

THE BELGIANS OF NORTHEAST WISCONSIN.

BY XAVIER MARTIN.¹

In 1838 ten families, mostly from the commune of Gros Doléens, county of Wavre, Province of Brabant, Belgium—all of them owning homesteads there, with more or less land, upon which they were unable to support their families and provide a suitable education for their children,—conceived the idea of emigrating to the New World. With that object in view, they held meetings at each other's houses to discuss what part of America would most likely improve their condition and that of their children. After due consideration, and before deciding what State they would settle in, they sold out their homes in Belgium and, bidding farewell to their relatives and friends in the fatherland, departed for the United States.

They had contracted with a vessel agent from Antwerp, and the venturesome emigrants reached that seaport on May 14, remaining there several days waiting for the departure of the ship in which they had agreed to take passage, meanwhile making preparations to supply their wants during the voyage. May 18, they boarded the "Queensbee," an old three-masted sailing craft, which about noon set forth, with its 225 passengers, toward the land of promise.

The names of the heads of these ten families who formed the first Belgian settlement in the county of Brown, are as follows: François Potinot, Etienne Detienne, Martin Paque, Philip Hannon, Adrian Masy, Joseph Moreau, Jean

¹Of Green Bay.—Ed.

Baptiste Detienne, Joseph Jossart, Lambert Bodart, and Jean Martin (the father of the present writer); with them, were their wives and children. The passage from Antwerp to New York was long, tedious, and rough, attended with several terrific hurricanes, one of which carried off the mainmast of the ship. There were many hardships, such as hunger, thirst, sickness, and one death; but finally we arrived in New York harbor July 5, having been tossed on the troublous sea for forty-eight days.

Whenever on the voyage the weather was fine, the heads of families would congregate and there exchange their views about the State likely to be the best for them in which to settle. From a little pamphlet in which several of the Western States were well advertised, Wisconsin seemed to the most of the party the best and most suitable on account of its land, its water, its timber, and its climate. This last is nearly the same as that of Belgium, with the exception that the winters are longer in Wisconsin; but considering the purity of its atmosphere, and the large volume of snowfall during the winter months facilitating traffic, the conditions were thought to be favorable to Wisconsin. A more hopeful little band of emigrants never set sail for America. For honesty, energy, and perseverance, considering that they came from a rural district, they were good specimens of a country whose history shows its love for human progress, for self-improvement, and for self-government.

It was on board ship that the majority of them decided to locate in Wisconsin; and upon their landing in New York July 5, 1833, they proceeded at once towards Wisconsin,—with the exception of two families, those of Martin Paque and Jean Martin, who remained in Philadelphia for a few months,—arriving at Milwaukee the latter part of July. After a few days in that young city, spent in consultation and rest, they proceeded northward along the lake shore, until they arrived at Sheboygan, where they stopped, believing they had gone far enough. Here they commenced prospecting for land, and had almost come to

the conclusion to settle near that town, having found a suitable location; but as none of them could speak anything but French and the Walloon (a Latinized *patois*, said to be a relic of the Roman Empire), they were considerably annoyed at not being able to communicate with the people of Sheboygan. At this juncture they met a gentleman who could speak French, and he informed them that at Green Bay nearly a half of the people spoke that language; and besides that the land, the water, the timber, and the climate were as good as in Sheboygan or anywhere else in the State of Wisconsin. Hence they at once determined to proceed to Green Bay, where they arrived the latter part of August. Here they found many French-Canadian families, who could speak their language, and so they decided to locate permanently in the neighborhood of these folk.

Leaving their families in what is now the city of Green Bay, the men went out of town in search of a suitable location for a settlement. After several days prospecting they concluded to settle along the Fox river near Kaukauna, about twenty miles south of Green Bay; and were it not for an incident which occurred just at that time, the Belgian settlements would, in all probability, be to-day situated between Wrightstown and Appleton. But it happened otherwise. The death of a child in the family of Philip Hannon caused a delay of a few days, and was the means of determining the locality of settlement of the 20,000 Belgians who are now in the counties of Brown, Kewaunee, and Door. The funeral of the child above mentioned occurred at St. John's Catholic church, in Green Bay. Father Daems, of the Bay Settlement, happened to be visiting the pastor of St. John's. Father Daems, himself a Belgian, was glad to meet some of his countrymen, and the little band were happy to make his acquaintance. They told Father Daems where they had concluded to settle, but he persuaded them to abandon their first-selected location, forfeit the payments on the entries of land they had made near Kaukauna, and settle on sections 1, 2, and 3, township 24 north, range 22 east; also sections 24, 25, and

35, township 23 north, range 22 east, which sections are adjoining. From that time forward, this district has been called "The First Belgian Settlement" (*Fr. Aux Premier Belges*).

