

## A VISIT TO MALINES.

BY JOHN KNIPE, Author of "Whited Sepulchres."

### THE TOWN.

**H**ALF an hour from Brussels on the Antwerp line, in a fertile plain, Malines, or, as the inhabitants say, Mechelen, has the appearance of a Ville Morte. The red brick houses line the quays of the stagnant canal, which smelt villainously in the sticky heat of a lurid June afternoon. The shops are mean and poor. The restaurants serve good food in dingy and unappetizing fashion. The citizens speak no French but sometimes a little broken English.

In a tiny corner shop of a back street I discovered after much search "The Last of the Lacemakers." She was no longer young and her dark eyes were red-rimmed and lustreless from the strain of lace-making. It was piteous to see how that poor woman was half-blind from working at the beautiful fine lace which was no more in demand, since, as she told me, the machine-made costs less than a quarter of the price and the Brussels factories copy exactly the antique patterns of the famous designs.

### THE CATHEDRAL.

The boast of Malines is the marvellous Carillon, which has clearer and more silvery tones than the Carillon of Bruges but is less rich in resonance and depth. On a still evening the sound travels for miles from the high tower of the ancient Cathedral.

The exterior is grand and impressive, but viewed from within the building was disappointing. The nave seemed short compared with the height of the columns. The windows were still blocked where the Boche cannon had shattered the glass. The bombardment of Malines began at five o'clock in the morning that fatal August and it lasted the whole day. The scaffolding against the outer walls showed where the workmen are busy yet repairing the damage done.

### AN UNOFFICIAL INTERVIEW.

In the Cathedral, by a curious chance, I had the pleasure of an entirely informal talk with a very interesting priest, one of the local clergy, whom I took to be a chaplain of Cardinal Mercier. After he had most courteously explained the features of the architecture, I ventured to ask if there was any chance of seeing his Eminence at

Vespers. My genial cleric replied that the Cardinal had slightly injured his foot and was unable to leave the Palace. Next I asked him plainly of the famous "Malines Conversations." His manner became a little reserved but he seemed not altogether averse to expressing his opinion of them.

"There have been several, you know," he said with a frank smile. ("A plusieurs reprises.")

"Il ne faut pas croire" ("One must not believe"), I answered deferentially; he was elderly and his manner was very suave and dignified, "that the opinions of Lord Halifax represent those of the majority of the Church of England."

"Evidently not," he returned quickly, and with marked emphasis. "And he can do nothing. He is only a layman, isn't he? (Ce n'est qu'un laïque, n'est-ce pas?) But he is a public person (homme de vue) and as such his ideas have their interest."

Whoever he was, perhaps a Monseigneur, he wore a simple soutane and there was no attendant whom I could ask for the name and rank; the cathedral priest was clearly "in the know" and he did not trouble to conceal his doubt whether anything definite could come of the "Conversations," in the direction of Re-union.

He said that the real difficulty was that *neither side had any real power to negotiate*. Lord Halifax and his friends had not the confidence of their Church and they only represented a party. Of Cardinal Mercier he remarked emphatically: "*Il ne peut rien avancer*" ("He can take no steps forward").

He added that the whole matter had been much misunderstood. He had wished to write a statement himself to the Press but the Cardinal would not allow him to do so.

"It is better to say nothing [more," his Eminence had said. "Restons tranquilles" ("Let us keep quiet").

The popular Cardinal is seventy-four. Lord Halifax is of course eighty-three. It was evident that the latter is regarded as one who believes possible what he desires to believe.

"The Cardinal is tall," observed the priest, "and he looks taller than he is because he is thin. But he looked short beside King Albert last Sunday."

"Would there be any renewal of the 'Conversations'?"

The ecclesiastic spread out his hands expressively. "J'ignore" ("I have no idea"), he said; "only the Cardinal knows that."

And I thanked him for a very interesting and strictly unofficial interview. After which I admired the splendid colouring of Van-dyke's "Crucifixion" in the transept.

But I was meditating on what had been said and could not give my full attention to any picture, however fine.

#### THE PALACE OF CARDINAL MERCIER.

On one side the Palace is a grey building in Georgian style which faces the street behind the Cathedral. The fourteen windows had white shutters closed to keep out the oppressive heat. The garden wall rises above the stagnant dark water of the canal and a willow tree overhangs it close by a tiny bridge. The Palace extends corner-wise and ends in a modern brick wing where is the library. Or so they told me. I lingered on the bridge looking at the silent house by the quiet backwater where those discussions had been held which startled the world, and aroused so much public alarm and resentment.

As I left the Cathedral my eyes were attracted by a printed notice of "A Dogmatic Congress" to be held there in the first week in August. Who would be the Cardinal's guests in the discreet seclusion of the Palace on the bank of the canal?

Would those same "Conversations" be resumed then—and as before *in secret*?

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#### LONDON INTER-FACULTY CHRISTIAN UNION.

(To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.)

SIR,—We should like through your pages to call the attention of any who may be commencing courses in the University of London this October to the existence of the London Inter-Faculty Christian Union. It is formed of men and women who desire to witness for Christ in the University, and whilst always seeking to deepen the spiritual life of the members, its main objects are—to uphold the fundamental truths of the Christian faith and to bring students to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Inter-collegiate meetings are held each term and each college branch arranges its own activities, including regular Bible Study and Prayer Meetings. We extend a hearty invitation to those who are like-minded and shall be glad if such would communicate with us as soon as possible. We should also be pleased to answer enquiries.—G. N. M. Aitkens (Charing Cross Hospital), "Winde-Edge," Southborough, Kent; E. Joyce Robinson (King's College), Prestonbury, Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent.