

MY EXPERIENCE WITH BAEDEKER

Mr. Baedeker Is an Author Who Has Written an Amazing Book About Belgium—He Finds It Full of the Loveliest Unspoiled Pieces of Thirteenth Century Architecture.

By ARTHUR GLEASON.

a lively country, full of busy, contented people; innocent peasants and sturdy workmen and that sort of thing. Why, it's the saddest place in the world. The people are not cheery at all. They are depressed. It's the last place I should think of for a holiday, now that I have seen it. And that's the way it goes all through his work. Things are just the opposite of what he says with so much meticulous care. He would speak of "gay cafe life" in a place that looked as if an earthquake had hit it, and where the only people were some cripples and a few half-starved old people. If he finds that sort of thing gay as he travels around he is an easy man to please. It was so wherever I went. It isn't as if he were wrong at some one detail. He is wrong all over the place, all over Belgium. It's all different from the way he says it is. I know his fellow countrymen, who are there now, will bear me out in this.

Let me show one place. I took his book with me and used it on Nieuport. That's a perfectly fair test, because Nieuport is just like a couple of hundred other towns I have seen.

"Nieuport," says Herr Baedeker, "a small and quiet place on the Yser."

It is one of the noisiest places I have ever been in. There was a day and a half in May when shells dropped into the streets and houses every minute. Every day at least a few screaming three-inch shells fall on the village. Aeroplanes buzz overhead, shrapnel pings in the sky. Rifle bullets sing like excited telegraph wires. If Baedeker found Nieuport a quiet place he was brought up in a boiler factory.

His very next phrase puzzled me—"with 3,500 inhabitants," he says.

And I didn't see one. There were dead people in the ruins of the houses. The soldiers used to unearth them from time to time. I remember that the poet speaks of "the poor inhabitant below," when he is writing of a body in a grave. It must be in that sense that Baedeker specifies those 3,500 inhabitants. But he shouldn't do that kind of imaginative touch. It isn't in his line. And it might mislead people.

Think of a stranger getting into Nieuport after dark on a wet night, with his mind all set on the three hotels Baedeker gives him a choice of.

"All unpretending," he says.

Just the wrong word. Why, those hotels are brick dust. They're flat on the ground. There isn't a room left. He means "demolished." He doesn't use our language easily. I can see that. It is true they are unpretending, but that isn't the first word you would use about them, not if you were fluent.

Then he gives a detail that is unnecessary. He says you can sleep or eat there for a "franc and a half." That exactitude is out of place. It is laborious. I ask you what a traveller would make of the "1 1/2 fr. pour diner," when he came on that rubbish heap which is the Hotel of Hope—"Hotel de l'Espérance." That is just like Baedeker, all through his book. He will give a de-

tail, like that precise cost of a dinner, when there isn't any food in the neighborhood. It wouldn't be so bad if he'd sketch things in general terms. That I could forgive. But it is too much when he makes a word-picture of a Flemish table d'hôte for a franc and a half in a section of country where even the cats are starving.

His next statement is plain twisted. "Nieuport is noted for its obstinate resistance to the French."

I saw French soldiers there every day. They were defending the place. His way of putting it stands the facts on their head.

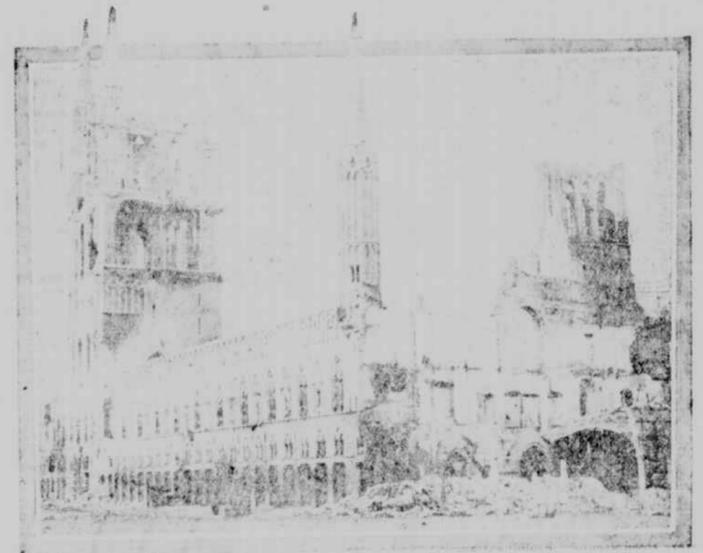
"And (as noted) for the 'Battle of the Dunes' in 1690."

tion for a leisurely walk. It isn't a sufficient warning against doing something which shortens life. The word "inspect" is unfortunate. It gives the reader the idea that he is invited to nose around those locks, when he had really better quiet down and kept away. The sentries don't want him there. I should have written that sentence differently. His kind of unconsidered advice leads to a lot of sadness.

"The Rue Longue contains a few quaint old houses."

It doesn't contain any houses at all. There are some heaps of scorched rubble. "Quaint" is word-painting.

"On the south side of this square rises the dignified Cloth Hall."



The Cloth Hall is "dignified," according to Mr. Baedeker.

That is where the printer falls down. I was there during the Battle of the Dunes. It is 1914. The nine is upside down in the date as given.