Here the little colony lost no time in hunting the deer and bears which at that time were in abundance in the neighborhood. Each having selected as much land as he wanted, paid the government \$1.25 per acre, and at once began to build small hewed-log houses which they covered with cedar bark, making benches with split blocks, beds with branches and leaves, and using their trunks for tables. For several days and nights, they were obliged to live and sleep in the open air, with nothing above their heads but the canopy of heaven. On the second night after their arrival, there came a terrific rain-storm which drenched them to the skin. Philip Hannon and wife, both of whom are yet living, informed the writer that all they had to protect themselves and their goods from that pouring rain was one umbrella.

The little party were ten miles away from any house, in a virgin forest consisting of a thick growth of pine, maple, beech, cedar, basswood, etc.,—many of the trees being five and even six feet in diameter, and some over a hundred and fifty feet high,—without roads of any kind, not even a trail; with no neighbors, no horses, no cattle; nothing but the occasional visit of a wolf, a deer or a bear, coming around their little huts, and on more than one occasion taking the pork they had brought with them. These and the other hardships incident to frontier life of those days, would have discouraged many people under the same circumstances, but not this brave little band. Their firm belief in Providence, and the desire for self-improvement, gave them courage and strength to acquire a competence in the near future for themselves and their children.

They had promised their friends and relatives at home, that, as soon as they had settled in the New World, they would write to them the facts and circumstances of their voyage, their arrival, and their settlement. This promise

they kept, within a few weeks of their arrival; without encouraging any one to come and join them, they simply said, after telling the story of their migration, that they were satisfied with their new homes in America. These letters were pored over by thousands of people in Belgium, who would come from long distances to read them. Overlooking all the difficulties, which had not been dwelt upon by the colonists, the Belgians at home were delighted with the fresh descriptions of the primitive American forest, and their passion for acquiring land was thereby quickened. Many of them sold everything they had in Belgium, and hastened to join their former neighbors and friends in Wisconsin.

In 1854-55 a large stream of Belgian immigrants—estimated at 15,000—followed on the trail of the pioneers and, locating on government land in the counties of Brown, Kewaunee, and Door, formed other settlements, naming them as follows: La Sacrairie, La Rivière Rouge, La Rivière des Loups, La Misère, St. Sauveur, Rosière, Walksain, L'Union, Brussels, Thiry Deems, Aux Flamand, Granlex, A la Petite Haie. Everywhere that they could find land in the three counties, the Belgians founded their little colonies.

The most of these men were tillers of the soil; a few were mechanics, such as masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, machinists, tailors, shoemakers, coopers; some came from cloth factories and other industrial establishments; but all seemed tired of their trades and wanted to become farmers, on land that they could call their own. But many of those who came in 1854 and 1855 were doomed to bitter disappointment; for the tilling of the soil was one thing, while the clearing the land of its heavy timber, in order that the soil might ultimately be tilled, was quite another. Those who had money enough to support themselves and their families for two years, could at once go to work clearing part of their land, so as to get a crop the second year; but those who were not so fortunate were compelled to work at very low wages, at anything they could find, so as to provide bread for their wives and children. As a re-

sult, in 1855, real hardship overtook hundreds of families; the want of work, and high prices for provisions, and no money, necessarily made them suffer for the want of food. Many families were without bread for weeks at a time, feeding on whatever they could find, such as fish, wild onions, and roots. This was followed by a disease resembling Asiatic cholera, attacking nearly every family in the settlement; death resulted in a few days, sometimes in a few hours, the corpse turning black immediately after death. Not a few families lost as many as five of their members in a single week; most of them were buried on their own land, and in great haste. This bad news soon reached the Fatherland through letters written to relatives; a few returned home, carrying to their old neighbors and reports of the calamities that had befallen the Belgian settlers of Northeastern Wisconsin; this at once checked immigration, and for the next five years very few families came over.

