

American Shoe Tramps Its Way in All Parts of Europe



MR. CARPENTER AND HIS CLOGS.



AMERICAN SHOES IN HOLLAND.

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MONS, Belgium, Dec. 17.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—I have come from Switzerland across France to Belgium and am now in Mons, on the southern edge of this country. Mons has 25,000 people, but the country about is one continuous village, and I can see the possibilities of an enormous consumption of American goods. Belgium is one of the most thickly populated parts of the world. I have traveled among the millions of China and India, but nowhere have found the people much thicker than here. The country roads are spotted with blocks of one and two-story houses and at every mile or so there is a village. I took a day's walk through the country last week. Every hour or so I went by a coal mine with a mountain of refuse behind it and a large collection of miners' houses under its shadow. The roads are thronged with men, women and children. Nearly all dogs, and a common sight is a woman and a wag dragging a cart, harnessed up side by side. Sometimes the dog is in the shafts and the woman pulls outside with a rope; at others the woman is in the shafts and the dog toils along behind under the bed of the cart, hitched on the axle. The fields are full of women working. They spade the ground; they dig and hoe. Sometimes they carry great loads along the roads or across the fields on their backs, like very beasts of burden.

I doubt if many Americans have ever been here. The tourists pass Mons by, although it is one of the oldest towns of northern Europe and full of historical interest. Julius Caesar had a fortress here when he was fighting the Gauls, and Mons was bathed in blood in the struggle of the Spaniards and William of Orange. There is a cathedral in the city, which was building when Columbus started out to discover America, and a monument to Baldwin IX, who took part in the crusades and who in 1205 became emperor of Constantinople while trying to wrest his soul from the devil and the holy land from the Turks.

The Mons of today, however, is more interested in the fires of the living than in the brimstone fires of the damned. It is the center of the chief coal mining section of Belgium. Mountains of coal waste rise up everywhere about it, standing like great cones high above the fields and villages. The city is one of hills and hollows. Its winding streets are of cobbles and its buildings such as you would expect to find in a coal mining center.

I took a room at the Grand Hotel de Schmitz, near the depot, and then started out to see if I could find some evidences of the American invasion. I did not expect much, for I knew that most of the people were miners and many of them exceedingly poor. This is my first city in Belgium, and as the town has no American consul I could find nothing about it in our State department reports. My knowledge of French is not over good, and that of my son Jack, a high school boy, who is with me, is little better; still we were not long in finding the American tracks. The first store we entered was that of a tobacconist next door to the hotel. I dropped in and asked for some American cigarettes. The maiden in charge promptly handed me three different boxes, all made in Virginia, and later on told me that she sold chiefly the wares of our tobacco trust.

A little further on I saw a large sales-room filled with American sewing machines, and next door was a store selling photograph cameras from Rochester, N. Y. I was wondering as to American foodstuffs when Jack called me across the street to see a grocery where the hens lay eggs for you while you wait. I went over and looked in. In the glass window upon a round crate of eggs sat what looked like a live hen in the act of laying. The fowl

had genuine feathers, a blood-red comb and real hen's eyes. The eggs were genuine, and it took me twelve seconds before I realized that the dominick was only stuffed and that it was merely to advertise the freshness of the eggs. Nearby were yellow porcelain butter rolls and in an adjoining window I saw the words "Weisse Oats" and some bags of "self-raising flour" from New York.

In the hardware stores I found American tools and a lawn mower which was exhibited in a window and to which was nailed the words, "Veritable Philadelphia."

Turning the corner, I was directly opposite the finest of the new buildings of Mons. This is a great telephone structure, with a wall of porcelain, in which are set the names of Bell and other American inventors. In a store not far away I saw American notions and spinning tops painted red, white and blue.

I did not expect to find American shoes here. The Netherlands, which, broadly speaking, include Holland and Belgium, are the homes of the wooden shoe. The common people wear clogs, but, nevertheless, American shoes and Belgian imitations of them are sold. The shoes are labeled "Veritable Americaine." In some of the stores I saw shoes marked "Veau Americaine," which Jack promptly told me meant American veal, but which I rather think was intended to convey the idea that they were of American calfskin. The leather was undoubtedly a poor imitation of ours, but the fact that it was advertised as such shows what is thought of American leather. Indeed, I got one of the merchants to give me a label. It reads: "Recommande Veau Americaine Solidite Garantie Souple Impermeable."

Which evidently means that these shoes are especially recommended as of genuine American calf, guaranteed for its durability, softness and impermeability as to water.

Another shoe store advertised Boston rubbers, and in a barber shop next door I saw a razor strop for sale marked "Made in America."