I wouldn't object so much if he were careless with facts that were harmless, like his hotels and his dinner and his dates. But when he gives bad advice that would lead people into trouble, I think he ought to be jacked up. Listen to this:

"We may turn to the left to inspect the locks on the canals to Ostend."

Baedeker's proposal here means sure death to the reader that tries it. That section is lined with machine guns. If a man began turning and inspecting he would be shot. Baedeker's statement is too casual. It sounds like a sugges-

skeleton. I have a good photograph of it. If Baedeker would stand under that "modern timber roof" in a rainstorm he wouldn't think so much of it.

"The Hotel de Ville contains a small collection of paintings."

I don't like to keep picking on what he says, but that sentence is irritating. There aren't any paintings there, because things are scattered. You can see

BREAKING AWAY FROM BABY

(Characters: A young mother; a maid servant. Time: Evening.)

"NOW, Julia, I'm going. You are sure you remember all I told you about baby?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You'll be sure to listen and go to him if he cries?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And if he wants a drink, to get him a nice fresh glass of water? Don't rouse him, you know; just lift him up gently and put the glass to his lips."

"Oh, yes; I know, ma'am. I'll remember."

"And if he should be sick, be sure to— Oh, I don't know, I just hate to leave him. It seems actually heartless of me."

"Why, I can take care of him, ma'am. If he should be sick, why, I'll telephone the doctor."

"Yes, and remember the doctor's telephone number. It's in the little book, if you forget. It's 4448-B Center."

"I know where to look for it, ma'am."

"And my mother's telephone number, you know, is 632-W Outskirts; that's in the little book, too."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And my husband's people live right around the corner, if you should need them. Their phone number is 4548 Eveningside. They'll come to you in a few minutes if you call them. I told them I was going out and that you'd be all alone with baby. Oh, I just hate to do it; somehow it seems almost cruel. Just suppose something should happen. I'd never forgive myself. Hark! Isn't that a fire engine?"

"I don't hear anything, ma'am. Only the phonograph downstairs."

"I'm positive I heard a fire engine whistle. Julia, what would you do if there was a fire?"

"I'd take the baby and get out."

"I'm sure you would if you could, Julia, but promise me this: That you won't go to sleep until we get home again, and that if you smell smoke anywhere you'll immediately go and see where it comes from. What's that noise in the kitchen?"

"It's that mouse again, ma'am, I guess."

"Oh, goodness, so it is. I'd forgotten all about him. Just suppose he should get into baby's crib. I've heard of mice doing that and biting a baby terribly. Oh, I simply CANT go out. If I go I shan't enjoy myself a bit."

"If you don't go soon, ma'am, you'll be late. Wasn't it at 8 o'clock that you were to meet—"

"Oh, yes, I know, but it's more important to care for baby than to be on time at a concert. Hark! He's turning in his crib. I just know

torn bits strewed around on the floor of the place, but nothing like a collection.

I could go on like that, and take him up on a lot more details. But it sounds as if I were criticising. And I don't mean it that way, because I believe the man is doing his best. But I do think he ought to get out another edition of his book, and set these points straight.

He puts a little poem on his title page: "Go, little book, God send thee good passage."

And specially let this be thy prayer: Undo them all that thee will read or hear.

Where thou art wrong, after their help to call, Thee to correct in any part or all."

That sounds fair enough. So I am going to send him these notes. But it isn't in "parts" he is "wrong." There is a big mistake somewhere.

he's going to be restless. I'll tiptoe down to the bedroom and watch him for a moment. Oh, I just hate to leave him; it seems so like desertion. Oh, how can women abandon babies! I can't understand it. You won't let him get uncovered, will you, Julia?"

"No, ma'am."

"You'll have to watch him, you know. Sometimes, when he's restless, he kicks the covers off, and babies catch cold so easily."

"I'll watch him, ma'am."

"And if the wind should blow any stronger before I get home, close the window a little. Don't let the air blow directly on him, you know."

"I won't, ma'am."

"I'll call up a couple of times during the evening and ask you how he is, so go to the phone as quickly as you can or the ringing of the bell may wake him. I should hate to have you tell me that I had roused him out of his sleep."

"I'll be on the wait for it, ma'am."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be anything more that I can—Julia, what is that on the floor?"

"Where, ma'am?"

"There—on the carpet."

"I guess it's a piece of plaster."

"Oh, goodness, that ceiling again. I wish it would stay fixed. It's always peeling off and dropping over everything. My gracious!"

"What is it, ma'am?"

"Oh, a perfectly dreadful thought. Suppose the ceiling should fall—it does sometimes; it did in my mother's house one day without the slightest warning—and fall on baby! It might kill him, Julia."

"Can't we move the crib, maybe?"

"Yes, we could do that, but how is any one to tell just where the ceiling WON'T fall? Oh, it is simply awful to think of the dangers that surround a poor little innocent child!"

"Maybe I could take him out of the crib and hold him in my lap till you get back. I could rock him, and then if there was a fire or a— a mouse, or anything like that, I'd be all ready to run with him."

"No, it isn't good to rock a baby, and I had a hard enough time to break him of the habit of expecting it. No, the only thing we can do is to trust to providence—and, of course, the telephone. Goodness, there goes the telephone now. Just as I was leaving, too!"

"Shall I answer it, ma'am?"

"No, I'm right here. Hello! What? This you, George? What? Don't come down, concert is off because the soloist is ill! Oh, thank heaven! NOW I can stay with baby!"

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