During the first four years of the Belgian settlements, the people were struggling to keep body and soul together. Shut out as they were from the outside world, not understanding the English language, and thus far unable to obtain any one to come and teach it to them, they felt that their lot was indeed a hard one. Nevertheless they were not discouraged; they taught the French language to their children; and held their religious meetings in their log cabins, with an occasional priest to visit them and administer to their spiritual wants. Another difficulty against which they had to contend, was the cutting and building of roads, which had to be opened through dense forests, often threading deep ravines and crossing swamps over which they would lay "corduroy," which made travel difficult and even dangerous for man and beast. These roads, when cut and built, were less than twenty-five feet wide, and on either side rose enormous trees which prevented the sun from drying them; so that the highways, full of stumps and stones and deep water-holes, were in wretched condition all the year round.

I much dislike to refer to myself in this narrative; but from the year 1857 to 1862 circumstances forced me to take a leading part among the Belgian settlers, and the truth must be told. On our arrival in New York in 1832, I had gone directly to Philadelphia, and there I remained until to a certain extent I could understand the English language. Having remained four years in that city, upon the urgent request of my parents I visited my countrymen on the then frontier. When I left Philadelphia, little did I think that I should be induced to remain among them—much less so, when I saw the condition of the settlers on my arrival.

As I was well known among the people, the news of my visit to the settlement made some noise, chiefly because it was known to them that I had received an English education in Philadelphia. Knowledge of the English language was an accomplishment so rare, that among the 15,000 Belgian settlers it was said not one could converse in that tongue.

I found the people apparently very poor, but a more industrious crowd of men, women, and children I have never seen. Many of them were felling trees and clearing land; others were busy shaving shingles by hand, while women were splitting the blocks, and the children were packing the shingles; old people were cooking meals; some men were hauling shingles to Green Bay in lumber wagons drawn by oxen; some men were harvesting, others threshing with flails, others burning logs and branches; many were making or brewing their own beer, and nearly all the men were smoking tobacco which they had raised on their own land. Many of them had cattle, some of them had wagons and yokes of oxen, a few had teams of horses; many raised their own pork; those having maple trees on their land would make their own sugar from maple sap; and all or nearly all of them had patches of from five to twenty acres under cultivation.

Such was the condition of the settlers when I came among them in 1857. They were emerging from their first

years of hardship, full of hope and courage. What they desired the most, they said to me, were schools and school-teachers, churches and priests, and the full enjoyment of their political rights, which up to this time they had not exercised. Under those circumstances, they were very anxious to have a man among them to lead them out of their chaotic condition. Many came and offered all the inducements at their command, to have me settle among them. They came in scores, and once on a Sunday afternoon there came over a hundred, heads of families, so anxious were they to have me remain in the settlement; and my father and mother joined with them. It took considerable time before I could make up my mind to accept their propositions, but finally they urged me so persistently that I concluded to remain, and for five years did I work among them, teaching school in English, necessarily using French as a basis. During those five years I worked incessantly not only as school-teacher, but in discharging the duties of the several offices to which I had been elected or appointed; until, in the fall of 1832, I was elected register of deeds for Brown County, so that I was compelled to leave the Belgian settlement and move with my family to Green Bay.

The First Belgian Settlement ("Aux Premier Belges"), was located in the town of Green Bay, county of Brown, which town at that time covered 94 square miles, and comprised what are now the towns of Green Bay, Scott, Preble, Eaton, and Humboldt, and a part of what is now the city of Green Bay. It was in this First Settlement that I labored for five years, although I was often called into other settlements in Kewaunee and Door counties, to instruct in their duties the newly-elected officers of the several towns and school districts which were being formed.

Up to this time the Belgians had been ignored by their neighbors of other nationalities. Their poverty and distress, and the ordeal through which they had passed during their first three years of pioneer life, had not attracted that sympathy and help which is generally accorded to new

settlers under the same conditions and circumstances; while the Belgians themselves had been too busy to cultivate friendly relations with the German, Irish, or Scandinavian settlements, ten or fifteen miles away from them. They had not yet exercised their right of suffrage. The people of the county regarded them as of little or no account; and probably for that reason the Belgians had not yet been able to obtain any help, either for the building of churches or schools or for procuring teachers,—not even help for opening highways leading to their settlements.

