

Railways and Tourism in Belgium, 1835 – 1870

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Abstract

'If Belgium is only to be visited, or indeed if the trip is to be limited to the Rhenish provinces, I strongly advise the traveller to leave his carriage behind him. The railroads and steam boats are so invariably adopted in these countries, that a vehicle of this kind is not only troublesome, but very expensive.' H.R. Addison opens in the very beginning of his travel guide of 1843 with an eye opener for the 21st century tourist. Moreover, he stresses the importance of the picturesque landscape. The opening of the railway network in 1835 in Belgium seems to create two different patterns of tourism. The first pattern seems to be an adept of the Romantic Movement and pays attention to the picturesque landscape. A series of descriptions of the railway lines integrating landscape and civil engineering constructions along the line are published, together with travel guides for the early adaptors. A second movement consists in the development of the littoral tourism in which two key elements played a role: the presence of the royal family in Ostend and the railway lines from Brussels to the coast (heavy rail) and tramway along the coast. On the other hand, the railway network created a possibility for overseas travellers to reach the borders of the Rhine in a more comfortable way with a faster transport mode. Together with the editing of the travel guide for Belgium and the Rhine, the Belgian State Railways edit the first railway publicity poster announcing the special fare for travellers visiting the Rhine (1856). It is likely that the Belgian State Railways followed closely the developments in the marked and used opportunities for potential clients; the rather low travel fares might indicate the existence of an egalitarian vision and the choice for travel and mobility. In this paper, I will make an analysis of different 19th century travel guides which might give a better view of the different patterns and phases in the development of tourism and mobility for the period 1835 – 1914.

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1. Introduction

In the early nineties of the last century, the Belgian Railway Company SNCB made a joint effort with the Flemish public service of Monuments and Landscapes to edit a leaflet in order to make the railway journey along the line from Mechelen to Leuven more agreeable, not only for the occasional public transport user, but also for the commuter who should at least already know the typical markers, heritage elements or views along the railway line. That leaflet was dressed in two parts, the first one for users going up from Mechelen to Leuven, the latter for those coming down. The trajectory of the railway line did hardly change since the opening of the line in September 1837, although railway buildings and stations were demolished and rebuilt, and moreover the siding lines are removed. The leaflet was a rather exceptional communication tool within the strategy of the Belgian Railways and the public service. No other recent examples of description and indication of heritage along the railway line are known for the moment, unless the old travel guides and descriptions of the picturesque landscape, written at the same time of the construction of the railway network.

From the early beginning of railway operating in 1835 in Belgium two different phases of tourism seem to develop. The first phase appears to be an adept of the Romantic Movement and pays attention to the picturesque landscape. A series of descriptions of the railway lines integrating landscape and civil engineering constructions along the line are published, together with travel guides for the early adaptors. A second phase consists in the development of the littoral tourism in which two key elements played a role: the presence of the royal family in Ostend and the railway lines from Brussels to the coast (heavy rail) and tramway along the coast.

An analysis of the early travel guides and of travel literature during the first phase of rail tourism can give a better view of the different patterns and phases in the development of tourism and international mobility, which is represented in the operating results of the Belgian State Railways. Whereas Bertho Lavenir sees three periods in the evolution of guides, this research is limited to the early railway period, from 1835 to 1870. It is a transition period from an older style of travel literature to the second generation travel guides with the well-known Murray Handbooks as epigone which will help to industrialize early tourism.¹

Since Guicciardini's *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania inferiore*, 18th and some 19th century travellers often gave comments on their experiences in large descriptions, a kind of records of impressions on their journey. Schivelbusch uses Goethe's travel from Frankfurt to Heidelberg as example, and stresses the intensity of the experience of traversed space, an experience coming to an end with the railway. Bertho Lavenir confirms that evolution, with a chronologic order of the progress of the journey in the narration towards other forms since the coming of the railway.² In the early railway period, from 1835 on, authors still write about their travel experiences, paying attention to the landscape in a narrow or a broad sense, using a step by step description. Examples of this type of writings are Victor Hugo, J.W. Massie, Elisabeth Missing Sewel, Bell, and others, not cited in this paper. In the same period – the early railway years – Murray published the first 'Travellers Handbook', simultaneous with the editions of picturesque guides with descriptions of the landscape. Whereas Murray stresses on origin and destination, the picturesque guide follows the older travel narratives. One element they all have in common: the

¹ C. BERTO LAVENIR, p. 58-59

² W. SCHIVELBUSCH, p. 52-53. See also C. BERTHO LAVENIR, p. 43-62.

works are written in a period of building the railway network which undeniable influenced the writings.

2. The early years of the railway network in Belgium

The 1834 Railway Act gives an overview of the early programme of network development in Belgium, with Mechelen as the hub of the state railways: *'There shall be established in the Kingdom a system of railways with Mechelen as its central point, extending eastwards towards the Prussian frontier via Leuven, Liège and Verviers, northward via Antwerp, westward to Ostend via Dendermonde, Ghent and Bruges and southward to Brussels and to the French border through, Hainaut.'*³ The reason for choosing Mechelen is essentially based upon technical requirements and the availability of space for the technical functions needed for railway operations.⁴

The consequences of the growing railway system are visible in the early days. For example, on the success of the new transport mode just one month after the first train journeys from Brussels, it was noted in the *Moniteur Belge*, the Official Newspaper publishing Belgian legislation, that Mechelen had become a *'faubourg'* [suburb] of Brussels. Every day, large numbers of spectators turned up to watch the trains at Allée Verte/Groendreef, where the first railway station of Brussels had been built, and the daily number of travellers was undoubtedly also considerable. Per section, 624 passengers could travel on standard train sets; on daily basis, this was tantamount to 3.744 journeys up to June 1835 on the three links in each direction. From June 1835, the number of connections in each direction increased to five, further increasing the number of passengers on the Brussels-Mechelen section to 6.240 journeys a day. Repeated comments suggest that there was insufficient capacity on the trains with the result that travellers could not depart. Every train was filled to capacity.⁵ The first complaints about the railway system confirm the descriptions of its success. People were dying for a chance to travel by train and complained in the press that there were too few connections a day, which was not technically possible in the first month. *'Even though since 1 June two additional trains have departed each day from Brussels and Mechelen, the flow of passengers has not shown any sign of diminishing, far from it! Unless one has obtained tickets the day before, it is quite impossible to find a place on the train at the times fixed for departure'*. Potential travellers ask that it should be made possible to book 48 hours in advance, but places are apparently bought up for speculative purposes. There are no guarantees for the return journey.

The success of railway journeys – although on a short distance from Brussels to Mechelen – was also observed by users from other countries. On June 17th 1835, six weeks after the opening of the first railway line, the *Moniteur Belge* quoted a letter, published in *Le Nord*, a newspaper in Lille: *'Many of our compatriots were travelling on the railway from Brussels to Mechelen, all agreed that this immense social amelioration was now a need that nothing could stop or delay. This railway from Brussels is now an object of fantasy, pleasure parties, but it will result to hasten all the projects that had already been proposed. From Ostend to Bruges, Ghent to the milestone of Mechelen, from the milestone of Mechelen to Leuven, Liège, Cologne; work, companies, everything is in operation.'*⁶

Victor Hugo's *'En Voyage'* is quoted by Schivelbusch on the change effected in the traveller's relationship to the landscape: the sense of sight changes fundamentally an visual perception is diminished by velocity. He described the view from the train window whilst travelling between Brussels and Antwerp: *'The flowers by the side of the road are no longer flowers but flecks, or*

³ *Moniteur Belge* (furtheron MB), 4 May 1834.

⁴ VAN HEESVELDE, Inventing.

⁵ MB, 27 May 1835. The calculations in this source differ from my calculations; an interchange of the digits in the figure in the original source is at the origin of this mistake.

⁶ MB, 17 June 1835.

*rather streaks, of red or white; there are no longer points, everything becomes a streak; the grain fields are great shocks of yellow hair; fields of alfalfa, long green tresses; the towns, the steeples, and the trees perform a crazy mingling dance on the horizon; from time to time, a shadow, a shape, a spectre appears and disappears with lightning speed behind the window: it's a railway guard'*⁷

From 1835 on the railway network expanded; each year new branches opened and new sections were added to existing lines. See table 1.

Table 1: Length of the railway network 1835-1845

	State Railways	Private Railways	Total length
1835	20,395		20,395
1836	43,795	37,275	81,07
1837	141,271	37,275	178,546
1838	256,521	37,275	293,796
1839	310,401	37,275	347,676
1840	332,831	51,856	384,687
1841	380,108	54,575	434,683
1842	454,734	55,808	510,542
1843	559,821	55,808	615,629
1844	559,821	73,697	633,518
1845	559,821	74,297	634,118

Source: Varnderherten, p. 493, based on M. Laffut.

From 1843 it was possible to travel from Ostend to the German border and to the Rhine. Travellers in Belgium were full of praise for the network, enhancing the possibilities of travel through the country. '*Glancing off from Malines, you may run to any point you choose in a few hours – Ghent, Liege, Louvain, Tirlemont, Brussels, Bruges. Belgium is covered with lines of railroad, which enable you to traverse the entire country in a few days.*'⁸ Meanwhile the first travel guides of the second generation were published, the period being very prolific for this type of writings.

On an international scale John Murray edited from 1836 on the well known *Murray's Handbook for Travellers on the Continent*. A reviewer of the London Times stated in 1836 about this Handbook: '*Mr. Murray has succeeded in identifying his countrymen all the world over. Into every nook which an Englishman can penetrate he carries his Red Handbook. He trusts to his Murray as he would trust to his razor, because it is thoroughly English and reliable; and for his history, hotels, exchanges, scenery, for the clue to his route and his comfort by the way, the Red Handbook is his 'guide, philosopher, and friend'.*' He wrote five editions of that Handbook between the first one in 1836 and 1845; the third edition (1839) was pirated in Brussels. Murray's guide was announced being a Handbook for 'intelligent travellers', in other words, using other travel guides might have been less intelligent.⁹

Murray's Guide was soon followed by a very interesting Belgian publication, made by an anonymous author, M. de W. in 1838: *Promenades sur le Chemin de Fer*. The author proposes five railway journeys, of which three start from Mechelen, one from Brussels and one from Louvain. The book opens with a short notice on the network building and development and the use of railways. It is written from a user's point of view, with useful hints for users. During Summer, it is so much nicer to be in the open wagons, but one has to reckon with the wind, bringing sparks from the engine's chimney, he writes. Each journey starts at the railway station and the author devotes great effort to describe important practices in the railway station, like booking office, train

⁷ SCHIVELBUSCH, p. 55-56, citation of Victor HUGO, *En Voyage. France et Belgique*, s.d., 1838, p. 42

⁸ BELL, p. 369.

