

**BELGIUM: THE LAND OF ART; ITS  
HISTORY, LEGENDS, INDUSTRY  
AND MODERN EXPANSION. NEW  
EDITION. REVISED AND  
ENLARGED**

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Revised and Enlarged by William Elliot Griffis

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**WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS**

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ANTWERP CATHEDRAL AND STATUE OF RUBENS (p. 5)

# BELGIUM: THE LAND OF ART

ITS HISTORY, LEGENDS, INDUSTRY  
AND MODERN EXPANSION

BY

WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS

AUTHOR OF "BRAVE LITTLE HOLLAND," AND MEMBER  
OF THE NEDERLANDISH SOCIETIES OF LEYDEN,  
MIDDELBURG, AND LEEUWARDEN

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## PREFACE

“WHAT can an American see in Belgium?” asked a twentieth-century friend. My answer was, “What he has eyes to see.” This little book, written after four journeyings in the Low Countries between France and Germany, is intended to give pleasure to the reader at home, and to the traveler the means of enjoying what he sees. Furthermore, it shows how numerous and vital are the points of contact between American and Belgic history. No other land is richer in history or more affluent in art than is Belgium. In none have devout, industrious, patriotic and gifted sons told their country’s story more attractively. By pen and in print, on canvas, in mural decoration, in sculpture, in monuments of bronze and marble, in fireplaces and in wood-carving, the story may be read as in an illuminated missal. Belfries, town-halls, churches, guild-houses, have each and all a charm of their own. Yet what avails all this historic and artistic wealth, to the unread and uncultured, if he fail to understand or appreciate what is before his eyes?

I have told in outline the story of savage, Roman, Frankish, feudal, crusading, mediæval, Renaissance, and modern Belgic land, and of the people in what, until 1830, was the old house of

bondage, with many masters, yet rich in local liberties, despite tyrants and oppressors many.

It is one of the wonders of history that a bilingual people, of two distinct ethnic stocks, Celtic and Teutonic, and successively in subjugation to Rome, Germany, Burgundian and Bourbon France, Spain, Austria, and to French Revolutionaries, to Napoleon, and to Holland, should finally, in 1830, win unity, freedom, and sovereignty. I have glanced at the eighty years or more of Belgian nationality, prosperity, and expansion by commerce and colonization.

Not less interesting than the story of their political vicissitudes is that of the social, economic, industrial, and artistic development of the Belgians. No people can be understood unless their past is clear. Nevertheless, I have dwelt upon the early mediæval and Renaissance periods, not with the "backward look," but as the soil from which the present has outflowered. In ages forgotten lie the roots of both their art and their national spirit. It is not to the "dead" past that I have given much space, but rather to those salient events and tendencies which have made fertility for the present and seed for the future. The story of Belgium may be read not alone in text and document, but also in statues and painting, carving and heraldry, lace and tapestry, and the modern natives have used these lavishly, both to express and to interpret the spirit and actions of

their predecessors. In this very condensed sketch I have laid emphasis on those phases of history which the Belgians themselves most value, and which they have notably represented in art, so that they are most visible to the tourist to-day. I have utilized not only the conclusions of critical scholarship, but also the results of my own studies and observations. Space, however, permits only a view of the bold headlands of the national history. One admires the experience-wise sons of Belgium, in their frank setting-forth, with pen, brush, and chisel, both the humiliations and the glories of their native land. They know that "Life often jests at what Death makes immortal."

I have been careful to show our debt to the Walloons (who, rather than the Dutch, first made homes in New Netherland, and, with the Flemings, furnished so large a contribution to the American composite), and to call attention to their great symbol of faith,—the Belgic Confession. In my large congregation at Schenectady (1877-1886), yes, and in Boston and Ithaca, were hundreds of people, like the de Forests, van Antwerps, etc., who were descended from forefathers taught by Guido de Bray and fugitives from the Spanish invasion of 1567. Thousands of Americans who say and believe that their ancestors were "Huguenots" are, in reality, descended from the Walloons.

At some future time I hope to add a volume on