There is no doubt but that a good cheap American shoe will sell here. The better classes will buy it, and if cheap enough it might command some trade among the miners. Still, no leather shoe can compare in price with the wooden clog which the most of the poorer people wear. During my walk in the country I bought a pair of shoes for 10 cents. They were clogs large enough to fit a 10-year-old boy, and I have seen hundreds of boys wearing similar shoes. I priced a pair of man's clogs which had padded leather insoles. They were offered for 32 cents, and I tried them on. They were not uncomfortable, and I bought them. Indeed, clogs are not bad to wear, after all. They are much lighter than hobnail boots or even than heavy leather shoes. They are impervious to water and more durable than leather. Both men and women wear them, and save for the clatter they make they do very well. The children have no trouble in getting about in them. I see them running and jumping and climbing trees with clogs on, and as far as I can see they succeed quite as well as our American children shod with leather. It must make a difference with the family expenses of the miner, who makes perhaps from 40 to 50 cents a day, and who, therefore, cannot afford to pay from 50 cents to \$1 to have his own or his children's shoes half-soled every few weeks.

I have been much interested in the European invasion of the American shoe. It is an article that has walked into the hearts of the people, notwithstanding the anger of the shoemakers and shoe dealers of France, Germany, Switzerland and England.

I found large American shoe stores in all the big English cities. There are scores of

them in London, and their business is enormous. The English shoe manufacturers have been importing American leather and American machinery, but nevertheless they are not able to make shoes equal to ours. There are towns in England, like Leicester, which are almost given up to the making of boots and shoes, Leicester having 11,000 members in its Boot and Shoe Trade association. Such towns seriously feel the effect of American competition, for it was only a few years ago that Leicester was shipping shoes to America. Now that town has American shoe-making machines and other machinery from Boston and elsewhere. It is using American leather, copying American styles and it has, I am told, a number of American workmen to teach the English hands how to make the genuine American article. Its shoes are often sold as American shoes.

American shoes are sold in Holland also by side with clogs, and some of the local factories there have imported American machinery. I found American shoes in Switzerland, and it is no trouble to buy them in Paris.

One of the most interesting men I have met in connection with this shoe business is Mr. W. S. Greeves, an English leather expert, who is connected with one of the biggest tanneries of Europe, situated at Lyons, France. Mr. Greeves has been making and selling leather all his life, and his father was a tanning expert. Said he:

"The leather business is rapidly changing in all parts of Europe. Until lately everything was done by individuals or in small factories. We had an infinity of little tanneries and petty shoemakers. This was so to some extent in America, but the Americans were first to grasp the idea of the big tannery and the big factory. They had plenty of hides and also the hemlock forests which furnish the bark, so that they could produce leather in quantity at a cheap rate. Their labor, however, was poor, and the first leather sent to Liverpool was so ugly and stiff that the English would not have it. Now leather of that quality, better finished, is shipped over in vast quantities. It furnishes the soles of our boots, and we buy it for Bristol, Leicester and Leeds."

"Later on," continued Mr. Greeves, "the Americans invented machinery to finish their leather. They took a French invention for splitting leather and improved upon it and out of that grew the great split leather trade of today. You Americans call it satin hide and split leather. You finished it artistically and sent it over here in such quantities that it injured our trade with England and elsewhere."

"How about France?" I asked.

"France does not use much American split leather," said Mr. Greeves. "It is too hard and greasy for this market. If your people would modify it in these respects, which they could easily do, you could sell it for 15 per cent more than you are now getting in England and Germany. Your manufacturers, however, don't seem to know it."

"But the French have the reputation of making excellent leather," said I.

"So they do. They make the French kid and the French calf, which is tanned with the bark of the evergreen oak. Our kid was once exported to America and all parts of the world, but the Americans applied the chrome process to kid and made the vici or glazed kid, which is superior to French kid. With this leather you have driven out our calf and kid and you now send kid here to France."

"The chrome process was an American invention, was it not?"

"No," said Mr. Greeves. "The process was invented by a German, but the Americans made it a commercial success. It was

in 1854 that a German, named Knapp, found that pelt could be turned into leather by bichromide of potash and an acid. He did nothing with the discovery, but a German-American named Schultz used it to make covers for corset ribs. Then a Boston firm put forth a chrome-tanned leather and called it box calf and willow calf. They made Knapp's discovery a commercial success and their work has been used in all parts of Europe. The Germans have taken it up and they bid fair to monopolize the European trade in such leather.

