

Notes of George S. Messersmith.

THE JOYEUSE ENTREE OF PRINCE LEOPOLD AND
THE PRINCESS ASTRID AT ANTWERP.

We had the good fortune to be at Antwerp when Prince Leopold and the Princess Astrid made their "joyeuse entree" to the commercial capital of the kingdom which they will one time be called upon to rule over. It is an old custom in Belgium for the heir to the throne to make a visit after reaching his majority to all the leading towns in the country. This visit is known as his "joyeuse entree". The custom dates back to the old Medieval days when the various princes who ruled over the different provinces comprising the Netherlands after their acquisition visited in turn each of the cities in their dominions. These visits were always the occasion for ceremonies and public holidays lasting for a number of days and were supposed to be accompanied by a general rejoicing on the part of the population. The rejoicing as a rule was not so much due to the interest which the population may have felt in the prince himself but in the fact that large sums were spent by him for food and drink for the population.

The Princess Astrid after her marriage in Stockholm to Prince Leopold arrived in Belgium through the port of Antwerp on the cruiser FYLGIA of the Swedish Navy. As her reputation for youth and graciousness and general attractiveness had preceded her, the crowd which

greeted her in Antwerp was a particularly enthusiastic one. The young Prince Leopold had always been particularly sympathetic to the Antwerp population on account of the interest which he had shown in the port and in the welfare of the city. The young couple on debarking from the FYLGIA proceeded on foot to the Hotel de Ville which was not far from the quay and the opportunity for the people to see the young princess was therefore comparatively restricted due to the small distance which they had to traverse. In their eagerness to see the young couple the crowd broke through the lines of police which lined the road and broke down the barriers which had been put up. The royal party was completely surrounded and almost roughly handled by the interested spectators.

An interesting incident occurred in connection with this arrival of the princess. The Comtesse d'Oultremont, a member of the suite of King Albert and Queen Elisabeth, was with the rest of the royal party somewhat caught in the crowd and afterwards reported to the police the loss of a piece of jewelry on which a very high value was placed. She later sued the city of Antwerp for this some on the ground that the police protection provided by the city to the royal party had not been sufficient. Every effort was made to find this piece of jewelry, and very shortly before the joyeuse entree of the princes in May 1928, the principal diamond in this piece of jewelry was recovered, but to the discomfiture of the noble lady it was found that the diamond and the piece of jewelry of which

it had formed a part was much inferior in value to the amount which she had placed upon it and for which she was suing. She explained that she had placed this high value on the stone as it was a family heirloom and possessed for that reason a unique value, but this explanation did not permit her to escape from the general ridicule which the discovery of the diamond provoked.

Several days before the arrival of the young princes, Governor Holvoet, Governor of the Province, and the Baronne Holvoet, the Burgermaster Mr. Van Cauwelaert, and the people at the Hotel de Ville were busy making arrangements for their reception and entertainment. The city was decorated with flags, with flowers, and with pillars in the principal streets as it had not been decorated during the nine years that I have lived there. Probably no other city in the world puts on a gala appearance such as Antwerp for ceremonies of this kind and in this instance they outdid themselves. As an indication of the pains which are taken on such an occasion, the following incident is of interest. The main business street of Antwerp is the Place de Meir, a very wide and broad avenue which was once the bed of a small stream flowing into the Scheldt. With the growth of the city this canal was covered over with an arch and made into a street. The growing traffic of a modern city and the natural decay of years brought about a weakening of these arches erected early in the Middle Ages so that it became necessary to undertake extensive repairs thereon, and an unsightly structure was erected in the middle of the Place de Meir from which

the material for the repairs was sent down under the street. In order to avoid this unsightly structure destroying the gala appearance of the principal thoroughfare of the city, the architect of the city conceived the idea of turning it into a huge ship which was very skilfully done. In the short space of a week this structure assumed the appearance of a modern passenger steamer with port holes, masts, and funnels, and all the appendages, and when it was lighted at night it presented a really attractive and interesting spectacle. The Princess on perceiving it was greatly interested and later in conversation with the Swedish Consul General stated that she was so pleased to see the FYLGIA in port again. When he expressed his astonishment that the cruiser should be in the port without his knowledge she mischievously insisted that it was there as she had seen it, and at last relieved him of his discomfiture and embarrassment by telling him that she had seen it in the middle of the Place de Meir on her arrival.