The time for action had now arrived. It did not take long to demonstrate to the leaders of other settlements, and of the county at large, that the Belgians could vote quite as well as they could; that they had some rights which entitled them, if not to their sympathy, at least to respect, and that one of those rights was the privilege of voting for whom they pleased. The first election attended by the Belgian pioneers, was one for the town of Green Bay, held in April, 1858. The nearest polling-place was near the wind-mill at Bay Settlement, ten miles away from the Belgian settlement. There the Belgians went, 230 strong, all prepared with tickets especially printed for them, marching in double file to the poll; and there they for the first time in their adopted country exercised their rights as American citizens.

It is needless to say that every man on that Belgian ticket was elected; and from that time on, the Belgian element was recognized in this and adjoining counties as an important factor in the election of town, county, and state officers. The ice is now broken; the Belgian settlers are regarded by the people of other settlements as an honest, industrious, and intelligent people; their friendship and their votes are courted.

The writer having been at this and following elections chosen justice of the peace, town clerk, and school superintendent, was instrumental in establishing school districts, building school-houses, and obtaining teachers. Roads were

put in better condition, new ones were laid out, and the settlement received its full share of the county road fund, the drainage fund, and the school fund. Upon the application of a number of the settlers to the general government, a post office was also established, called Robinsonville, of which the writer was appointed first postmaster. The other Belgian settlements emulated our example, organized new towns, established school districts, provided teachers, laid out new highways, petitioned the general government for post-offices, and exercised their right of suffrage at every election.

Now came the building of churches,—one, and sometimes two, at each settlement,—and when the church was built, then would follow a parsonage for a priest. But the priest was hard to get, and when one would come he was generally a poor specimen of his kind. Some of them were so avaricious that they would refuse to bury a dead child because the parents did not have the ready cash to pay for their services; others were dissipated, some were habitual drunkards; and it was not rare to see a row break out in a church during the service, between the priest and the officers of his church, terminating in a regular fight, in which there generally came out a whipped priest.

Our Belgians are mostly Roman Catholics, some are Protestants; but generally they are lovers of liberty and freedom, willing that every one should worship according to the dictates of his own conscience. The question of religion is not a subject of contention among them. I have seen Protestants contribute material and labor towards building Catholic churches, and Catholics have done the same thing towards building Protestant churches. Religious quarrels are confined among themselves, and are mostly upon such materialistic questions as the location of a church site, the building of a church, or the retaining of an arbitrary priest.

Upon the 15th of August, 1838, an alleged miracle happened among the Roman Catholics of the First Settlement, which made quite a noise at that time, the effect of

which has not yet died out. In this Settlement, within fifteen miles of Green Bay, there exists a chapel and shrine, built to the Virgin Mary, to which thousands of pilgrim worshipers from far and near come yearly to offer up their devotions; and if we are to believe the reports of some of the faithful, many invalids have found a permanent cure, which is attributed by them to the virtue and powers of the Virgin. Many claim to have left their canes and crutches on the altar in the chapel, and to have gone home rejoicing and repeating, "*Ave Maria, gratia plena; Dominus tecum.*"

On the spot where the chapel is now built there stood, thirty-seven years ago, two small trees a few feet apart. Between these, it is said, appeared the Virgin Mary in person, and addressed Adèle Brice, who was at the time passing on her way home from attending church in the Bay Settlement: "and the Virgin Mary spoke to her in the French language, requesting her to devote all her time to the service of the Virgin Mary and the dissemination of the Catholic faith, and to build a chapel on that sacred spot." The report of this strange apparition spread over the Belgian settlements, in this and adjoining counties, with lightning speed. The people came in large numbers to see what they considered "holy ground," and to listen to the words of Adèle.

Without going into the details of the event and its results, I will simply say that for several years this young woman met with considerable opposition from the clergy of this diocese, who publicly declared that the alleged apparition was "a myth and an imposition." For a time even the holy sacrament was refused to the girl, for the perseverance with which she made her assertion. However, in spite of all opposition, the multitude would congregate on the spot, and with Adèle would worship and even say mass on certain days, without a priest. In the same year a small chapel was built, afterwards a school; and within five years from the apparition there was built a large chapel, a church, and a school-house and convent,

in which boys and girls were educated and boarded for a nominal consideration.

The bishop of the diocese, while still not recognizing the authenticity of the apparition, has virtually sanctioned the erection of the ecclesiastical buildings on the spot, and allows the faithful to congregate there for the purpose of worship according to the Roman Catholic faith. August 15 of each year is the time set for the gathering of the faithful to this shrine, and thousands come from far and near, even from other States, to here offer up their devotions to the Virgin.

