they both

treated with equal depth, and with an equal feeling for the beautiful. Kinker wielded with success the weapon of satire; the *Letters of Sophia to Feith*, in answer to *Letters to Sophia*, from the author of *The Tomb*, are a satirical defence of the German philosophy; he bitterly censured the etymological system of Bilderdyk, in his *Farewell to the River Y*, and applied the homœopathic treatment to the mania for the horrible in domestic tragedy. He took part in the formation of the best political and literary reviews which appeared from 1789 to 1815.

The poetry of Kinker is sometimes obscure, like the philosophy which he defended against the whole nation. Although he overwhelmed Feith with the weight of his sarcasms, he succeeded no better in upholding in verse the system of the philosopher of Konigsberg than Van Hemert had done in prose; his pantheism passed, so to speak, unnoticed, and his disputes with Bilderdyk did not draw upon him all the attention he deserved. His promotion to the professorship of Flemish philosophy and literature at the University of Liege was an honourable ostracism, in order to remove him from Amsterdam, where the peculiar turn of his mind was troublesome to some of the magnates. Teaching was the proper vocation of this profound thinker. It is only to be regretted that Kinker was not rather sent into Flanders, where a more refined taste for

poetry might have been cultivated side by side with a growing appreciation of the language. Certainly at Ghent and Louvain his philosophical opinions would have occasioned embarrassment to the Government, which was not likely to be the case at Liege, where the frankness of Kinker procured him a friendly sympathy. But in truth, the mission to the Flemish provinces did not hold out more favourable prospects to the Catholic priest than to the pantheist. It seemed decided that every professor of Flemish literature should meet with a systematic opposition on the part of those who directed the public mind.

If blind party spirit is always dangerous, it is especially so in a country whose homogeneity is not firmly constituted. The kingdom of the Low Countries consists almost entirely of the Thioise provinces, and of some Walloon districts of the ancient appanage of the Dukes of Burgundy, and was looked upon by some as an accession of territory in compensation for losses beyond sèa; by others as a realisation of the monarchy of Albert and Isabella. The national language having been excluded from public affairs by the French administration, it was reinstated by King William, and at first energetically supported by him; but, from causes which this is not perhaps the proper time to discuss, there soon arose in the Flemish provinces

an opposition against the would-be Dutch, whom they wished at all hazards to distinguish fundamentally from the Flemish. This change in the opinions of those who took part in public instruction was very detrimental to the study of the language in Flanders. Thus, being abandoned by the legal profession, who had lived during a quarter of a century under French rule, ridiculed by foreigners who were receiving Belgian hospitality, it saw itself forsaken by those very individuals who had only lately been its firm supporters, and the people were excited against the most valuable of their national possessions.

By the side of these various obstacles to the re-establishment of the Flemish tongue in the provinces, must be placed the half-measures of the Government. It is true that in the different branches of instruction men of talent were employed, who initiated the people into the secrets of the language which had been lost for two centuries; but we must impute it as a fault that it confined itself exclusively within the strict limits of duty. Thus it did not encourage in the youth of the University the exclusive and professional study of Flemish literature; it made no sacrifice to organise the theatre, which might easily have been done, from the large choice offered by the chambers of rhetoric in Flanders and Brabant, and in the dramatic

companies of Holland; the most eminent characters of which, and especially the tragic actress Wattier, had elicited applause from Napoleon and from Talma. They confined themselves to the encouragement, at rare intervals, of excursions by the actors to Brussels, Antwerp, and Ghent, and to bestowing gracious words upon the societies of rhetoric. Under its auspices were formed some literary reunions in the royal residence and in the two capitals of Flanders; but these learned bodies, far from being organised according to the peculiar taste of the Belgians, were rather arenas, open to intrigue for places, and by no means calculated to serve the national cause. Thus they were swallowed up in the tempest of 1830, scarcely leaving a few wrecks floating on the surface. Another grave fault was the withholding from the Flemings the facility of access to the best authors, while the republication of the production of French literature was encouraged.

The fate of the language remained then in a great measure in the hands of the chambers of rhetoric. If these chambers had not yet freed themselves from the routine which fettered the flight of genius, they had at least the privilege of having belonged for centuries to the soil, and of having represented real evils. With more tact, these societies might have regained the *éclat* which they enjoyed in the sixteenth century; they would

have become once more a brilliant focus of civilisation. The various meetings which they held attest that the taste for, and study of the language, made in fact rapid progress.

