

## AN EYE-WITNESS DESCRIBES THE FUNERAL OF CARDINAL MERCIER

Catholic University of Louvain,  
January 28, 1926.

We left at 7.30 this morning to attend the national funeral of Cardinal Mercier. There was a special train provided to accommodate the professors and students of the University. We arrived in Brussels about eight o'clock and went directly to the Cathedral. The streets were crowded for blocks along the way that the procession was to pass. The military were out in full force and soldiers with fixed bayonets were lined up on both sides of the street. There were more abbess in the city than I had ever dreamed of seeing. We couldn't enter the Cathedral, so we had to choose a point of vantage among the crowd to watch the proceedings.

At last the big bell of the Cathedral began tolling to announce the approach of the procession, and in about half an hour we could hear the strains of the Dead March and glimpse the first flags. First came a company of infantry with ensigns flying, next a detachment of cavalry with drawn swords. After them came several more companies of infantry followed by another mounted group with gun carriages and cannon, then the body of the Cardinal on a gun carriage. More cavalry follow, then a long procession of priests followed by monsignors, bishops, archbishops and other dignitaries. Conspicuous among these were about twenty abbots, some in white cassocks. After that came Cardinals Bourne and Dubois with their attendants, then the Papal Nuncio in full pontifical vestments. A great crowd of high officials followed, all on foot. The first one I noticed was Marshall Foch and I was so interested in seeing him that I missed King Albert and Prince Leopold who were walking with him. There were generals from every country, many of them old, grizzled veterans with lines of decorations across their breasts,—quite a dignified-looking crowd, I can tell you. A long line of important men followed—hundreds of them, Knights of St. Gregory and of other orders both ecclesiastical and secular, with diplomats and representatives from practically every European Nation.

We managed to get into the sanctuary of the Cathedral. This sanctuary, as in all churches over here, forms a semicircle about the main altar. The whole place was draped in black, shutting the altar and most of the ceremonies from our view. What we could see was most impressive and the music was wonderful. The choir was composed of men and young boys, and the boys over here certainly know how to sing, they have a soft, subdued way of singing, and their rendition of the "*Dies Irae*" was perfect. Over here everyone seems to sing well. You can hear them at night passing along the streets—crowds of them—in perfect harmony.

After Mass we had something to eat, then walked around a bit. Another chap and myself went through the Botanical Gardens. Here we saw some fine pieces of statuary. Then we visited Luxemburg Park, which fronts the King's Palace, then St. Joseph's Church, where the royal family attend Mass. The place reserved for the royal family is built into the wall of the sanctuary. My companion took a picture of this place and if it turns out well you may see it.

January 30, 1926

Yesterday morning at eight o'clock we left Louvain on another special train for Malines to attend the final funeral celebration of Cardinal Mercier. There were about fifteen coaches on the train, all crowded with ecclesiastics, professors, and students of the University of Louvain.

We brought our surplices and birettas with us as we were going to participate in the procession. Arriving at Malines, we went immediately to a seminary near the cathedral, where we had been invited to dress for the procession and to dine afterwards. It was drizzling rain, so we pulled on our surplices over our coats and donned our birettas. It gave us a rather corpulent appearance in comparison with the ecclesiastics who wore only their soutanes and surplices.

We started from the seminary at ten o'clock and paraded to the Cardinal's residence. Along the way we noticed that the sidewalks were packed with people and that the military were again in evidence. We stood there in the rain about twenty minutes listening to the famous chimes: as we waited several ambassadors came up in



their cars and entered the Cardinal's residence, and, each time, the soldiers before the door presented arms.

At last, to the sound of bugles playing the National anthem of Belgium, the Cardinal's coffin was carried out and deposited in the hearse. Then the procession started. We proceeded through several streets to a square near the town hall, here we circled about and started back towards the cathedral. All along the way the seminarians and priests ahead of us chanted psalms. It was very impressive. Arriving at the cathedral we passed in and took our places at the right of the doorway while waiting for the dignitaries to enter. The result was that after the prelates, generals, knights, burgomasters, etc., had entered, the church was filled. Only the centre of the immense cathedral had been vacant, the two sides had been crowded with people before the procession arrived.

I can't say how many thousands of people, who had been in the procession, entered the cathedral as we stood there. This time I had a good view of Cardinal Micarron, the Papal Legate, and Dubois, the Archbishop of Paris. After the coffin had been carried in by the soldiers, a crowd pushed in through the guards at the doorway and occupied all the remaining seats, to the exclusion of us, so that most of us were obliged to stand. The Cathedral is so immense that, from the back of the church where I was, you could barely distinguish the priest at the altar, much less follow the Mass. The choir, which I had a good opportunity to inspect, was composed of men and boys, as at Brussels, and the majority of the boys were under twelve years. I tell you it was wonderful singing, I never heard anything like it. It was the most beautiful Requiem Mass to which I had ever listened. However, the fact that we had to stand all the time took most of the enjoyment from it and when one of the dignitaries started to deliver a funeral oration in Flemish, five of us left and started back to the seminary.

I noticed a great many camera and moving picture men in action as the funeral procession passed by different streets in Brussels, and again in Malines. You will probably see some of their work later on.

F. C. C.

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Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.—*Burns.*