We have now arrived with our historical sketch at the year 1860. We find the Belgian settlers, with the patient industry characteristic of the people of that nation, fast transforming a wilderness into beautiful farms. Nearly all of the settlements have their school-houses and teachers, quite a number have churches, and more of these latter are in the course of construction. These schools and churches are built of hewed logs, and roofed with hand-made shingles; the lumber and other material are sawed in the settlements with whip-saws, there being no saw-mills except at a long distance.

The attendance at the schools is large, although some of the scholars have to walk three and four miles to reach them. The churches are also well attended on Sundays and on holy-days, and when the people have no priests they select one of their number to read mass and the gospel of the day. In nearly every settlement there is a country store; this building is generally large enough to comprise the store, dwelling-house, tavern, and dancing-hall. Old-country feasts are being revived, and we find on these feast-days that old-time Belgian games and amusements are practiced, such as the swinging of the flags in public places, surrounded by young men and young girls waiting for the first dance. The young men indulge in a tournament of their own, called "carrousel;" on horseback they ride at full speed in a circle, catching rings for prizes, which generally consist of fine saddles, bridles, &c. After

these games are over, dancing commences, and continues to a late hour in the night.

The Belgian settlers are great lovers of music; nearly every settlement has a brass and string band; they love to sing songs, especially the national hymn of Belgium, "La Brabançonne," the national anthem of France, "La Marseillaise," "Partant pour la Syrie," and other patriotic songs. Their favorite drink is beer, and Philip Hannon, one of the first settlers, built a brewery at which he made a peculiar kind of beer; when a Belgian had drunk sixty or seventy glasses of that beverage, he would begin to feel good, and then he would sing a certain song, beginning "Nous avons planté des Canadas avec Marie Doulouys," &c. The music of this is not very stirring, nor the words very patriotic—somewhat resembling the dying song of a Chippewa Indian; but when sung, it always indicated that the kegs were empty, and the feast nearly over.

The Belgians were beginning to forget the hardships through which they had passed during the first few years of their settlement; they were having good crops, and fair prices for their surplus products and their shingles. Many were buying horses and discarding the oxen, which were too slow for them. They were having schools and churches, and they were exercising the right of suffrage. They were growing confident of the future; there was a good deal of talk about establishing factories in their midst, and genuine prosperity seemed about to reward them. But here again they were doomed to disappointment. Instead of new factories everywhere, instead of the good times they were anticipating, the firing upon Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861, announced to them, as well as to all patriots, that this was not the beginning of good times, but the beginning of a long and cruel civil war. The call for troops by President Lincoln was a call on the Belgian settlers as well as on citizens of other nationalities. They had exercised their right of suffrage; they were, therefore, American citizens; and, be it said to their credit, they responded

nobly. The settlements furnished their full quota of Union soldiers; many fell on battle-fields, while hundreds of them even to this day carry on their persons honorable scars, together with their honorable discharges.

It need not be said that the War of Secession was a setback to these settlements. During those four years, while fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons were fighting the battles of the Republic, wives, daughters, sisters, and sometimes mothers, together with those men who had not been drafted, were working the little farms the best they could, in order to maintain and support themselves and their children. In those days it was an every-day sight among us to see Belgian women driving teams, harvesting or plowing in the fields.

For a period of six years immediately after the war, there came an unusual season of prosperity in the Belgian settlements, the like of which had not before been seen, nor has it been since. The surviving citizen soldiers had returned home. Some were engaged in business, others were employed in the workshops or in the mills, or on the farms; large tracts of primitive forest disappeared before the axes of the settlers, thereby adding thousands of acres of tillable land to their farms. Saw, planing, shingle and grist-mills were built at or near the settlements: Lafeyvre's saw and shingle mill, at Walhain; Decker's lumber and shingle mill, at Casco; Lamb's lumber and shingle mill, at La Sacrerie; Daal's lumber and grist mill, at New Franken; Delvaux's lumber and shingle mill, at Delvaux Mill; Cowles's saw and shingle mill, at Bay Settlement; Firlet's grist mill (afterward Shirland's saw mill), at Aux Premier Belges; Scofield's lumber and shingle mill, near Dyckesville; Anton Klaus's lumber and shingle mill, at La Sacrerie, in the town of Humboldt; and Williamson's mill, near Brussels.