But the chambers of rhetoric kept themselves too isolated to be of use in stimulating the energy of the people; their labours were too much restricted within the narrow circle of their own members. At Antwerp there was a more extended communication between the public and literary men. There the accents of the poet found a wider sphere, and the claims of the language a more energetic defence. It was in the first years of the existence of the kingdom of the Low Countries that our Willems appeared, the true personification, during more than a quarter of a century, of the Flemish literary movement. Born in 1793, in the neighbourhood of Antwerp, he felt himself at an early age attracted towards the metropolis of the arts, where the national literature had secured for itself, in the society *Tot Nut der Jeugd* (For the Benefit of Youth), a sanctuary in the midst of many destructive elements. Willems, crowned in 1812, at a meeting in Ghent, where the venerable octogenarian Cornelissen had the courage to sound the praises of all that has constituted the glory of Flanders, rendered himself famous in 1818 by an address in favour of his country, under the form of

an *Epistle to the Belgians.* This address, full of energy, was perhaps the most perfect specimen of poetry which for half a century had issued from a Flemish pen. Willems attached to his poem a translation in prose, and some French notes, for the benefit of those who did not read Flemish, and also, as a direct answer to the attacks of some gentlemen of the long robe, who had been already partly refuted by the *Belgian Spectator.* As the question at issue regarded the validity of the claims of the Flemish to the use of their language for official purposes in the provinces, where such language was actually in use, Willems made it his task to prove these claims from the history of the country. This was to avenge the right of nations upon the French propaganda, the holy alliance of the people upon a usurpation of twenty years' duration. France vanquished at Leipsic and at Waterloo, the influence of the French language destroyed in Germany and in Holland, it had nevertheless preserved its vitality in the Flemish part of Belgium. Willems gained his cause, but to the detriment of the vivacity of his poetical spirit; this must be regarded in some respects as a misfortune, considering the very small number of poets of merit which these first days of struggle produced in Flanders, and the apathy shown by the Government when called upon to take efficacious measures to encourage the revival of literature.

While Willems was combating the lawyers, he had at the same time to maintain another contest against several members of the clergy, — on the subject of his *History of Netherlandish Literature in Belgium* (Verhandeling over de Nederduytsche Tael- en Letterkunde, opzigtelyk de Zuydelyke Provintien der Nederlanden, 1819 — 1824), a refined work, of sound criticism and profound erudition, but which, in the opinion of some, extolled the Dutch to the detriment of the Flemish poets. The members of the clergy who attacked our author the most vigorously were Buelens and Thys. The first, who carried on simultaneously a paper war with the Vicar-General of Malines, respecting a sermon which the latter had just published, proved by his own writings that in reality there is no distinction between Flemish and Dutch, where each is careful to pay due attention to style. Thys, formerly hagiographer of the Abbey of Tongerloo, and member of the Academy of Brussels, had obtained a reputation among those liberal-minded men who, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, enriched Belgium with works upon agriculture. Thys lost himself when, in answer to a question proposed by the Literary Society of Antwerp, he became involved in the labyrinth of a linguistic argument. Like Scrieckius and Becanus, as well as his contemporary

De Grave, he attributed a fabulous antiquity to the Flemish tongue. Willems was wiser; like Ypey, the author of *The History of the Language of the Netherlands* (Beknopte Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Tale, 1812), he considered Flemish to be the modern Teutonic branch, the nearest allied to the ancient Indo-Germanic languages. Among the Belgians who at this period gave themselves up to the study of their own idiom, he was one of the very few who entered closely into its composition, which had been already greatly improved by Bilderdyk, and still more perfected by Hamaker in his *Akademische Voorlesingen*, a remarkable work upon the filiation of languages, published a few days before the death of the author (in 1835). But let us return to Willems. It was left to him to prove the identity of the Flemish and the Dutch, and to demonstrate the causes of an apparent distinction. He accomplished his mission in a dissertation *On the Flemish and Dutch Mode of writing the Language of the Netherlands* (Over de Hollandsche en Vlaemsche Schryfwyzen van het Nederduitsch, 1824). In this treatise he proposed a mixed orthography, which he afterwards carried out, and which served as a basis for the discussions of the Linguistic Congress held at Ghent in 1841. But during the existence of the kingdom of the Low Countries, his system was accepted by no one. The Institution, which favoured the study of Flemish,

adopted the orthography of Siegenbeck, while his adversaries put forward the miserable grammar of Des Roches.

