

# GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETIN

Prepared Weekly by

## THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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General Headquarters, Washington, D. C.

for

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Education

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#### THE SERENADE

Music is considered a necessity, not a luxury, by the Italian people

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#### HOW TO OBTAIN THE BULLETIN

The Geographic News Bulletin is prepared and printed by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.

The Bulletin will be sent direct to teachers, upon application, or superintendents and principals may apply for teachers. In the latter method of ordering names of teachers must accompany the request, to avoid duplication. Only one copy per teacher can be supplied.

Requests should be addressed to Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C.

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## A Musical Adventure For America

NEWSPAPER dispatches state that there is a plan afoot to have a National Carillon in Washington, D. C., as a tribute to the soldier dead. Contact with the men and women of Flanders has directed American attention to one kind of music, vital in the national lives of these people, which cannot even be heard in this country.

We have welcomed Italian tenors, Austrian violinists, Russian pianists, and French and German orchestra leaders, but we have evinced no interest in the Belgian carillonneur nor have we, within the confines of our country, one mechanical instrument whereby we could demonstrate his music.

### Bell Ringers Challenged German Troops

Soon from a high tower vibrant bells may waft over Washington at twilight such strains as have for centuries rung out from the towers of Belgium and Holland on days of national festivity or crisis, and which, in 1914, challenged the Germans from such carillons as those of Louvain, Antwerp, Bruges, Malines, or Ghent with defiant "Brabanconnes" as the invaders approached their gates.

A carillon is made up of a set of tower bells attuned to the intervals of the chromatic scale, usually covering a range of four octaves. To attain such a range the bell producing the lowest note must weigh several tons, while the smallest scarcely weighs 20 pounds. The bells are connected to a keyboard or to a clockwork mechanism, which causes their clappers to strike.

### Musicians Who May Require Gymnastic Training

Producing music from the bells requires great skill and dexterity on the part of the bellmaster, for he must use his feet for the larger bells, and the muscles of both his wrist and elbow are brought into play in producing the tremolando effect usually given. A fine carillon is not the result of a chance moulding of metal, but its making is as much an achievement wrought by a wise combination of excellent material and deep thought as a Stradivarius. Lovers of carillon music compare the tones to those of a pianoforte in delicacy and to an organ in majesty. When touched by the hand of a master like Denyn, the wizard of Malines, the music seems to come veritably from the heavens and to settle in peace and benediction over the surrounding country.

During the war the Germans melted down many of the Belgian carillons for munitions, dealing their enemies an even more cruel blow in humiliation than in the actual physical ill done to them. Many an old Flemish woman who had spun all day, and many an old man who had labored in fields whose crops would be confiscated to feed German troops, felt loneliness and a desolating silence creep over them at twilight without their beloved bells.

## Poets Responsive to Lure of Bells

So closely has this love of bell music grown into the national life of the people of the Low Countries of Europe that it has lured to their shores poets and writers from other lands. Longfellow and Robert Louis Stevenson paid tributes to their silvery tones, and, to Victor Hugo's imaginative mind, the spirit of the Carillon of Mechlin became personified as a dancer scattering magic notes on a sleeping world as she tripped from the heavens down a crystal staircase. To the people who live within the shadows of these towers, the bells possess a personal as well as an historic significance for having been connected with some stirring event. Many of the peasants are connoisseurs of bell music and can tell the names and tones of the individual bells in a carillon.

From the even rows of red-topped roofs and the trees of the surrounding level spaces in Malines, the immense flat-topped Gothic spire of St. Rombauld once arose. The cathedral dated from the thirteenth century and has for hundreds of years been known the world over for the remarkable silvery quality of its bells. So much attention had been given to making it the best of its kind that its bell makers gained wide reputations and the town itself became the headquarters of bell-founding.

### Eight Men Required to Ring This Bell

The tower, vast and mysterious against the luminous sky, seemed to dominate the city. While compelling the attention it stirred the imagination as it kept watch over Malines and tolled the passing of the hours with its hugest bell. When not attached to the wonderful mechanism that controlled the ringing of the carillon, this bell required eight men to ring it. The range of the bells of this carillon was great enough to admit of many difficult operatic selections. Today the majestic tower mingles its dust with that of the ruined city which it had for centuries guarded.

The carillon of Antwerp possessed the greatest number of bells of any in Flanders—sixty-five. It has been said that from the cathedral tower on a clear morning 126 carillons could be seen. High above the heads of puny mortals they held converse with each other in clear vibrant tones or melodious whispers.

Of the once quaint, squatty church of St. Martin, at Dixmude, not one stone remains upon another to tell of its solemnity and exquisite Gothic beauty, or to suggest the tower from which its harmonies drifted.