These mills were a source of much revenue to the Belgian settlers. Before the war, in order to make farms, they were compelled to fall valuable pine, oak, cedar, basswood, maple, and beech trees, cut them into logs, and pile them up in heaps twenty or thirty together, then set fire to them,

when they would burn for several days, leaving nothing but ashes. But after the war it was different; the felled trees were cut into logs, and taken to the mills to be converted into lumber, shingles and ties, for which the settlers would receive good prices. Prosperity was everywhere visible; many of the settlers had threshing-machines, reapers, and other farming implements of the latest patents; they were enlarging their farms, and increasing their stock; many of them were building new houses, not of logs, but substantial dwellings of sawed lumber; they were building more and better school-houses, churches, and parsonages; every one was trying to emulate or excel his neighbor, — all contributing toward that progress which makes man independent and free.

Then came the never-to-be forgotten fire of October 8 and 9, 1871. So appalling was it, so entailed with loss of life and property, that the whole civilized world was moved with compassion for its victims. For eighteen months, clothing, bedding, provisions, farming implements, and money came from all quarters of the globe for the relief not only of the Belgians, but of all the sufferers of that terrible holocaust in the counties of Brown, Kenosha, Door, and Oconto, the pecuniary loss of which aggregated over five millions of dollars, while its death list footed up over a thousand men, women, and children.

In the year 1871 but little snow and rain had fallen, and there had been an unusual drought. Forest fires had raged in many localities in August and September; the heat was oppressive, and the smoke so dense that vision in broad daylight was seriously obscured; on the waters of Green Bay, in full day-time, mariners were compelled to resort to the compass to find their way into port; flakes of black and white ashes and cinders fell in the streets of the city of Green Bay; and the roar and crackle of the flames could be heard from a long distance.

Fire had for some days been raging in the woods on both sides of the bay, and coming nearer and nearer. The people were in great alarm; scores of city people would

go out, days together, to assist the settlers in fighting the destroyer, but apparently with little or no effect. Finally, on the afternoon of October 8, the atmosphere became unbearable; clouds of smoke and tongues of flame seemed to spring up everywhere; the whole heavens were ablaze, the atmosphere itself seemed to be on fire, many people believed the end of the world had come, for none had ever before heard or read of such a conflagration. It was an awesome sight, as belching smoke and flames rolled along in masses, carrying desolation in their way. Houses, barns, and outbuildings of every description were destroyed in a few minutes; glass, china, and hardware were melted, so intense was the heat. Many families lost half of their numbers. In terror, some ran one way and some another; one man from the Red River settlement jumped into a well with his two children, and they were all saved, while his wife and three children ran into the clearing and the four perished. Wild and domesticated animals would make common cause in seeking shelter; many such were found along burned fences, huddled together, and roasted to cinders.

The district to which the writer, as a member of a committee, was assigned for the distribution of relief immediately after the fire, was the First Belgian Settlement, and the Red River Settlement. Tugs loaded with provisions, clothing, and tools, were sent down the east shore of the bay to Dyckesville. The writer, who had made his way on horseback to these settlements, gave orders for goods on the tugs, to those who were entitled to immediate relief. Later on, when the roads were cleared, relief was sent to the sufferers by teams and distributed by me and my assistants. The burned district on the east side of the bay commenced in the town of Glenmore, Brown county, and traversed all the Belgian settlements as far as Little Sturgeon Bay, in Door county,—being about six miles wide and sixty miles long.

The greatest loss of life on our side was at Williamson's Mill, near the Brussels Settlement. A little way from the

mill, which was utterly destroyed, there was a clearing where the hands had run for safety when the building caught fire; there, surrounded by a blazing forest, they threw themselves on the ground, trying to evade the flames and the smoke; but all of them, sixty-eight in number, were suffocated by the terrible heat and smoke. Three of the mill-hands did not run there, but threw themselves into a large tank of water under the mill, with the idea that thereby they would escape; but only one of them survived, the other two were so badly burned that one died the next day, and the other a few days later. The survivor told the writer that he saw one girl, named Desautel, run from the mill, and when a little way off stand as if petrified; she remained motionless, and her body was soon wrapped in flames and burned to a coal. On the other side of the bay the loss of life was appalling. The village of Peshigo, with its mills, its hotels, its churches and school-houses, its halls and dwellings, was wiped from the face of the earth in one night, together with over seven hundred of its inhabitants.