"Just here," said Mr. Greeves, "I want to say that you Americans make a great mistake in giving away your ideas and experience. You sell your leather-making machines to us, and we are now making American split leather in all parts of Europe. The American brain is now going all over the world and the Americans are getting nothing out of it. Europe is fattening upon it and it will be more so in the future. You even send your experts here to show the people how to use your machinery. You give away your trade secrets, and upon the basis of these the Europeans are establishing factories which will eventually lead to the loss of your foreign trade."

"I don't believe we will lose our foreign trade," said I. "We are making new machinery all the time and we shall continue to improve faster than Europe can copy."

"You may," said Mr. Greeves, "but it seems silly to give so much when you get nothing in return. The English go to America and the secrets of the workshop are shown them. Americans come to England and they can't get inside the doors. I know a big English tanner who went to the United States and visited the largest tanneries. After going through one where he had been especially well treated he said to the proprietor: 'I hope you will come to England and let us show you what we are doing.' Two years later the American did come. He was received with kind words and offered some hospitality, but not a word was said about the tannery. At last the American asked to go through the works."

"Ah!" replied the son of John Bull, with a grin, "I should like to oblige you, but we English never show our machinery and methods to our rivals in trade. We really can't do that, you know."

"But," said the American, "when you were in our country you asked for permission to go through our works, and got it."

"Yes," said the Englishman, "but this is our rule, and we can't go back on it."

"Well," replied the American, "if you ever come back I shall assuredly see that you are kept out of the shops. We are not afraid of your competition. We have thrown most of the machinery you saw on the scrap heap, and have invented better. I suppose you have copied the old shop. At any rate, no Englishman shall ever enter the new one." And he left."

The conversation here turned to the American shoe, and Mr. Greeves said:

"The American shoe is the easiest and most stylish shoe made. The uppers are thinner and more durable than ours, but the soles are too thin for the English market. I am surprised you do not sell more shoes in France. You ought to have a greater trade here than in England, and if you will use the same energy to capture this market as you have used to capture the market in England you will have much better results. Your people ought to send out drummers who can speak French, German and English. As it is, the English and Germans sell more shoes here than you do, although the better classes of the French would surely prefer the American shoe. At present they have most of their shoes made by hand by the old-fashioned shoemakers. The shoes cost

more than yours, and they are not so good."

In talking about leather the question of durability came up, and Mr. Greeves gave me a recipe which will probably decrease my shoe expenses. Says he:

"The first thing one should do on buying a pair of shoes is to give the soles a good greasing. You can do this with neatfoot oil, greasing them at night and rubbing them off in the morning. This greasing, if repeated every month or so, will keep out the water and make the shoes wear twice as long. They will be softer to your feet, and if you are an average walker they will last you at least a year without mending." FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Fat Sharpshooters

At many of the shooting tournaments this fall in rifle ranges, armories and the field, says Leslie's Weekly, it has been remarked that fat men are coming to the front as sharpshooters, and there has been much speculation as to the reason. There is no good reason why the men of superfluous flesh should not excel in this scientific and delightful pastime if they give attention to it. Nervous energy plays little part in marksmanship. To become a sharpshooter one must have a good eye, steady nerve and be an excellent judge of distance. It has been my experience that fewer fat men wear eyeglasses than do their thin and nervous neighbors. Shooting from prone or reclining positions appeals to the stout shooter, and he consequently does his best work at distances of 500 yards or over. While a man with a shooting eye can handle any sort of a weapon with more or less skill, the sharpshooter with his rifle is seldom expert with the shotgun, and vice versa. It is the nervous and thin man who generally makes the best bag in the field with the shotgun.

A Mean Balance Sheet

There are certain things about finance, and especially about making money, says the New York World, that no woman apparently can find out.

An instance is furnished in the belated news of the club women's exhibition held in Madison Square garden for two weeks in October. The show was a good one of its kind and enjoyed a generous patronage. Everything went merrily and many of the women were probably perplexed as to what should be done with the proceeds of the big show.

Then came a preliminary showing of expenses and income, which was a rude shock. And now, after a period for sober reflection, comes the announcement that the Professional Woman's league will receive "less than \$1,000 and more than \$150" as its profit from receipts amounting to \$50,000.

No wonder the managers do not want to talk about the profits! It is a painful subject. But the women had a good time nevertheless, though it will probably always remain a wonder to them how the \$50,000 could evaporate so quickly and leave such a small sum as its residuum.

Didn't Know His Peril

Boston Courier: Frailman—Ah, doctor! I called to ask for your bill against me for service during my recent illness.

Doctor—Yes? That's strange, for I was just about to make it out.

Frailman—What is the amount?

Doctor—It's what an even \$300.

Frailman—What! You don't tell me it's that much; why, I believe if I had known I was as sick as that it would have killed me.