⁹ GRETTON, p. vii-xlix.

departure, etc. Although the writer is very in favour of the new transport mode, the timetables cause trouble, because of the regular changes in departure time.¹⁰ Each journey contains much information on the railway line, with attention for landscape, geography, civil engineering, but also picturesque aspects of the trip.

In 1840 two different types of travel guide were produced in Belgium, the first one, edited by J. Duplessy, *Le Guide indispensable du Voyageur sur les chemins de fer de la Belgique* and latter one by A. Wauters, *Atlas pittoresque des chemins de fer de la Belgique, compose de 15 cartes ornées de 400 vues*. Wauters added a subtitle – or even more an adage – ‘Time is money’. Duplessy indicated the needs of a travel guide for Belgium; the rapid development of the railways in Belgium urged him to create a book to teach foreign travellers or to remind Belgian travellers on each step of his trip by railway everything which appears interesting or strange in this rich and varied country...in order to raise an agreement upon the charm of the railway trip, because it offers for each line or for each city everything what might be of importance or interest.¹¹ After an short notice of one page on Belgian history – starting with Julius Caesar and ending up with the treaty of London of 1831 – and a global description of Belgium during the 1830s, he describes the railway network, again from a historical point of view and he adds a statistic on the number of travellers by rail for the years 1835 to 1839, followed by an overview of the current regulations for transport of passengers and luggage and a list of fares for a railway journey. This part consists of 34 pages in the book. Although Mechelen is still the hub of the railway network, the part of the travel guide with the descriptions of cities and lines starts with Brussels, being the capital. A new version was edited one year later, in 1841. It is not entirely clear whether this version is the pirated Murray edition.

In the same year 1840, Alphonse Wauters edited his *Atlas Pittoresque*; this book starts also with a historical note and statistical evidence on the Belgian state railways, but the author gives no other motivation for the publication. The lack of any indication on time tables, hotels, fiacres and vigilantes, etc., makes it no travel guide in a broad sense. It is more or less a description of the geography, politics, history, commerce and industries of the cities and hamlets crossed by railways or located in the proximity. The Atlas contains 16 maps, of which 15 are supplemented by views of the churches and country houses along the railway line.¹² The author mentions only 15 maps in the title, because the remaining map is an overview over the global network and doesn’t fit into his concept. Starting from Brussels, like Duplessy, he gives an overview of the history and highlights of Brussels, but no further information, except some scarce information between Brussels and Mechelen. Duplessy on the contrary draws also attention on civil engineering, along the line, for example: ‘*Before arriving in Sempst, one can see a wooden construction; it is a kind of semaphore [optical telegraph] for transmission of information up to Mechelen*’.¹³

These three books, written by Belgian authors, have a very different approach and motive; therefore they are hard to compare, but they bring both new elements on the Belgian scene into the world of travel and tourism. The first one by A.de W. gives a very good depiction of the scenery of the landscape, seen by the traveller during the trip. The additional information is useful but it is not given in a standardized format and thus it is still a precursor of nascent picturesque guide, as well as for the upcoming travel guide. The second book by Duplessy is helpful for the traveller, even for those who undertake a railway journey for the first time. The third one follows the book of A. De W. and adds plans and views of the nascent picturesque landscape, that is ‘not destroyed by the railroad; the monotonous landscape is brought into an aesthetically pleasing perspective by the railroad. The railroad has created a new landscape’ as Schivelbusch argues. Wauters book draw attention on a more global view of the landscape from a perspective that was largely unknown

¹⁰ A de W., p.23-26

¹¹ J. DUPLESSY, p. 3-4

¹² A. WAUTERS, no pagination.

¹³ DUPLESSY, p. 65.

before the opening of the railway lines. *'While the railroad caused the foreground to disappear, it also replaced looking at the landscape with a new practice that had not existed previously.'*¹⁴ Duplessy tried to obtain the same effects by his writings, without maps, unless the plans of the cities he described. The books have a common denominator: in contrast to the upcoming travel guide, this type of publications inform the traveller also on the road, the trajectory between origin and destination.

3. Across the border

In 1843, the railway line to Germany opens. The line is built near the Vesdre river. It offers marvellous views. New texts on travel are published, not only by Murray, but also by novelists and writers. J.W. Massie as Elisabeth Missing Sewel gave nice descriptions of the panoramic views. Hence it looks strange to see Wauters' writings already in 1840, at a moment the line is still under construction: *'Coming back to the railway station of Mechelen, which buildings offer a considerable development, we have three different paths to choose from, one leads us to Holland, another to England and the last one to Germany. Which one we have to choose in advance? This is a rather difficult question, because all three offer on a main level picturesque sites, populated cities, venerable monuments.'*¹⁵

In 1843, H.R. Addison comes up with a description of Belgium 'as she is', because of Murray's Handbook is only a guide for travellers along the 'high roads' and the cities crossed by those roads are well described by Murray. Addison has the intention to dedicate not more than 30 % of his book to these highlights; *'the routes, the ordinary objects of attention in the principal Towns, the distances, expences, etc., will only form the first part of this work.'* Being an adept of railway travel, he makes a strong plea for the use of trains and steamboats, instead of carriages, *'a vehicle of this kind is not only troublesome, but very expensive'* for travellers to Belgium and to the Rhenish provinces. Although the quality of the transport by rail is not the same as to English steam travelling, the traffic is safer than in other countries and is less expensive.¹⁶ His introduction on Belgian mores is not more than a series of platitudes and clichés. Further on, his writings become more interesting and sometimes more adequate than the indications, given by Murray, especially on railroads. His comments on the railway practice in Belgium seems to raise the confidence of the user. He even points to early passenger rights: *'Each train is accompanied by a certain number of Guards. These persons are bound to see the Railway regulations enforced. You will therefore do well to comply with their directions, particularly about putting up and down the windows; if however you doubt their decision on this head...you have the power to appeal to the chef de convoy who is always forthcoming: there is also a book kept at each station where you may record any complaint.'* In so far his descriptions are reliable, service is not that bad at the Belgian State Railways. His remarks on lost objects confirm more or less the findings of Massie. The unfortunate traveller has only to apply at the station, *'and the odds are ten to one you recover it. A detailed list of objects found is monthly published.'*¹⁷ Massie is passing through the Vesdre valley when: *'lifting myself, in order to accommodate my position as I thought, I dropped my Taglioni, or great coat, from the railway. There was no possibility of stopping the train: we went on, perhaps about seventy miles; yet such was the power of centralization, that, sending back from a station where I stopped, at Cologne, and waiting only till the next day, my great coat was restored to me, costing only three francs and it reached its destination safe and injured.'*¹⁸ Both Addison and Massie might be too enthusiast; in 1849 the Railway Board takes measures because *'travellers are complaining that there is no employee to receive their claims at the arrival of convoys in several stations or to give*

¹⁴ SCHIVELBUSCH, p. 60 & 64.

¹⁵ WAUTERS, no pagination.

¹⁶ ADDISON, p. iii and p. 10-11.

¹⁷ ADDISON, p. 12-14.

¹⁸ MASSIE, p. 95

them accurate information in the absence of the stationmaster.' Therefore the stationmaster had to designate an employee who replaces him whenever they must leave their station.¹⁹

The connections with the networks at the French and German borders were more or less the end of the government ambitions which had been put down in the first Railway Act of 1834. The building up of the network was not finished, but international services became possible. In 1844 a convention was made with the Rheinische Eisenbahn (Chemin de Fer Rhenan) and with English railway and steam boat operators. Common railway operations between Verviers (Belgium) and Ronheide (Germany), at the top of the inclination towards Aachen, were organized in order to have a secured and economic result of transport between Verviers and Aachen. The Belgian State Railways committed to provide traction and staff (footplate men); the Rheinische Eisenbahn committed to build in Ronheide a depot for four to five engines, with siding lines, turntable, switches and including a workshop and forge for minor repairs, stock pile for all necessary products, like oil, steal, etc., and water and coal provisions. All staff needed for operations (engine driver, fireman, etc.) and for repair and maintenance was paid by the Belgian State Railways, but the Rheinische Eisenbahn had to build the housing for the workshop responsible and the guard. Train staff (guards and brakemen) were on the payroll of the Rheinische Eisenbahn. Agreements on exchange of rolling stock and on maintenance had to be made, decisions about liability and cost were necessary. Although pricing policy remained strictly in hands of both the Belgian Railways and the Rheinische Eisenbahn, each for their network, both administrations took the commitment as far as possible to organize the booking procedures and train services with a maximum of convenience for the users.²⁰

In 1852 a new guide was edited: *The Traveller's Guide on the Mons and Manage and Namur and Liege Railways*. This book was edited in French and English and is for the largest part a description of the line in a picturesque way, including history and biographic notices of historical persons but contains hardly any recommendation for the user. Ten percent of the book however, is dedicated to the company who obtained the grant for both railway lines. Interesting is the bird's eye plan of the valley of the Meuse and several vignettes of locations along the line.²¹

Edmond Texier's book, *Voyage pittoresque en Hollande et en Belgique*, was published in 1857. It looks like a new peregrine has arrived: the book opens with a consideration on speed and efficiency: *'One is travelling to Ostend, to Spa, to The Hague, to Switzerland, to Italy, to the banks of the Rhin, anywhere; thanks to steam, we do not know what distance is; one makes three steps and arrives, like Homer's gods. Yesterday, I was in Amsterdam, tomorrow I'll be in Brussels and in two days maybe, I will see the daybreak on your peak of ice, o Jung-Frau.'*²² The author doesn't want to travel in the way Murray's Handbook is suggesting. He gives the example of sir John, having a berline in which he travels around, together with his *valet de chambre*, through the most exiting landscapes pointed at by Murray. After a year of travel, the tour is over and sir John returns to his beloved Devonshire. He was crossing different countries, without a closer look or even visit without leaving the carriage. His honor was safe and his vehicle had visited Europe. The stories of Texier might be poorly written but the reader can be assured that he did not travel like sir John. *'I observed conscientiously, and it happened often to me I had to walk for several lieus [5 km] to see a curiosity, an art object, a hamlet or a viewpoint that wasn't in the neighborhood of the railway.'* Traveling is a way of art for Texier, which cannot be learned. It is not enough to him being a spotter, it is necessary that the observation doesn't crumble on the details. *'To see the things quick and in a right way, that is what matters for the traveller. A native bonhomie and a cosmopolitan benevolence are both necessary for those who want to study law, morals and practices of other*

¹⁹ Ordres de Service, 43, April 30th 1849.