The princes arrived at Antwerp on the morning of May 19, by train from Brussels and proceeded in an open carriage of the court immediately to the Hotel de Ville where they were met in the magnificent setting of the Salle Leys where so many distinguished royal personages have been received by the city of Antwerp and where years before the father of Prince Leopold was received on the occasion of his joyeuse entree. This room is really a magnificent one, in the middle of one side of which there is a 14th century mantelpiece.

Under this mantelpiece there always awaits the distinguished visitor the Pucelle d'Anvers in her royal robes together with her pages. On this occasion the setting was a particularly memorable and interesting one in view of the fact that the title of the royal pair is the Duke and Duchess of Brabant and on the walls of the Salle Leys the magic hand of Baron Leys depicted during his lifetime a series of portraits of the Dukes of Brabant from as early as the 12th century. It was particularly interesting to see this young happy and attractive couple, he clad in the olive drab of an officer of the Belgian army, and she in a very attractive blue morning dress, immediately under the pictures of the Dukes of Brabant clad in leather jerkins with shield on the arm, and holding in front of them the long two-handled sword of the period.

After the usual address by the Burgomaster welcoming the royal pair to the commercial capital and port of Belgium, the prince replied in a really very well thought out speech in Flemish. Immediately thereafter the Pucelle d'Anvers approached and handed him the red and white flower symbolic of the freedom of the city, and then offered to the princess a case containing a magnificent diamond offered her as a gift by the city. They were then presented with a magnificent leather case containing the copy of the address made by the Burgomaster printed on the old type of the Plantyn Museum. Then followed the presentations and it became my unexpected duty to present the 49 chiefs of post of the various countries represented in a consular way at

Antwerp. I had not been warned of this and although quite familiar with my colleagues my heart failed me as towards the end I saw approaching some whose names were entirely unknown to me as well as the country which they represented. Remembering that a predecessor of mine had made mortal enemies and almost brought about an incident by introducing the consul general for Venezuela as the Japanese Consul, I decided it was best merely to utter a few unintelligible words when presenting the tail end of the line. It all passed off without incident and embarrassment and I could tell from the ghost of a smile in the eyes of the Prince and Princess that they thoroughly understood and appreciated the situation.

After luncheon at the palace which had been opened for several days for this occasion and which was literally filled with flowers sent by the people of the city to make it more habitable, they visited the port and various institutions for seamen and dock workers. At 4.30 they appeared in the huge hall of the Bourse where the leading business people of the city had gathered to meet them. A chorus of some hundred young men and women rendered some selections of old Flemish songs in a magnificent manner due to the fact that the leading talents from the two operas, the Flemish and the French, in the city were in the chorus. The entire setting of the Bourse was extremely attractive and the picture is one not easily to be forgotten. After some more presentations the young couple were able to return to the palace for a few minutes rest before going to the governor's palace where they

dined with their immediate suite with Baron and Baronne Holvoet.

At 9.30 the city gave in the Salle des Fetes a ball to which some two hundred people were invited. All the officers of the central, provincial, and city government and of the army, as well as the entire consular corps, were present in uniform. The Salle des Fetes is one of the largest and one of the most magnificent halls for an entertainment of this kind in Europe. It is equalled and probably excelled only by the huge hall in the new city hall at Stockholm. Decorated with the flags of all the nations, with the shields of the provinces of Belgium, as well as of the various countries of the world, and with stands of banners belonging to the many societies of the city of Antwerp, the huge hall presented a brilliant spectacle. The gathering was a particularly distinguished one and the setting of the uniforms and the gowns made a picture which it would be difficult to forget. The young couple seemed to enjoy the dance instead of being bored by it, and instead of leaving at 12 o'clock as they were expected to, asked to remain until one, much to the discouragement of some of the rest of us who were no longer so young and whose feet were giving way after standing up all day.

