

# Belgian Fairy Tales

*By*

**WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS**

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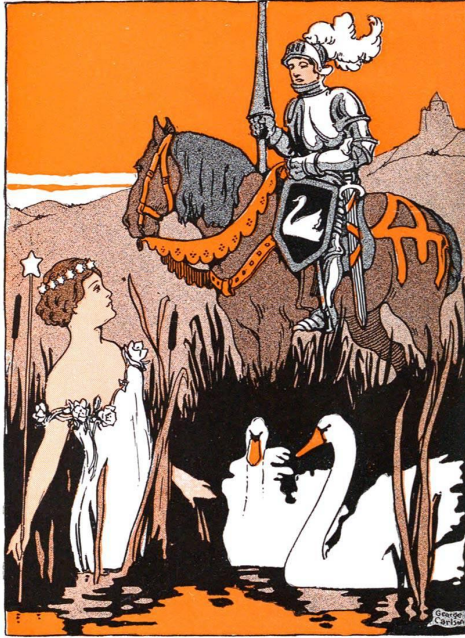
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# BELGIAN FAIRY TALES



The Silver Knight and the River Fairy

# I

## A STORY FOR A PREFACE

(WHICH TELLS OF THE PEOPLE, SCENERY AND ANIMALS  
IN BELGIUM)

The name which the Belgians give to their country is Belgique. The English form Belgium is that from the Latin of ancient days.

The country is inhabited by two races. Draw a line across the map of Belgium and you divide the kingdom into two regions, inhabited by Flemings and Walloons.

Let the line pass from east and west through Brussels. North of this, as a rule, there are farms, gardens and sea coast. Here the people speak old Dutch, or Flemish, and most of them are fishermen, farmers, seaport men and traders. South of this line are mines, factories, furnaces, or flax fields and their talk is French. They are called Walloons, which is only another way of pronouncing Gaul-loons. When Cæsar met and fought with their ancestors, whom he called the Belgii, he declared them "the bravest of all."

We Americans ought to know who the Walloons are; for, in 1624, some of these people—even before the Dutch mothers and fathers, boys and girls came—settled New York and New Jersey. It was they who introduced on our soil the marguerite, or white-and-yellow daisy, and they were the first farmers in the Middle States. Moreover, when New Netherland received a civil government, it was named Nova Belgica, or New Belgium.

The finest part of Walloon Belgium is the hill country of the Ardennes. Here lived, in 1912, a boy named Emile, seventeen years old. His home was in one of those stone houses, which are common in the highlands of southern Belgium. All around him grew pine and birch trees, which made his part of the country look so different from the lowlands around Antwerp, where the tall, stiff poplars and the low branched willows abound. The one tree points its boughs up to the sky and the other down to the ground.

Emile's father was a farmer, but the land of the hill country was not rich, because it was too full of rocks and stones. The soil was quite different from that down on the flax meadows, towards France, and the flower gardens and truck farms of Flanders. Emile's father could make more money by raising horses, for the pasture was rich and splendid horses they were, so big and strong.

The buyers, from the horse markets over in Germany, came every year into the Ardennes forest country, for they liked nothing better than to get these horses for the Kaiser's artillery regiments. For, although the animals of this breed were not as big and heavy as the Flemish cart horses, they were not so slow and clumsy. In fact, there were few places in Europe, where the horses excelled, in their power to gallop while harnessed to heavy loads. They had what jockies call good "wind" and "bottom," that is, staying power, stamina, grit, or what we call, in boys and men, "pep." Emile, with his father, learned to take good care of the mares and kept them in fine condition with brush and curry comb, until their coats were glossy. One day, an unusually fine colt was born, just before Christmas of 1909.

“What shall we name it?” asked the father of his wife; for it was her favorite mare. She drove it to church every Sunday, and when born Emile’s mother had named it “Jacqueline,” after the famous medieval princess.

Now, it was a day or two after King Leopold had died, ending a long reign of forty-four years, and the present King Albert had become ruler of the Belgic country. Yet he did not call himself “sovereign,” or “autocrat,” like a Czar, or “emperor,” as the German Wilhelm did, but “king of the Belgians.” That is, he wished to treat his fellow countrymen not as subjects, but as gentlemen like himself. So, when he issued a proclamation, he addressed them, not as inferiors, but as “Messieurs,” that is, gentlemen.

