

THE SCULPTOR OF BRUGES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649476442

The Sculptor of Bruges by Mrs. Walter G. Hall

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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MRS. WALTER G. HALL

**THE SCULPTOR
OF BRUGES**



"It was only when the golden bar shone upon that one little spot in his wall,
that he could continue his loved pursuit."—THE SCULPTOR OF BAUGES, Page 33.
(Frontispiece.)



THE
SCULPTOR OF BRUGES.

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EDINBURGH:
WILLIAM P. NIMMO.

1870.

250. q. 14.



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THE SCULPTOR OF BRUGES.

I

THE CROSS : MAKING THE SIGN OR BEARING THE WEIGHT.

HERE was no fairer city to be found on the Continent than Bruges, in her palmy days, when her canals were crowded with vessels from every land, when her storehouses were overflowing, and her burghers many and wealthy.

But this is long ago, and the modern tourist finds the grass growing in the once busy market-place, the harbour almost deserted, and the ancient Flemish streets nearly silent. Yet Bruges has not lost her quaint beauty; her palaces, churches, and public buildings remind us that once she was second to none of the cities of Europe; nor have time or reverses of

fortune robbed her of one charm ; for, by night and day, her unrivalled carillons still ring out, filling the air almost incessantly with the sweetest music—

'Low at times, and loud at times,
Changing like a poet's rhymes,
Ring the beautiful, wild chimes,
From the belfry in the market,
Of the ancient town of Bruges.'

But we do not want to carry our readers to the deserted city of to-day, but to the Bruges of three centuries back, that bowed beneath the Spanish yoke ; to the time when her quays and marts were thronged with citizens ; back to the days of chivalry, when her nobles lived romances.

On the third of May an annual festival was held (and is, we believe, observed to this day), to commemorate the return from Palestine of Thierry D'Alsace, Count of Flanders, who, for his great services in the Holy Wars, had been presented by the King of Jerusalem with, what he blindly believed to be, a few drops of the Saviour's blood. This blood had been 'marvellously preserved on a sponge, with which Joseph of Arimathea had wiped the hands and feet of Christ, after the taking down from the cross.' The supposed relic was enclosed in a bottle, ornamented with gold, and brought by Thierry to Bruges with great pomp, and deposited in 'La Chapelle du Sang de Dieu.'

This third of May, long ago, rose in cloudless

splendour, and a golden sunset found the fine streets and squares crowded with burghers, in holiday attire ; children and young women were everywhere to be seen, carrying chaplets and baskets of flowers, the hum of voices mingling with the rising and falling of the musical bells. The principal ceremony of the festival was a procession by torchlight ; and the impatient citizens, who had assembled in the square near La Chapelle long before the appointed time, gladly hailed the deepening twilight. The musicians of the several guilds were arranged near the little chapel, and amused the crowd by playing favourite national airs, for this was not exclusively a religious festival. Before the twilight had quite faded, the authorities of the city, in almost regal costume, attended by the members of the Council, with banners and trumpeters, took their places in the square ; then the playing ceased, the laughter and conversation amongst the crowd were hushed, and as the first torch was lit, a hymn rose from the band of musicians. The door of the beautiful little chapel was now thrown open, towards which all eyes were directed, and six or seven boys, dressed in white tunics, bearing censers, took up their stations each side the steps. A massive silver crucifix was borne before a priest, arrayed in gorgeous vestments, carrying, on a velvet cushion, a small object that glittered with jewels.

The hymn died away as another priest, in crimson and gold, lifted the sparkling bauble (said to contain the Saviour's blood) from the cushion, and exhibited it to the multitude. The people all sank on their knees as the relic was elevated, some with an expression of sincere adoration on their countenances, and others scarcely hiding the indifference and half-scepticism they felt. For a few minutes this posture was maintained, while a prayer and benediction were being uttered; but before these were ended a tumult arose in one corner of the square.

We have said that *all* knelt; but there was one solitary exception. Notwithstanding the scowling looks directed towards him, and the twitches given to his garments by those within reach, or the earnest whispered entreaty of some to 'kneel down,' one man had remained standing, with his arms folded, paying no heed to the wishes of the people around him. He was a man of about thirty years of age, with a large, finely-shaped head, his face bearing marks of close study and toil, and his eyes deep set and intensely bright.

As he gazed on the prostrate crowd and the group on the chapel steps, a glow of mingled pity, scorn, and indignation kindled on his cheek, and made his bright eyes flash. The defiant attitude of this man instantly caught the attention of the priests, and they angrily