If their first day had been a busy one it was nothing in comparison to the Sunday which followed. By quarter of ten Mrs. Messersmith and I were already in our places at the Cathedral where high mass was to be said by Cardinal Van Roey at 10 o'clock. The

high altar of the cathedral and the entire cathedral were decorated with all the riches in gold and silver and tapestry and banners that the treasury of this Medieval cathedral contained. It was literally splendid with the huge banners in crimson draped from the high arches of the cathedral to the very foot of the huge columns. To the right of the altar under a red canopy were the two prie-Dieu for the Prince and Princess, and to the left a canopy under which was the crimson armchair for the cardinal. To my surprise on entering the cathedral and proceeding to the high altar I found that as dean of the consular corps my own place was immediately next to that of the general, the second place in the whole cathedral, and the thought occurred to me that probably not again in my lifetime would I have the privilege of enjoying such a position on an occasion of primary importance such as this. While honors in themselves mean nothing and have never meant anything to me, I was rather glad on this occasion that it so happened that I was acting as dean of the consular corps for it gave me the opportunity in the cathedral as well as on other occasions during the visit to see the proceedings roll by from a point of vantage. The long ceremony of the mass, accompanied by the music of the choir and the deep roll of the cathedral organ lasted for over an hour and ended as is usual in Belgium on an occasion of this kind with the Brabanconne set to music by Wambach, the Antwerp composer whom I knew well during his lifetime.

After the mass we all followed the Prince

and Princess on foot to the Hotel de Ville only a few hundred yards distant, where they reviewed a popular cortege from the windows of the Salle Leys. The cortege was composed largely of school children and the so-called societies of Antwerp, and was in the real sense of the word a popular one as it was intended to be. I had seen many processions of school children in Antwerp but none so impressive and large as this one. It is customary on the national holidays for the school children to march in a cortege passed the local authorities but not a few of the socialist families object to their children marching in these parades. It appears however that on this occasion they offered no objection to their children passing in review for the royal pair, and this to many of us had a particular significance as it showed that already by their charm and ingenuousness the young couple had succeeded in winning the affection of the great mass of the population. For an hour and a half school children in white with their banners, gymnastic societies, music societies and bands in their fantastic uniforms, and all kinds of societies for every conceivable object passed by. Practically every one of them was accompanied by its band of music and all of them carried the magnificent banners in silk for which Antwerp is famous all over Europe. No idea can be given of the beauty and variety of these banners. They have to be seen to be appreciated. The cortege was closed by two magnificent Flemish horses led by their proud owners and these were followed by some hundred dockworkers each mounted on one of the huge Flemish horses used for heavy

carting on the docks. As these heavy horses mounted by their drivers passed by the Hotel de Ville it was exceedingly interesting how their work-hardened and in many cases work-deformed riders glanced with a look of proud ownership at the young princes on the balcony. If anything could repay the Prince and Princess for their visit to the city and make it worth while, it was the tribute paid to them by these dockworkers who gave up their Sunday to pass in review before them. There is no city in the world where people love to parade as much as they do in Antwerp and where they seize every opportunity to do so, but this popular cortege in this instance really took the form of a popular manifestation of interest in and affection for their future sovereigns.

After the last file of the cortege had passed by the city hall, the banners which had been carried by the various societies were massed in front of the Hotel de Ville. There must have been hundreds of them for the entire market place was filled with these banners. The vivid display of color and the wonderful imagery on these flags against the setting of the Medieval guild houses which surround the market place was an unforgettable sight to those who had the privilege of seeing it from a point of vantage. Many times had these same societies and these same banners passed in front of the Hotel de Ville in review but never had anyone had the idea of grouping them afterwards in one mass in the market place.