²⁰ Compte Rendu des Operations, 1844, p. 104-109

²¹ E. WARDY, Guide, 1852, 128 p.

²² E. TEXIER, p. ii.

*people. Coming at the border of a country, a traveller must shake off the prejudices of his back, like the dust of his shoes.'*²³

What are the effects of the upcoming international travel and mobility? The annual report of operations that the State Railways were supposed to make every year for the parliament gives a view on the number of passengers crossing the German and the French borders. In table 2 absolute values of the arrivals in Belgium are given for the years 1845 to 1869 for the connections between Belgium and Germany under the Belge-Rhenan convention, between France and Belgium under the Franco-Belge agreements, via two different lines – Quievrain and Mouscron. Not all of these passengers are tourists. The values are in certain years probably estimations and the way the data were collected or represented differs from one year to another. The absolute values give a trend, but do probably not represent the real use.

Table 2: International Movements Belgian State Railways - Arrivals 1845 – 1869.

	Belge-Rhenan	Franco-Belge
1845	59.137	127.876
1846	59.400	44.000
1847	59.700	70.000
1848	40.600	51.000
1849	43.600	55.000
1850	50.700	71.000
1851	53.000	68.500
1852	45.810	63.845
1853	55.507	76.184
1854	52.039	70.093
1855	54.237	91.139
1856	60.430	79.841
1857	56.333	92.522
1858	72.019	92.064
1859		
1860		
1861	55.180	137.425
1862	61.189	155.038
1863	58.929	201.107
1864	77.068	190.013
1865	89.208	217.783
1866	72.618	224.611
1867	123.705	221.627
1868	72.740	202.052
1869	63.741	226.863

Source: Compte Rendu and own calculations

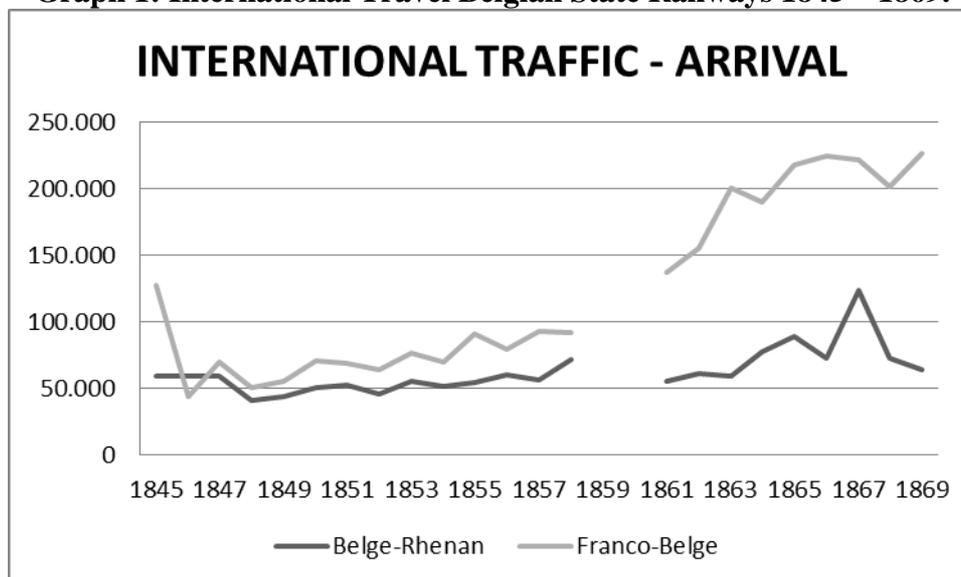
In 1848 international passenger traffic seems to fall down. For the relation with France, this is without doubt caused by the revolution of that year. In February 1848 the rebellion started in Paris; because of the situation the Belgian Railways suspended the services from February 26th on: ‘*Communications by Railway between France and Belgium being intercepted since this night, from the date of receipt of this Order and until further notice, MM. Heads of Station do no longer issue*

²³ ID., p. iv-vii.

*travel cards and do not accept freight for France.*²⁴ It last until March 18th before the railway operations started again between Brussels and Paris. The German transit also diminished, probably by the March revolt, but traffic wasn't suspended, see graph 1.

The global trend for this period is traffic growth for both regions of origin. Growth on French side is bigger than on German side. This can be explained by the greater number of border links; there is only one station that connects with the Rheinische Eisenbahn until 1862; with France in origin two links exist – Mouscron and Quiévrain – and during the considered period, two other links will open: Haumont and Blandain. Also other elements might be considered, e.g. the new direct international link of the Anglo-France-Belge-Rhenan Union with different Swiss locations in 1863. Traffic results are also influenced by international events. The International Exhibition in 1862, the so-called Great London Exposition, made ends meet in the global income of international traffic. On such occasions, the Minister decided in consensus with the Railway Board, to accord a discount of 25 % on the travel cards for those who purchase a return ticket by Ostend or Calais; 25 kg. of luggage was free of charge. The tickets were sold at the booking offices in Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, Aachen, Cologne and Mainz. Travellers in other stations had to buy a ticket at the selling points.²⁵ This practice might have been used for other international events too.