Emile’s mother who had, years before, lost one of her baby boys, answered:

“Our dead ruler will have a great monument, but for Baldwin, his son, who was to have been king, instead of Albert, but died early, there will be few to remember him: So let us call our new colt ‘Baldwin’ and let it be Emile’s own—his pet always.”

“Good,” said the father, and Baldwin it was, or “Baldy,” for short; and the pretty young horse was given to Emile for his very own.

“It’s yours to play with, and to work for you, all your life,” said papa Henri, “but you must care for it, as your mother and I have cared for you.”

“That I will, father. You may trust me,” answered the boy.

As soon as the new long-legged stranger was able to cease taking refreshments from its mother, Emile fed the colt out of his hand. After Sunday dinner, he would go out into the garden, pluck some tops or leaves of tender plants, such as radishes, peas, or the like, hiding a lump of beet sugar under the greens. Then he would follow the path to the stable to give a treat to both mother and son. Both the old mare and young Baldy seemed to have an almost human look of gratitude, when they cast their eyes on their owners and good friends. Nevertheless, no horse ever yet learned to talk with its tail and say “thank you,” like a dog.

When the time came to break Baldy to harness and for farm work, the well fed and kindly animal proved to be one of the strongest and best. It seemed equal to most horses of at least six years of age.

But it was not always sugar and young carrot tops, for Baldy! Emile usually gave it salt out of his own hand. Sometimes he loved to play a joke and even to tantalize his pet, though for a minute or two, only. When out at pasture, and its master wanted to throw the halter over its neck, Baldy would give Emile tit for tat and had his horse-fun by cantering off. Then Emile would gather up the heads of white clover and holding these, down deep in the palm of his hand, would entice Baldy near, as if it were salt. Then he would throw the halter over his neck, and Baldy was a prisoner. Emile took care not to play this trick too often, and sometimes gave his pet real salt, even when out in the field. If horses could smile, Baldy would have laughed out loud.



There were other pets in Emile's home, besides the colt; and, first of all, his dog Goldspur, named after the trophies found on the field of Courtrai, when the Flemish weavers, with their pikes, beat the French knights, in 1302. Though he worked hard all day, outdoors on the farm in summer, and tended the cows and horses in winter, he had plenty of time to give to his hares, which were so big and fat, that they took the prize at the local fair. In his loft over the barn, he had a dozen or two carrier pigeons. Some of these had been hatched on his father's farm, but most of them had been brought from Ghent, a city down on the plain, where the two rivers, the Lys and the Scheldt join. Here, where there were plenty of canals, he had a cousin Rogier, a boy of his own age. The two lads often sent messages to each other by their winged letter carriers.

The Walloon folk pronounced the name of this city of Ghent, or Gand, in the French way, which sounds a good deal like "gong"; while the Flemings, who talk Dutch, say it with a hard *g*, and as if "gent." We Americans put an *h* in the name; for fear, I suppose, lest we should pronounce it like "gent" in gentleman.

In fact, when you get into Belgium, you find that even the laws and some of the newspapers, as well as names of places, have two forms, French or Walloon, and Dutch or Flemish. The British soldiers usually take no further trouble to pronounce foreign names, except as they are spelled at home, on their island. That is the reason why, for the name of Ypres, around which the war raged during four years, one may hear the sounds—French, eepe, or epray; Flemish, i-per; and, what the English Tommies say, "wipers."

Not long after his nineteenth birthday, Emile sent to his cousin Rogier, at Ghent, a message. It was written on a note sheet, as light as tissue paper. Rolled inside a bit of tin foil, in case of rain, and with black sewing silk from his mother's work basket, it was tied on the pigeon's right leg, between its pink toes and the first joint of the knee. Safely making the journey, the bird fluttered down on Rogier's dove cote, which was set on a post in his garden. Untying the missive very gently, and letting the bird into the cote to rest, Rogier read:

*Dear Cousin:*

"Crops were poor this year, and father had to sell my pet horse, Baldwin. I took it hard, and almost cried, to see a German horse dealer pay down the money and lead it off. When out in the road, Baldy actually turned round and looked back at us. The very next day, word came from the army headquarters that I must report to camp at Ypres. From next week, Tuesday, I shall be a soldier under the black, yellow and red flag. Hurrah! Sister Yvette has been singing the 'Brabançonne,' when she isn't crying. I have only one sister, you know. I hope they'll put me in the cavalry; or, if not, assign me to the machine-gun battalion. Goodbye! We'll meet, when I get down into Flanders."