Five thousand people were now homeless and destitute, with their dead, wounded, and dying; farms and homes, churches and schools, mills, lumber, and timber were in blackened ruins; the desolation alarmed the survivors, and a Wisconsin winter was coming on apace. Such was the condition of the different Belgian settlements on that gloomy 9th of October, 1871. Thanks to the generosity of charitable people in all parts of the civilized world, especially the American people, abundant relief began to pour in; with rekindled courage, self-reliance, and hope, the Belgian settlers began to erect new houses and barns, new school-houses and churches, and still further to enlarge their farms. Large tracts of timber land had been burned over, leaving nothing but charred logs and timber easily removed, so that thousands of good tillable acres were added to the farming tracts already under cultivation. Nearly all the marketable timber having been burned or destroyed, it followed that the lumber and shingle-mills

which had been destroyed by the fire were not rebuilt, and this alone was a great loss to the people. There was nothing left for them to do but to turn their attention strictly to farming, which they did; from that time on, farming, stock and wool-raising, butter and cheese-making were the main occupations of the Belgian settlers.

Three years after the great conflagration of 1871, we find the Belgians in better condition and circumstances than ever. Twenty years before, they had renounced their allegiance to their king, and declared their intention to become citizens of the United States; they were now American citizens, and were proud of their citizenship. They were adopting many of the American ways; cheese-factories were being built, and a fine article manufactured; they were farming with new and improved machinery, some of them had steam threshing-machines, and many had stump-pulling machines with which they were clearing their fields with ease.

And so it has gone on, to the present day. Some settlements, such as Rosière and Granlon, have taken down their fences; and it is a beautiful sight in summer time to see fine crops of wheat, rye, barley and oats covering fenceless and stumpless fields with an even height along the highways. The wilderness of forty years ago begins to look like the fields of Belgium. The original settlers are growing old, but their sons are coming into manhood and are fast becoming Americanized. Their modes of living and dressing are changing; the young generation are casting aside their wooden shoes, although at the date of this writing (1893) they are still manufactured in the settlements, and worn by many.

Neither the old settlers nor the new, nor their descendants, have ever lost sight of education, that all-important factor which develops man's intelligence and liberty,—that liberty which is dear to all men, especially to Belgians, whose native fields have for centuries been saturated with their blood, fighting against the tyranny of a Charles V., a Philip II., or a Louis XIV.

Under forty years of American citizenship, with that industry and perseverance characteristic of these people, they have acquired good farms, well stocked and well equipped,—not only sufficient for the support of themselves and families, but also to give their children a good common school, and some a collegiate, education. We find these latter attending schools and colleges in cities; some of them have graduated at our State normal schools, and are now school teachers; several have graduated from the State University. We find young men in this and other States, children of Belgian settlers, following their professions as teachers, physicians, lawyers, or priests. The intelligence and education of many Belgians seem to be appreciated by the American people, as well as by the people of other nationalities, in the counties of Brown, Kewaunee, and Door; in proof of this, we find many of them elected by their fellow-citizens to honorable positions and offices of trust and of great responsibilities. We find them active members of school boards; chairmen and supervisors of their towns; clerks, treasurers, assessors, and justices of the peace. We find Charles Rubens elected sheriff of Kewaunee county; Joseph Collignon elected treasurer for Door county; O. J. B. Brice, sheriff for Brown county; Constant Martin, superintendent of schools for Kewaunee; John B. Eugene, county clerk for Brown; Henry Watermolen, sheriff for Brown, and now clerk of the circuit court. Moreover, we find the people of these counties electing Americanized Belgians in whose honesty, intelligence, and capacity they have implicit confidence, to represent them in the State legislature. Thus, we find in the legislature of 1856, Constant Martin representing Kewaunee; in 1858, John B. Eugene representing Brown; in 1880 and 1881, Benjamin Fontaine representing the first assembly district of Brown, including the city of Green Bay; in 1867, Grégoire Dupont, representing the same district; in 1889, Joseph Wery, representing Kewaunee.