Graph 1: International Travel Belgian State Railways 1845 – 1869.



In 1856 the Belgian Railways started a publicity campaign for travel to the banks of the Rhine. It is the first commercial poster known in Belgian railway publicities. Afterwards larger campaigns followed for the Ostende – Dover line, for travel and tourism to the coast and other touristic highlights in Belgium or other countries; posters were used until the sixties of last century and well known designers developed concepts for railway posters. This particular poster invites for a long trip along the banks of the Rhine, by train as well as by boat. The programme is more or less free; travellers can choose the hotels amongst a series of German and Belgian cities. The travel card remains valid for one month. If the campaign was successful is difficult to determine, because the way in which travel results are represented in the yearly reports changed.²⁶

The view on international mobility and travel might be sharpened with a closer look at the repartition in the different travel classes of the trains on the international connections. Express trains

²⁴ SNCB, Ordres de Service, 1848, n° 14 February 26th 1848.

²⁵ Ordre de Service, June 11th 1862.

²⁶ NEIRINCKX, p. 16-18.

only had two classes, the other trains had three classes. For the years 1845 to 1869, numbers are given, with exception of 1847, 1856, 1859 and 1860; see table 3. The numbers in the chart are only arrivals. The situation on both relations looks more or less the same, with a growth of the marked share of first class travel, but because of the two different routes to France, via Mouscron and via Quiévrain, a clear difference is seen in the occupation of the 1st and 2nd class. The line via Quiévrain was the direct connection from Paris to Brussels; quality was higher: during Winter for example, the first class was heated on trains calling at Quiévrain, but for Mouscron nothing is mentioned about heating. During Spring, the special measures were put to an end. Heating had to be removed from first class and it was forbidden to continue the use of straw for keeping cold out of the second and third class wagons.²⁷ In the sixties, again new ‘ameliorations’ are announced: from 1861 particular compartments in the diligences are reserved for women on the line Quiévrain to Brussels, Charleroi, Namur, Verviers and Liège.

Table 3: Repartition in classes Belgium - Germany and France – 1845 – 1858.

	Germany			France		
	1st class	2nd class	3th class	1st class	2nd class	3th class
1845	14.519	19.121	23.497	18.898	38.549	70.302
1846	14.300	21.200	23.900	12.300	17.900	13.800
1847						
1848	18.300	26.500	32.900	26.900	43.900	35.400
1849	24.700	30.100	29.100	38.300	68.100	40.600
1850	28.800	57.500	52.600	54.700	50.700	51.300
1851	34.300	38.800	30.600	61.800	52.800	43.500
1852	37.863	25.146	27.959	54.137	53.517	57.120
1853	41.702	23.134	29.685	60.809	51.635	58.951
1854	45.506	18.615	23.367	56.742	43.683	57.082
1855	46.315	18.165	25.876	77.257	53.818	49.624
1856						
1857	34.908	8.550	12.875	31.239	22.429	38.854
1858	36.027	14.100	20.095	54.384	44.618	89.870
1859						
1860						
1861	29.934	15.640	9.606	35.263	26.365	75.793
1862	32.361	18.625	10.201	38.850	29.834	86.363
1863	31.311	17.628	9.990	39.795	21.162	100.427
1864	33.470	21.044	22.554	43.100	30.925	116.988
1865	36.059	22.325	30.824	45.768	34.874	141.958
1866	27.042	17.815	27.761	41.006	29.902	155.764
1867	43.372	40.205	40.128	49.017	41.171	134.439
1868	25.917	13.619	28.911	71.556	39.968	178.164
1869	27.846	14.327	30.347	33.634	36.284	156.945

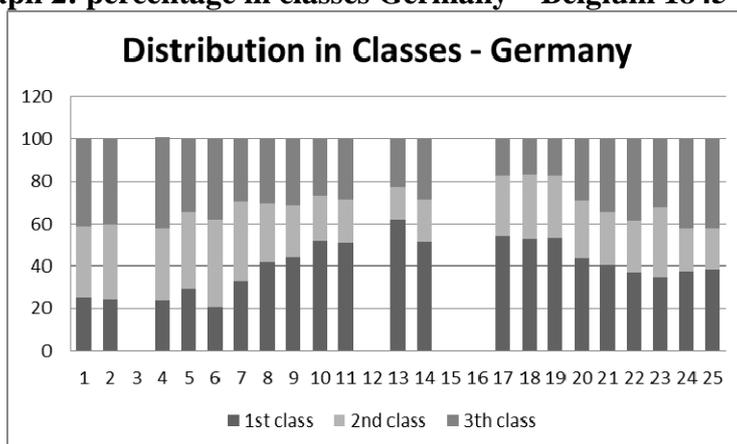
Source: Compte Rendu and own calculations

The statistics of this period are not reliable; e.g. the years 1848 to 1853 are without doubt not exact. Moreover, sometimes arrivals are given, sometimes arrivals and departures are put together. Nevertheless we have an indication on the results of international mobility. The ratio for this period diverge strongly between the relations with Germany and France: for Germany the first class has an