All too soon, the looming shadow, cast from the east, shortened and the war-storm broke. On Sunday night, August 2, 1914, Germany sent an ultimatum, demanding passage of her armies through Belgium to France. To the Kaiser, Belgium was no more than a turnpike road to Paris. The hero, King Albert, knowing he had his people behind him, refused to cringe and become a German slave. It was like the boy David defying the giant Philistine. The national flag—black, yellow and red—the ancient colors of Brabant, the central province in the kingdom

of the nine that made Belgium a nation—was unfurled everywhere by “men determined to be free.” That is what our Anthony Wayne said at Stony Point, in 1779.

By this time, in 1914, Emile was a seasoned soldier, not in the saddle, as he had hoped at first, but with the dog-drawn mitrailleuse, or machine-gun battalion, No. 40. A happy soldier he was, ready to fight “for King, for Law, for Liberty”—as the chorus in the Brabançonne—the national anthem—declared. Still happier was he to have with him in harness, drawing the revolving, quick-firing cannon, of which he was sergeant pointer, his pet dog, Goldspur. Like man, like dog was the Belgian War Department’s acceptance of both—“in the first class of efficiency.”

This was Belgium at peace, under her beloved King Albert and Queen Margaret. Rich in wonders of art and architecture, in fairy, folk wonder and hero lore, in traditions of valor and industry. When, again and again, the story teller visited the country, he brought back, each time, the seed, for flowers, in the bed-time story-garden.

## II

### THE WAR STORM AND BALDY THE HORSE

War, in modern times, comes like a lightning flash. Seven thousand German automobiles, loaded with soldiers, rushed over the Belgian border. The Uhlans galloped in by other wagon roads, and twenty army corps, in swift trains, followed. Belgium was desolated by fire and sword. The Liège forts, once thought impregnable, were reduced to rubbish. Louvain was given to the flames.

What awful odds! Only 68,000 men of all arms, in the Belgian Service, to stand against the onrush of hordes! Yet they did. Day by day, the Belgians wondered! Where were the Allies, that had promised to help them? Where were the red coats, or the khaki of the English, or the kilts of the Scotch, or the “invisible blue” of the French poilus? Had any one heard a sound of the bagpipes?

During those six weeks, before the British guns fired a shot, or the French sent reinforcements, the Belgian soldiers fought on, contesting the possession of their native soil, inch by inch. Many a time the machine-gun batteries drove off the German Uhlans and destroyed both the gunners and horses of their batteries; each time retreating in order and safety, though many a comrade of Emile’s was missing. City after city fell, until Brussels was occupied. It was thought that Antwerp could be saved, though the garrison was very small. Some English

marines had come to help; and more, yes, a big army, was coming. So every one said.

So Emile and the other gunners braced up. They were again full of courage, when ordered to defend a narrow road, which was really a dyke, or causeway, with mud fields on either side, but commanding the main road, over which the German artillery must come. Here, with what military men call an enfilading fire, they could open on the Germans. They were given this post the night before, with only haversack rations.

The next morning, when breakfast, and a cold one, was hardly over, and the dogs had been drawn out of the shafts and sent to the rear, the German train of guns was heard in the distance thundering towards them. The Huns must go straight ahead; for, on either side of the brick paved road, were the ditches and destruction.

“Twill be a hot fight, but keep cool, gentlemen,” cried the officer in command, “then, at the right moment, let every shot tell.”

“Crack, crack, crack!” The machine-guns opened and sheets of lead and fire swept a wide area. Bullets, not by hundreds but thousands, were showered upon horses, men, caissons and guns. Within five minutes, half of that German battery was a wreck. The dead horses and men, of the three forward cannon of the six, were piled on top of each other, or were rolling and plunging over the dyke. The others behind had to halt.

