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Typed by M. Cloud

Ada P. McCormick
Tucson, Arizona
September 24, 1945

(Letter from Ida Tarbell
to her family - 1891)

Antwerp, Belgium
Aug. 16, '91

My Dear Family:

I am "in it," and time for letters must be stolen, but I must write. I sent you my letter written on the steamer on Friday. The ride up the English Channel to the mouth of the Scheld was most delightful. We saw a good deal of the English coast and would have seen more of the beautiful amethyst thing if a fog had not drown us on Friday noon and we been obliged to spend the rest of the day creeping along trying to avoid other wanderers. Yesterday morning I rose early and found that we were skirting the north coast of Belgium. The shoreswas so near that we could trace the villages plainly, Ostend and others, watering places. A railroad runs along the coast and when I discovered the smoke of the engine I shouted a salute. I began to feel that I had reached land again. The land seen from the steamer was flat as paper and the little houses as stiff as matches. The trees here are cared for with great attention and stand in rows like so many lamp posts, all the same height, all trimmed ~~all~~?, and all having their particular mission. All the rows of large trees are accompanied by young ones, growing up to take their places. We soon reached a spot where we could see the dykes and saw what it meant to build a wall around a country to keep out the sea. The land is much lower than the water and the great strong barracks follow the shore, neat, green, and strong. The houses behind them show only their roofs. These are of red tile and very steep. From the boat they look exactly like Standard Oil tanks and I

grew pale to think of that combination swallowing Belgium too. I soon discovered my mistake however. We reached the mouth of the river about noon. The place is Flushing. Here the pilot came aboard with mail and I was an hour gettingup courage to go down and see if there was a telegram from you. There was none and my heart arose. Flushing is so quaint, windmills, steep red tiled roofs, little gables, and great walls keeping out the sea and for defense. We were too late for the morning tide which should take us to Antwerp
31T and so laid a little below Flushing opposite a picturesque little village. When it became certain that we would go down the river with the evening tide we pitched into packing. We have put all our things away except our toilet articles and nightgowns into the handbags and we carry our wraps. The trunks and steamer bags go to Paris <u>in bond</u>, i.e. without examination. This will save carting. Travel with little is the rule here. The dinner was the last meal served in the boat and we started for Antwerp before it was finished. The ride up was wonderfully beautiful. The sky was clear, the sun ?sank sat in red glory, the moon came out. The land on each side was like a garden as far as we could see. Here was a harvest field with haycocks which might have been imported from Hatch Hollow, here great windmills, with slow sailing wings. Currents run inland now and then and one sees a mast or sail skimming along by itself, the boat below the land line. The river was full of crafts. One interesting sight was a wreck, a 3 masted schooner collided with a steam ER? had sunk and the masts and stacks only were
32T above water. We passed a steamer earlier in the day going to America. A twin to ours and the two saluted. <u>I cried</u>. Everything

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breaks one up here. Going down we sang songs, Home Sweet Home, America, Jesus, Lover of My Soul until everybody was weeping on everybody's bosom and your middle-aged wanderer was "broke up" worse than when she kissed her mamma good-bye. Within a half hour of Antwerp the pilot ran us into the mud. We were all on deck, bags in hand watching the city when we stuck, such a shame! There lay a long stretch of brilliant lights "so near and yet so far." The Kirmasse is celebrated here just now and there was a procession and illumination on hand which we wanted to see. But no use. It was 11 o'clock before the tugs and the engines were able to pull us off and get us into the harbor. It was too late for us to go into the city alone though "our gentlemen" offered to take care of us. Fortunately we stayed aship. Several persons who went in returned about 2 A.M. for lodgings, the city being full. The fête has brought thousands here. This morning when I came from stateroom, I found a note from Mr. Sisson saying that they had discovered that no rooms could be had without long search and had engaged rooms at the Hotel de Flanders, which were to be vacated this morning for us. Think of their kindness! We went of course. Our luck is the envy of all our steamer acquaintances. Some of them are crowded 5 in a room on the 5th story. We are on the 2nd story and have 2 rooms. Such quaint rooms, too. The beds are high, the quilts a foot thick, the whole canopied in white. The furniture is quite natural though it does seem funny to see your washing china on the bureau and not to be furnished soap. (Soap is extra over here. See Mark Twain's experience). Our rooms cost 60 cents a day. Meals extra. Of course all our eyes are occupied with the sights of the town. The streets are

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very narrow, almost everybody walking in the middle, they turn at the most unexpected points and you constantly are facing a stone wall. Everything is paved with cobbles and is kept decent by street 34T sweepers, very necessary since almost everything is thrown into the street. Of course there are boulevards, some of them very beautiful, with double rows of trees on each side of the carriage drive. We are on one of the squares, the Place Verte (green place) and from our window see all the street sights. The noise is terrific, cabs and drays on the pavements cause most of it, but the dogs do as much by their barking. From the picture I send you'll see how they are used though oftener there are two. Sometimes only one is fastened under a cart. I saw today a Dutchy little cart like a bicycle come drawn by a dog and a little fellow about 6 years old in it. I wish my Sweetheart and his sisters could have one. They would bring out all Titusville to see the show. The heavy drays ? pantechnicon low on the wheels are peculiar to this country, too, I believe. The cabs, etc., are not very different from New York vehicles. The people, too, are so sprinkled with English and Americans that one 35T does not mind the change much. The children are delightfully odd sometimes. Many of them go with short dresses and bare legs and arms. There are peaked hats, many funny caps and hideous plaits. The peasant women and the Flemish whom the advance of civilization(?) has not spoiled are lovely. The picture will give you a little idea. Of course the fête has brought many to the city and the real features are somewhat clouded. The streets are rich. We lunched today on the sidewalk before a Hotel and cafe. We had <u>beer</u> and

