

LEGENDS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Jubilee of Our Lady of Hanswyck

Mater Divinae – Mother of Divine Grace

Malines, or Mechlin, is perhaps the only city in the world which has preserved in all their original perfection the religious fêtes, or shows of the Middle Ages. In 1825, at the Jubilee of St. Rombould, to whom it is indebted for the knowledge of the Gospel, and in 1838, at the Jubilee of our Lady of Hanswyck (the name of a venerated image held in great esteem), this old Christian city exhibited the magnificent and popular spectacle of those gigantic processions, rich in allegory, and studded with those attractive costumes which delight the crowd, whose appearance reminds one of the times of Philip the Good, when the same fêtes took place exactly in the same manner, the spectators alone differing.

We will here faithfully describe in all its details the grand procession of 1838, in the persuasion that they will be appreciated by our readers, few of whom, perhaps, have ever assisted at any fête of so remarkable a nature.

First marched a band of music on foot, in the costume of the present day, after which rode a squadron of cavalry. This formed, as it were, a modern preface to an ancient work. The following was the order of the procession .

A group of sixteen angels on horseback, with large extended wings and azure bodies, sounding golden trumpets, around the herald who carried the standard of the Jubilee. They announced the coming of the representation of the Litany of Virgin of Loretto.

This sweet and favorite devotion of the people was represented by emblematical figures. First came thirty-six maidens, mounted on horses, elegantly dressed in white, in the modest and becoming fashion of Christian art, wearing crowns on their heads, from which fell rich lace veils. Each one carried in her left hand the attribute she represented—the Tower David, the House of Gold, the Tower Ivory, the Mystical Rose, the Mirror of Justice etc.; and from their right hands waved banners of white silk. On every banner was worked, in letters of gold, some title given to Our Blessed Lady; as, Amiable Mother, Admirable Mother, Powerful Virgin, Clement Virgin, Cause of our Joy, Health of the Sick, refuge or sinners, Consolatrix of the afflicted, and Hope of Christians, etc. Thus the show was for the people a continual prayer.

The concluding portion of the Litany, in which the dignity of queen is so justly attributed to Mary, called forth still more majestic representation. Eight triumphal chariots bore the groups emblematic of these glorious titles of our heavenly queen.

Before the cars rode choirs of angels, with snow-white wings and starry foreheads, playing on harps and psaltering, mounted on palfreys (parade horse for women) magnificently caparisoned(cape). The Queen Angels was in the first car, drawn by six cream-colored horses. She was raised on a golden throne, around which knelt many heavenly spirits. Seraphim, cherubim, archangels, and angels surrounded their Queen, the powers, principalities, and dominations carried crowns and scepters. All these characters were borne by young girls, taken from the noblest families of Malines.

The Queen of Patriarchs was in the second car, attended the venerable personages of the Old law—Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.

Next came the Queen Prophets, round whose throne might be seen the inspired men, whose voices recorded the future as plainly as the past, from Abraham to St. John the Baptist.

The fourth car bore the Queen of Apostles, Who sat on a high throne, covered by a canopy, over which was raised the arms of the See of Peter, the eternal emblem of the Church.

Among the twelve Apostles, the chosen Ones of Christ, who were directly commissioned by Him to propagate His Holy Gospel, might be seen their successors who had been chiefly instrumental in spreading the Christian religion in the north Of Gaul; St. Rombauld, St. Servais, St. Amand, Saint Lambert, St. Lievin, St. Gomer, and St. Willibrod.

The Queen Martyrs sat in the fifth chariot, which represented the whole of the earth; for where has not the blood of been shed for the faith? Princesses and recluses, bishops and soldiers, children and old men, young girls and mothers—all were there bearing their palms of triumph.

The sixth car was formed like a pulpit: and carried the Queen of confessors and her militant court ; the young girl who held the reins bore also a naked sword, to show that they who labored in the propagation of the faith must always be ready to shed their blood, if necessary, in its defense.

Next came the Queen of Virgins. The fair charioteer of this car trod the pleasures of this world under her feet; behind her was a wheel and a palm, and on her right a lamb, emblem of innocence.

The eighth chariot was made to represent the heavens, in which reigned the Queen of Saints, surrounded by her heavenly court, round whom shone a brilliant glory. The Grand Harmonic Society of Malines followed the Litany ; but it sadly marred the effect of the whole to see the members dressed in the modern costume. Better had it been to give them the characters of the court of David, or some others corresponding with the allegorical nature of the festival. But see, here is Malines herself, represented by a beautiful child crowned with towers, and surrounded by nine maidens, bearing emblems of the virtues of the city—Faith, Prudence, Charity, Union, Constancy, Fidelity, Valor, Modesty, and Justice.