The kingdom enjoyed a moment of calm. It was then that the new generation in Flanders first tried its wings. D'Hulster, its most classical and correct poet, had then reached the climax of his age; and Willems himself, although engaged in philological and historical studies, drew from his muse some fine verses. The union between the Catholics and the Liberals soon revived the war against the use of the language, and Willems defended it anew, with all the energy of a profound conviction, against the most eminent men of the opposition. The revolution broke out: it treated the Flemish form of speech as vanquished, and exiled to a small town its noble defender,—a melancholy but sublime symbol of the fate reserved for the Flemish tongue, which, notwithstanding a considerable loss of ground, has remained the language of the majority. Let us not, however, bring unjust accusations. If the Flemings lost their preponderance, they had long been prepared for their fall. It is no less true that it became the duty of every generous heart, as soon as the horizon began to clear, to consider the means of re-establishing the national dialect in its honours and its rights.

Willems prefaced his translation of the *Renard*

into modern Flemish, in 1834, by an animated but true picture of the state of desolation in which the Flemish language was plunged. This bold tone released Willems, already restored to the post of historian, from his place of exile, and opened to him the doors of the Academy, which had been closed against him even before the revolution, under pretence that the Government was seeking an opportunity to *Netherlandise* this learned body.

Willems had consecrated the five years of his retreat to opening for the Flemings a passage to the literature of the Middle Ages, an epoch so well calculated to awaken a national feeling. These studies brought to light the deep learning of the author in philology and history, at the same time that they stimulated the zeal of the rising generation who had remained faithful to the language of their country, and caused Willems to be justly regarded as the leader of the march of intellect in Flanders. The chambers of rhetoric roused themselves, and fresh literary reunions were formed in the principal towns. It had been asserted that the new order of things had destroyed the Flemish language; its revival was, in the opinion of its enemies, but the dying notes of the swan. A very poetical idea truly: to collect together a brilliant youthful choir, full of zeal and ardour, that they might chant a requiem on their expiring country! This hymn

was transformed into an energetic protest, addressed to the Chamber of Representatives by the people against the injustice done to the speech of their forefathers, and was closely followed by a solemn festival in Ghent on the occasion of a linguistic congress held there, 23rd October, 1841. This *fête*, all the more significant that the members of the Government spoke in Flemish, was the first solemn act of the revival in Flanders.

We have still a word to say on the first public encouragement which Flemish literature received from the Government. In 1834 an appeal was made to the Belgian poets for the composition of a poem on the independence of Belgium. In this appeal the literature of the country was placed on a level with that of France. The number of Belgian poets who disputed the palm was very inferior to that of the French. Only thirty-two competitors presented themselves; but the comparative examination of the successful pieces was entirely to the advantage of Flanders. We do not cite this in order to draw a parallel between Flemish and French poetry, we are too well aware how much is accidental in the result of these literary exercises; but the conclusion we wish to arrive at is, that after so glorious a test, the Flemish did not at least deserve, in analogous circumstances, to be afterwards put aside.

The laureate of Flanders was Ledeganck, of whom his country has recently been bereaved, some months after Willems, and, like the latter, in the vigour of life. If we especially recognise in the prose of Willems purity and correctness of style, the same qualities are inherent in the poetry of Ledeganck. He deserved a place in the first rank, not that he was the most original or the boldest of Flemish modern poets, but because the productions of the last ten years of his life were indisputably of the first intellectual order.

After Willems, one of the magnates of modern Flemish literature is Henri Conscience, born at Antwerp in 1812. Self-educated, he made himself remarkable from his youth by his poetical improvisations. His first work, published at twenty-five years of age, showed that his soul was fired by an ardent love for his fatherland, and in his numerous publications since then, he has ever made her the guiding star of his imagination and of his pen. Freshness of ideas, and exactitude in the details, are his great qualities. His novels have received an honour rarely bestowed upon works of that kind; they have been translated into French, English, German, and Swedish.

We do not intend to enter the field of modern literature, and therefore will not speak of the many other prose writers and poets, whose works,

published during the last twenty-five years, show that the love of their mother-tongue is still as vivid in Flemish hearts as in olden times.

We will only add, that Flemish literature, constantly attacked, has been obliged to apply its resources rather to combat its enemies than to raise an edifice of its own; that in its moments of repose it has rather sought to captivate the heart than to shine by intellectual power. But its great merit, which cannot be contested, is that of being essentially national: this is the only distinctive character which it had the power to make thoroughly apparent. Will this vital principle save the Flemish language, and thus realise the maxim, "God helps those who help themselves"? or will the Government effectually second the literary efforts in Flanders, and so restore sufficient energy to its people, to enable them to surmount the material and moral obstacles which prevent Flemish authors from resuming the rank which they formerly occupied, and of which they are certainly still worthy? Time will solve these questions, which are of greater importance for the country than at first it would seem.

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