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sandwiches with German mustard which nearly burnt us to a crisp. While there we saw something of the beggars which invest the streets. Among them were: a man with one hand, three blind persons, an Italian family, he grinding, of course, she in full costume scattering smiles for centimes, three boys with villainous accordions whom the gentlemen had to pay to go away, a girl with a tambourine, who sang, a boy who turned somersaults, a boy with a hump which a doctor in our party felt and pronounced made of cotton, a family in dirt and rags, a woman who sold jumping jacks, a man with matches, all these while we ate our lunch and the cab waited. They spot you everywhere and follow you with curses if you do not give them something. One of the prettiest sights I've seen was a compnay of peasant women dressed in black plain gowns, with bare heads, wooden shoes, and bow of Belgium colors, yellow, red and black on their bosoms, dancing in the street to a hand organ. They had come in for the great fête and they abandon themselves completely to the fun going. They danced heartily and modestly, many pretty fancy steps, paying the grinder a centime after each piece. Once a man called something to the prettiest girl as she passed and she shrieked a rebuff into his face so contemptuously that the fellow turned away. When they were tired of that, they stopped like children would in a play they had grown weary of and went after something else. Some of our acquaintances were telling of a similar party they saw today where the women each carried a white umbrella, which they swung over their heads. It is as natural to dance here where there is music as to walk. Men passing in couples down the street hear a waltz and change their walk to dance without seeming to know it. Women, three, four

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or five in a row go dancing pass the organs they hear, but this is fete time, perhaps it is not so in quieter days.

Monday Morning. I have risen early to finish my letter, if possible. My Sunday in Antwerp was so full and brilliant a day that I want you to have its outline. The great feature in the morning was the procession. In it were carried all the rich things of the religious orders of Antwerp. The most astonishing was "Our Lady." A figure of the Virgin. She was clad in a cloth of gold falling back from her neck in a long stiff train. Most beautiful jewels were sewn into the cloth. A complicated crown was on her head and her bosom was actually plated with stones. In her arms was the child, also, well ornamented. She is worth 2,500,000 francs -- all on her back. I cannot describe the procession. It was a long line of priests in[illegible] white linen or lace sacks, carrying candles, swinging censors or bearing banners, of religious bodies, of church treasureslong concealed and now brought out under glittering canopies, of bishops and archbishops clad in coats wonderful in gold and glitter and villainous in fit, of bands of scores of pieces, their music delightful, etc., etc. We had a good position and saw all we cared to. After it we "did" the town in carriages, a compliment from some of our gentlemen acquaintances. There are many beautiful sights in parks, statues, houses, which I would like to But cannot describe. After our drive during which we stopped for the luncheon described, we girls spent a couple of hours in the cathedral where Reubens' famous pictures are and where the carving defies all description. The cathedral is

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old, beautiful, shabby, a church which for 400 years or more has been draining the people to add to its attractions. The exterior is wonderful though our architect criticises a little the mixture of the Gothic and Byzantine styles in it. The tower is over 400 feet high and in it is a chime of 99 bells which yesterday pealed nearly all day. They are wonderfully mellow. Within one can walk 30T wander and observe for hours. It costs something, a franc, to get in when the pictures are unveiled. Whom do you suppose I saw in the cathedral? I was standing looking at a picture when someone said, "It is Miss Tarbell" and there was Mrs. Hyde (Emery). They had just come and were spending only a few hours. I had a delightful little chat and met Mr. H. They have seen Will Benson and the McKelveys and just missed Mrs. at Abbotsford, Walter Scott's home. She is looking brilliantly and he a little pale.

After the cathedral we girls went to our rooms and rested, then dinner. Do you understand table d'hote done here? You have a table with nothing on it but centerpieces of flowers, and the fruit dishes, spoons, etc., and wine glasses at your place. They serve you in courses, 8 to 12, and you take what you get and ask for nothing more. It is excellent for conversation and for those who want to kill time. In the evening the hotel was full of 40T the steamer people. They seem like home folks now and wherever we met we grasp each others hands. A very sad thing has happened, a man on board who drank very heavily coming over went crazy Sunday morning, first stage of delirium tremens, they say. He was arrested. The friend who brought him was disgusted, let him go and "our gentlemen" who are the souls of kindliness as well

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as courtesy finding that Mr. Douglas had left the poor fellow spent three hours and I do not know how much money to get him out -- they succeeded at 10 P.M. A party of us took carriages to see the last of the Kirmasse. Through the middle of one of the boulevards runs, for several blocks, a double row of booths, where they sell candies and hotcakes, tell fortunes, perform tricks, shoot at marks, etc., etc. At each street corner is an illuminated merry-go-round.

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