Emile noticed that one of the horses, from the German battery, drawing the front gun had been stung by a ball that scraped his

flank. Part of the wooden tongue and whiffle tree had been shot away. They were dangling behind him, as he dashed madly forward.

This horse was no other than Baldy. Instantly recognizing his old pet, Emile waved his hand to the gunners of his company to spare the animal. He ran forward, shouting "Baldy, Baldy."

The horse stopped and sniffed the air; but at the strange uniform, halted, even while he cocked his ear, awaiting further developments. Emile took in the situation at once, for he too had "horse sense." Jumping down along the grassy sides of the dyke, he picked off enough white flowers to stick between his fingers and in his palm, so as to look like salt. Then in Walloon talk, he tried his old trick of enticing Baldy. As if in front of a phonograph, this four legged creature that had, for years, heard only German words, for "halt" or "back" or "get up," moved his head sideways, first to the right, then up to the left, then down, as if pondering. At last, throwing back his head he neighed joyfully and trotted forward, as if he surely recognized his old master, who now patted him as if he welcomed a human friend.

It was a family reunion, for Emile, leading his prize back, amid his admiring companions, quickly told his story in brief to his captain, who bade him to lead Baldy over to Goldspur. There was no time to unharness the dog, nor any need of doing it; for as soon as Baldy was near enough, the dog's tongue was as active as his tail. While one end of the animal was busy in licking the horse's muzzle, as in old friendship, the other terminal was wig-wagging, as if a sailor boy were signalling "I'm glad to see you."

It was many minutes before the Germans, further back, could unlimber a gun on the narrow road, point it at the Belgians and send shrapnel among them. By this time, however, the machine-gunners had made good their retreat, according to orders. The dogs pulled off the light Belgian artillery and the whole army moved to the defence of Antwerp. Emile's battalion was soon out of range of the enemy, who wasted his shells in vain.

It would be a sad story to tell in detail of the fall of Antwerp. Against the overwhelming numbers, with few or no allies to help, and the heavy siege guns of the Huns in activity, day and night, the Belgians were no match for their foes, and the Germans entered the city.

Two mighty heroes rose out of the Belgian commonwealth during this awful, desolating war. One was that of Cardinal Mercier—bravest of the brave. The other was King Albert. He lived up to his colors, for in the Belgian flag, the king's color is black, standing for constancy, wisdom and prudence. Later, when the Americans had reached Belgium, Albert rode with his queen, Margaret, into Ghent and Brussels.

What happened later, to Emile, and Baldy, and Goldspur, is told in his letter, from Queen Wilhelmina's dominions, to his boy friend in Ghent.

"We are interned in a large camp in Gelderland, with British marines and sailors in one part and the Belgian army men in another. Baldy is rented out to a Dutch farmer near Nijkerk, till the war is over. The Dutch commandant lets me have Goldspur, and being our mascot, is a great favorite with all the men. A

prisoner's life is dull and tiresome, and we can only wait for victory, which must surely come. Queen Wilhelmina's government has cared for a quarter of a million of our Belgian civilians and Holland spends one fifth of all her revenue in feeding them. Our people are building a splendid memorial of gratitude, at Amersfoort, and I am glad of it. One of our boys got hold of the words and music of an American song, and now the whole camp has learned to sing "The Yanks are coming," and I believe they'll come, even beyond the Rhine."

And they came, and of the three sons of the story-teller (who was himself one of Lincoln's and Grant's soldiers, a veteran of '63), one was there; and to his grand children, these Belgian tales—mostly of the kind that have fairies in them—were first told. In these "Belgian Fairy" and wonder tales, we shall learn about the colors of the flag, and the national motto, and other things that, it is hoped, will make us Americans love Belgium the more, and all of us, at some time, see the country itself.

The little folks in wooden shoes have not forgotten how the American children sent to them a ship load of Christmas presents. Nor should we fail to remember that Belgium is one of our fatherlands, whence came the people who made the first homes in the four Middle States. The first white children, born in New York State, were of Belgian parents.

Not all the stories in this book are fairy tales, but all tell of wonderful flowers, animals, inventions, people, things, and happenings, if not of dragons, ogres and lovely little fairy folks, who do astonishing things. In Belgium, neither fairies nor men are anything but industrious, so the fairies work hard always.



This is our preface.

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