



THE BELFRY
OF BRUGES



In the marketplace of Bruges stands the belfry old and brown;

Thrice consumed and thrice rebuilt, still it watches o'er the town.

As the summer morn was breaking, on that lofty tower I stood,

And the world threw off the darkness, like the weeds of widowhood.

Thick with towns and hamlets studded, and with streams and vapors gray,

Like a shield embossed with silver, round and vast the landscape lay.

At my feet the city slumbered.
From its chimneys, here and there,

Wreaths of snow-white smoke,
ascending, vanished, ghost-like,
into air.

Not a sound rose from the city
at that early morning hour,

But I heard a heart of iron beating
in the ancient tower.

From their nests beneath the rafters sang the swallows wild and high;

And the world, beneath me sleeping, seemed more distant than the sky.

Then most musical and solemn, bringing back the olden times,

With their strange, unearthly changes rang the melancholy chimes,

Like the psalms from some old cloister, when the nuns sing in the choir;

And the great bell tolled among them, like the chanting of a friar.

Visions of the days departed,
shadowy phantoms filled my brain;

They who live in history only
seemed to walk the earth again;

All the Foresters of Flanders,—
mighty Baldwin Bras de Fer,

Lyderick du Bucq and Cressy
Philip, Guy de Dampierre.



I beheld the pageants splendid that adorned
those days of old;

Stately dames, like queens attended, knights
who bore the Fleece of Gold

Lombard and Venetian merchants with deep-
laden argosies;

Ministers from twenty nations; more than
royal pomp and ease.

I beheld proud Maximilian, kneeling humbly
on the ground;

I beheld the gentle Mary, hunting with her
hawk and hound;

And her lighted bridal-chamber, where a duke
slept with the queen,

And the armed guard around them, and the
sword unsheathed between.

I beheld the Flemish weavers, with Namur
and Juliers bold,

Marching homeward from the bloody battle
of the Spurs of Gold;

Saw the light at Minnewater, saw the White
Hoods moving west,

Saw great Artevelde victorious scale the
Golden Dragon's nest.

And again the whiskered Spaniard all the
land with terror smote;

And again the wild alarum sounded from
the tocsin's throat;

Till the bell of Ghent responded o'er lagoon
and dike of sand,

"I am Roland! I am Roland! There is victory
in the land!"

Then the sound of drums aroused me. The
awakened city's roar

Chased the phantoms I had summoned back
into their graves once more.

Hours had passed away like minutes; and,
before I was aware,

Lo! the shadow of the belfry crossed the sun-
illuminated square.