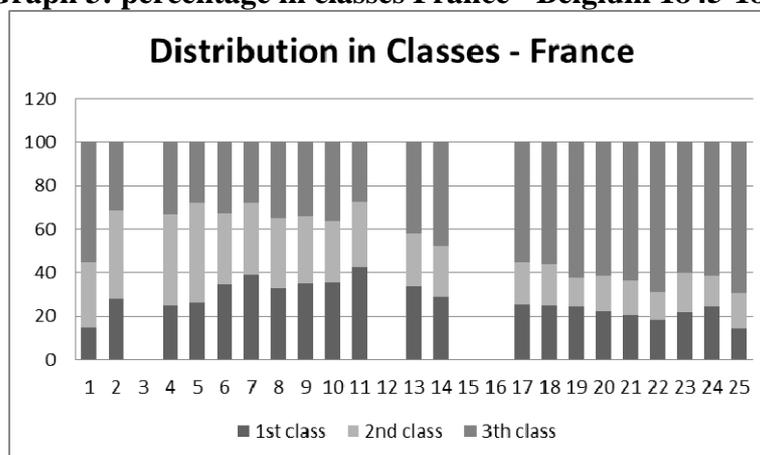
²⁷ Ordres de Service, 1847, n° 81, 22 December 1847; Ordre Spécial 4830, March 27th 1851.

average percentage of 40,5%, while second class still represents 27,8%; third class has an average percentage of 31,7%. In France this percentages are inversed. First class represents 27,4%, second class 25,5% and third class 47% . Therefore the remarks of the Belgian State railway may look strange at first sight. In the 1844 report on railway operations, the Board of the Belgian State Railways mentioned the ratio in global income of travellers in first class in national traffic and international travel. Whereas in national traffic 26 % of the global earnings were coming from first class, for international travel this percentage raised to 43 % for travellers coming into Belgium and up to 48 % for those leaving the country. The Board added: *‘This observation demonstrates sufficiently the accuracy of the opinion that we have already issued on the low priority cars or third class wagons, on the international relations.’*²⁸ For trips between London and Brussels, Antwerp, Aachen and Köln, only first and second class travel cards were sold. The traveller had the possibility to stay with additional tickets, included in the fare, in Ostend, Bruges, Ghent, Brussels, Louvain, Liège, Verviers and Aachen. Apparently a lot of discussion went on for third class tickets. The proposal, made by the representatives of the South-East Railway was fiercely resisted by the Belgian delegates, because it was contrary to the instructions for negotiations. With the idea of better pricing, an agreement was made. In Ostend, third class tickets were sold for the trajectory from Dover to London, with the possibility to pay an additional travel fare for a ticket second class in Dover.²⁹ Calculations over the period 1845-1869 shows at least that both opinions were correct. On the link to Germany, with probably more tourism, although it is hard to find evidence, first and second class represent together between 60% and 70 % . The link with France was less prosperous on that point.

Graph 2: percentage in classes Germany – Belgium 1845-1869



Graph 3: percentage in classes France - Belgium 1845-1869

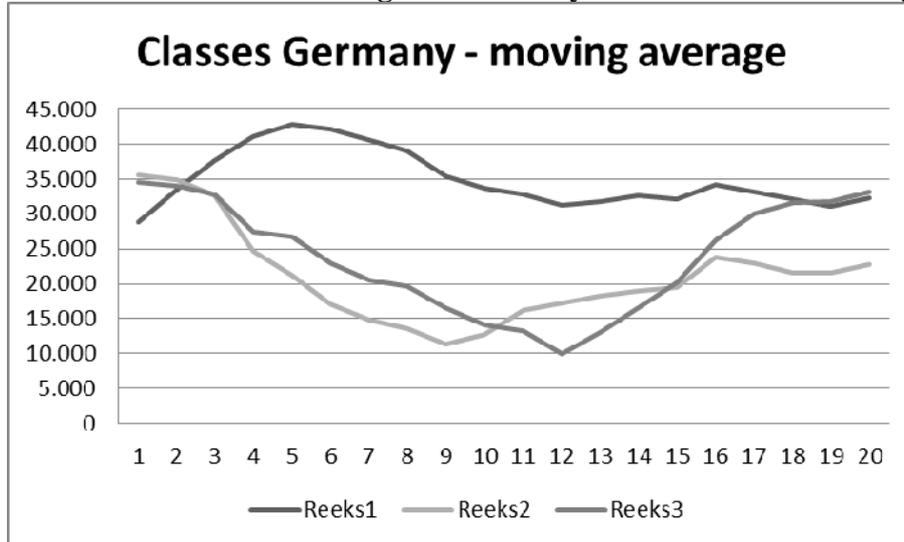


²⁸ COMPTE RENDU, 1844, p. xli.

²⁹ ID., p. 112-114.