The traits chiefly characteristic of these people, their religion, their patriotism, their attitude towards the public

schools, their courage and perseverance under the most trying ordeals, as well as their love for independence and human progress, have all been made manifest. I have necessarily omitted many episodes, amusing as well as serious, which perhaps would have made the reading of this historical sketch more interesting; but these I must defer to some more fitting occasion. The only remaining trait of these people which has not been mentioned is their qualification for business. During the summer of 1867, ex-Governor Horatio Seymour, of New York, happened to be in this region on a tour of observation, he being the owner of large tracts of land in Brown and Kewaunee. In a conversation between the governor and the writer, the former praised the husbandry of the Belgian settlers whom he had visited, and he asked this question: "What are the business qualifications of the Belgian settlers?" My answer was, "Conservative." He desired me to explain, which I thus did: "When a Belgian enters business, be it as merchant or manufacturer, he carries on that business with the money which is his own." The ex-governor replied that it was unlike Americans, but that it was the best and surest way to a successful end.

The merchants of early days in the Belgian settlements were as follows: Désiré Duquaine, Jean St. Doyen, Henry Robens, and Emmanuel Demain, of the First Belgian Settlement; Charles Robens, of Rosière; Pierre Challé, of Granlee; Pierre Houart, of St. Sauveur; Jean Baptiste Puissant, and his successor, the Gosin Brothers, of Walhain; Peter Müller, of the Flemish settlement in the town of Red River; Louis Van Dycke, and his successor, Théophile Duchateau, of Dyckosville. All of them were successful business men. The names of those who are now engaged in the mercantile business in the different settlements are: Charles Robens and Victor Brans, of Rosière; William Barrett, of Dyckosville; Amand Noël, of St. Sauveur; Grégoire Dupont, of the First Belgian Settlement; F. Pierre Virloc, of Brussels; Pierre Challé, of Granlee; Joseph Wery and Louis Boucher, of Thiry Dœms; August Gosin, of Walhain; Gall-

Ismae Lafebvre, of the Sugar Bush; Eugène Nasé, of Roslire; Jean Anquet, of Gardner, near Little Sturgeon Bay; Grégoire Denis, of Bay Settlement; and a few others unknown to the writer.

During the past twenty-five years, the Belgian settlers in Brown, Kewaunee, and Door counties have enjoyed marked prosperity. During that time, hundreds of families have come over from Belgium to seek their fortune in the settlements, while many of the old settlers have disposed of their farms and lands, sold out their rural interests, and moved into the city of Green Bay. At this date (1893), Green Bay has somewhat over 10,000 inhabitants,¹ one-fourth of whom are Belgians by birth or by descent. Here again, their intelligence and business qualifications are fully demonstrated. We find them marching abreast with their fellow citizens, favoring all and every improvement of a public nature, when for the public good. We find them engaged in all manner of vocations. We find some of them elected to honorable and responsible offices, not as Belgians, but as American citizens, known for their competency. We find them active members on the board of education, on the county board, and in the city council. We find some of them elected to the responsible offices of city treasurer, city clerk, city assessor, chief of police, and justice of peace and police justice. We find them equally active in business.² Many of the Belgian firms are among the largest and most enterprising in

¹ In 1890, Green Bay annexed Fort Howard, which gave her, in the State census of this year, a population of 18,200.

² Chief among these are: Arthur, Philéas and Frank J. B. Duchateau; Florian and Jules F. De Cremer; Benjamin and Raphael Fontaine; John M. Franssens; Florentine Frisque; Théo. Duchateau; Labart and Muller; Charles Lecomte; Edward and Gilbert Lafebvre; John Leons; Désiré Hostet; Christen Massey; Léopold Lafebvre; David and Sam. B. Dittmann; Gustave and Joseph Cassenbergh; Élie and Joseph Gutta; Joseph Frazon; Mrs. Marie V. De Boët; Frank Frazon; Raphael Soguet; Emil and Mrs. Octavia Van Dyke; Peter Muller; Jules Farnantier; Charles, Michel, and Thomas Janssen.

this city and county, and cover nearly every branch of wholesale and retail trade; while, in the several professions, people of Belgian birth or descent have achieved among us most enviable reputations. I would like to mention them all, but the lack of space forbids. A large majority of these Belgian people have become thoroughly Americanized; they have adopted many of the American ways; but in business, with a few exceptions, they have adhered to the conservative rule. Those who have not, though for a time they were reputed to be wealthy, like their American brethren have in years of financial depression met with business disasters; while those who anchored their lines to the conservative practices of their native land, were little if at all affected by commercial cyclones.