The cavalry officers, the king's aides-de-camp, and the grand officers of the court, followed on horseback. Behind them is a royal car, drawn by eight horses, in which are faithfully represented by children of twelve years of age, the king and queen of the Belgians upon their throne. The attributes of the arts, commerce, justice, and war, group at their feet. The car is led by Fidelity, Religion, Justice, Goodness; Belgium, Wisdom, and Generosity are the attendants of their majesties. Four winged angels, at each corner of the car, bear aloft the national standard, surmounted by the lion.

A party of naval officers forms the transition to another spectacle. It is a ship, representing the country's welfare, an ingenious emblem—navigation is to all countries the source of wealth.

The countries welfare is a three-masted ship, with her sails, cordage, flags, and cannon. An emblematic figure of Belgium commands her; she has her officers and sailors. She sails along the streets by mechanical contrivances, and is followed by fantastical personages, serving as forerunners to the horse, Bayard, an enormous animal, on whose back ride four medieval knights ; they are the sons of Aymon.

In the tradition of the country, Aymon was a count of Termonde. His four valiant sons defended Malines and Brabant, and Bayard, their trusty steed, often came to feed in the forest Of Soigne, where he left the mark of his foot upon a rock ; he browsed formerly in the fertile plains watered by the Dyle.

After Bayard follow the giants, for which the northern cities are so famous. Here come three children, fifteen feet high, whose father and mother look over the houses ; the lady being a colossal princess, holding a fan as large as those with which domestics in the Indies cool their employers. The grandfather is even taller than his son; to show that each generation degenerated in size. He is seated in a monster tilbury(open two wheeled carriage) of antique form,

escorted by two monster camels mounted by cupids. This is, it is said, a relic of the crusaders, who were the first to import these animals into Europe.

After these great figures comes, as a kind of moral to the show, a good old man smoking his pipe, on a wretched nag, who draws Damo Fortune's wheel (Lady Luck). The goddess herself is born on high, around whom are grouped figures, who, as she makes a movement, rise or fall, showing what freaks the dame plays with mankind. These personages are well-dressed representations of harlequin and a beguine; a hunter and a milkwoman; courtier and a coquette; a hermit and an old woman. Bursts of laughter greet the vicissitudes which these various persons undergo as they pass along. The cavalcade closed as it opened, with a large body of cavalry.

Such is a rapid glance at the curious procession which passed four times through the city of Malines during the fifteen days of the jubilee, from the 15th of August to the 1st of September, in the year 1838. But what, you may ask, has this to do with Our Lady of Hanswyck? The little we have been able to gather on this subject we will now relate.

In 1188, a ship, which bore the precious remains of a little ruined church, stepped of itself upon the waters of the Dyle, nor could all the efforts of the sailors cause it to advance. It stopped just before the little village Of Hanswyck, where shortly afterwards a small chapel was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and received in its sanctuary a statue of our dear Lady, the most precious object the ship carried

These circumstances becoming spread abroad, and it being evident that our Lady had herself chosen this spot for her sanctuary, numerous pilgrims visited it, and many and wonderful were the cures and blessings received by those who sought them.

The miraculous image, which still exists, holds in one arm her Divine Son, and in the other a scepter. Innumerable have been the cures, both corporeal and spiritual, obtained before this image.

In 1578, the church of Hanswyck was burned down, and the monastery destroyed by heretics. From vicinity, the religious took refuge in Malines, bearing as their only treasure this statue, which they concealed for sometime. They eventually built a new monastery at Malines, near the gate of Louvain, in which they placed their precious charge.

In 1585 our Lady Of Hanswyck signalized her establishment in Malines, by delivering the city from a besieging enemy. One of its keys was henceforth confided to her keeping by the magistrates. Her shrine became so frequented, and so rich were the offerings deposited there, that they erected the church, with its beautiful cupola, which is the admiration of visitors to Malines.

At the last Jubilee of our Lady of Hanswyck, one hundred thousand strangers visited the city. All the streets were decorated and illuminated, and beautiful transparencies exposed to view. The railway trains arrived every half hour, and when we saw these beautiful processions and fêtes, how sadly did the thought of the cold and meaningless spectacles of home strike us.