

**THE CARILLON IN LITERATURE; A
COLLECTION FROM
VARIOUS AUTHORS WITH SOME
NOTES ON THE CARILLON ART**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649413010

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Art by William Gorham Rice

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM GORHAM RICE

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The CARILLON *in*
LITERATURE



L.D.J.

TO
JOSEF DENYN
OF MECHLIN
MASTER BELL-MASTER
AND TO
HIS FRIEND AND MINE
PROSPER VERHEYDEN
OF ANTWERP

VOORSLAG

HIGH tower clocks in the Low Countries play a tune just before the hour to call attention to the strokes of the great bell about to sound. In earlier times this tune was short and had the name of *voorslag*, which put into English is *forestroke*. So this *voorslag* of mine in a concert where the art of others is to supply the larger music will have but few measures.

He who does not know the civic character of the carillon, or how it differs from a chime, and seeks for definition, is referred to the chapter on *Origin, Construction and Technique*, included among the notes in the last pages of this book. Indeed, such a one may also think it worth while to read there the account of *An Evening Concert at Mechlin*.

The notes referred to are taken from *Carillons of Belgium and Holland*, which, for-

tunately, I had completed just before the great war began. Since that fateful August many inquiries have come to me concerning what has happened to Belgian belfries, and, though my information is slight, it is a satisfaction to share it with all who are interested.

St. Rombold's noble tower at Mechlin, with its finest of all carillons, was struck seven times by German shells during the bombardments of August and September, 1914. The tower, however, still stands firm and happily the wonderful bells are uninjured, though the key-board is smashed. The devoted carillonneur remained at his post to the very end. On the last night that he climbed the tower the soldiers marshalled in the Grand' Place beneath him were stirred by his spirited playing of *Valeureux Liégeois*, *God Save the King*, *The Russian Hymn*, *The Marseillaise*, *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* (*The Lion of Flanders*), and other national airs.

St. Peter's Church at Louvain, with its

carillon, counted among the best, is gone. St. Gertrude's Church, also at Louvain, and having one of the great carillons, was in a part of the city not put to the torch and is reported unharmed. The magnificent Cloth Hall of Ypres has been battered down and its splendid bells are in the ruins. The carillons of Liége, Namur, Dinant, Visé, Dixmude, Nieuport, and Alost, are apparently destroyed. None of these were of the highest rank. Termonde's bells broke in pieces as they fell upon the pavement of the square. The carillons of Bruges, Ghent, and Antwerp, all three of the very first order, seem to be uninjured.

Josef Denyn, the great bell-master, driven out of his home at Mechlin, found refuge with friends near Tunbridge Wells, England, and is giving notable concerts on some of the half-dozen carillons that country possesses. In September last, invited by the Dutch authorities, he went to Arnhem, and is

reconstructing the key-board and mechanism by which the thirty-five fine Hemony bells in the Groote Kerk are played. Zutfen and Nimeguen, awakened even in this time of stress to the need of improvement in the arrangement of their bells, are also asking him to put their carillons in order.

Incidentally I would add that letters tell me that Middelburg, Delft, Haarlem, Alkmaar, Amersfoort, Nykerk, and Deventer are also moving to better their carillons, and that Amsterdam within a few months has restored in the Zuiderkerk and the Westerkerk the old custom of playing before service, which Sunday playing in latter days has been confined solely to Belgium. So there is a decided and patriotic revival of the carillon art in the northern Netherlands though disaster is overtaking the belfries of its southern neighbour.

Felix Van Aerschodt, the most famous of modern Belgian bell-makers, had his house and foundry at Louvain burned, was seized