After the cortege had passed a privileged few of us went to the Salle Leys where the

princes had an opportunity to sit down for a few minutes before lunch was served. The luncheon was served in the Salle de Mariages adjoining the Salle Leys. It was rather a pleasant luncheon as there were no speeches and it was quite an intimate gathering. After the luncheon, the Burgo-master showed the Prince and Princess the plans for the colonial and maritime exposition to be held at Antwerp in 1930 and they then left to visit some homes which have been built for working people by the city in some of the suburbs.

At 5.30 tea was served in the palace of the Governor of the Province and it was here that the aristocracy of Antwerp, that is to say the nobles, had an opportunity to see their princes. It is a rather peculiar thing and a rather anomalous one that not only the King Albert and Queen Elisabeth, but also the young Prince and Princess should be more popular with the commercial, banking, and business circles and the great mass of the people than they are with the nobility. The nobility in Belgium are a rather retired class who live practically entirely separate from the rest of the people and who move to a very large extent only among themselves. They are jealous of their prerogatives and the great part of them abstain from business and all outside associations. The natural result is that in this day they enjoy in reality no prestige and no influence and the royal family has very wisely cast its lot with the people of the country rather than with the aristocracy. This the nobility cannot forgive them and they

are rather inclined to look down upon the royal family as having given up the privileges of their caste. It was naturally at the Governor's that they were given the opportunity of meeting the royal visitors. After the usual presentations we had tea in the Rotunda room where the provincial counsel usually holds its sessions. The Prince and Princess and Baron and Baronne Holvoet were at one of the small tables, of which there were four others, and Mrs. Messersmith and I had the good fortune to be each at one of these. There were two huge buffets for the other five hundred or more guests.

The visit was ended by a gala performance at the Flemish Opera at 8.30 that evening. Promptly on the hour the royal couple entered their box accompanied by the Burgomaster and by their own suite. During my stay at Antwerp it had been my pleasure to be present at many gala performances at either the French or the Flemish Operas, but none of them from a spectacular point of view could equal that of the evening. The opera opened with the first act of the "Herbergprinses", an opera by Jan Blockx, an Antwerp composer. The stage setting for this first scene is a street scene of old Antwerp and the theme of the opera is itself intimately connected with the life of the old city. After the first act a number of the leading artists, composers, musicians, and literary people of the city were presented to the royal pair in the beautiful lobby of the theatre. Next followed a ballet of unusual prettiness and exceedingly well executed; but the climax of the evening was the third and last act of an opera by Emile Wambach, an Antwerp composer,

"Quinten Matsys". In this act there is a popular procession through the streets in which the traditional banners so intimately connected with the life of this city are carried. For this occasion the most beautiful banners of the various societies had been lent to the theatre and were carried in the procession. The effect was really fairylike and the audience was moved by the ensemble of color in flags and costumes and by the excellent music as one seldom sees a number of people moved by a spectacle of this kind. At the close of this act the Prince and Princess were given a real ovation on their departure.

The Princess Astrid wore at this gala performance the tiara which had been presented to her by the people of the nine provinces of Belgium as a wedding gift. It is composed of a broad band of diamonds for the brow and a string of some 14 large stones surmounting it. Seldom has such a splendid jewel been worn in a more fitting manner, and seldom has a royal couple aroused such real enthusiasm on a visit of this kind as did this young pair on their visit to Antwerp. The Princess by her simplicity, graciousness, and by her real personal charm succeeded in making an impression which will not be effaced, while the Prince by his amiability and by the manner in which he met the hundreds of people who were presented to him and by the intelligent interest which he showed in everything, won the affection of those of the population which he did not yet possess.