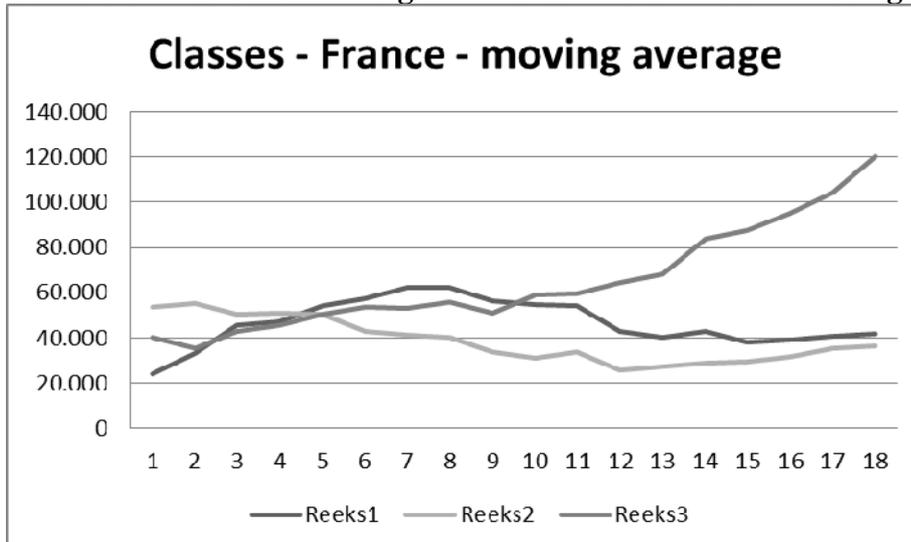
More interesting than the average percentage is the calculation of the moving average for both France and Germany. In graph 2 the results for the relation with the Rheinische Eisenbahn are calculated. The first data indicates a larger part of second and third class travellers. At the end of the line, in 1869, third class users represent slightly more than the first class in. The growth of first class passengers is not stable, but is still positive. That is also the case for third class, with a steady growth. Second class is losing both to first and third class.

Graph 4: Division into classes – Belgium Germany – 1845 – 1869 – Moving average



For the links with the French network, the evolution is different, in a sense that first class passengers will only have for a short time a marked share that is bigger than third class. Both first class and second class will in the end of this period more or less have half of the marked share of third class.

Graph 5: Division into classes – Belgium France – 1845 – 1869 – Moving average



An explanation for the French situation needs more in depth research, but for the first part of the period, from 1845 to 1851, it is clear that the link by Quievrain had far more attraction for first and second class travellers than the link by Mouscron. See table 4 and both graphs 6 and 7. It is by way

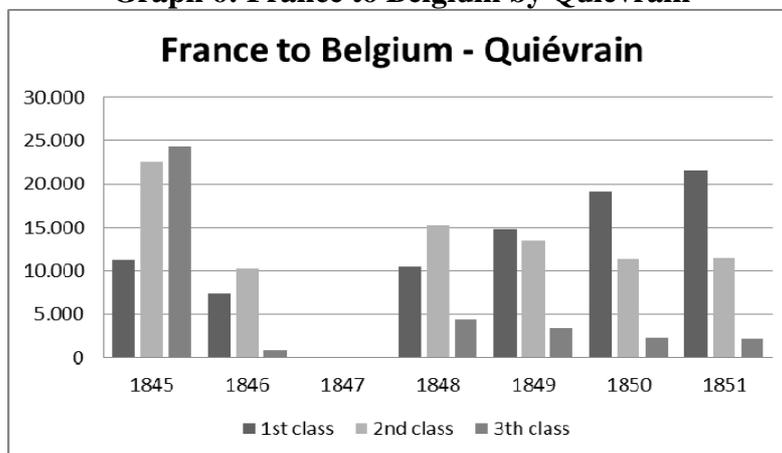
of example possible to determine the shift in trains in Quiévrain, with the coming of express trains. First class travellers shift from the classic international train towards the express train.

Table 4: France to Belgium by Mouscron & by Quiévrain 1845 - 1851

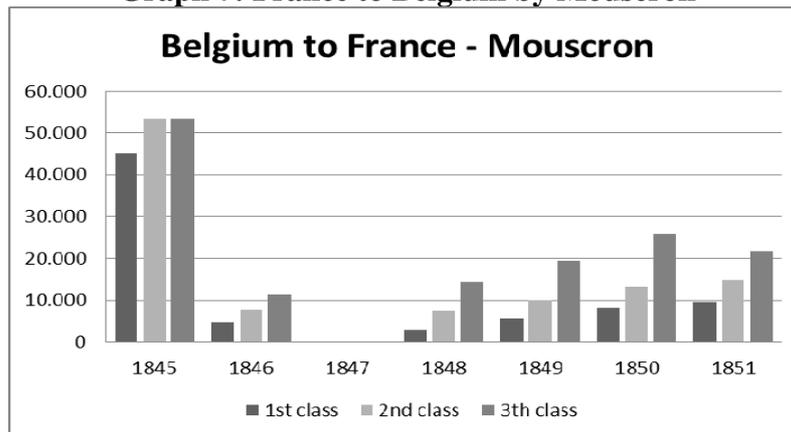
	F-B Mouscron			F-B Quiévrain		
	1st class	2nd class	3th class	1st class	2nd class	3th class
1845	7.647	1.801	46.031	11.251	22.548	24.268
1846	4.800	7.500	12.900	7.500	10.400	900
1847						
1848	3.100	6.300	11.300	10.500	15.300	4.500
1849	4.200	7.200	12.000	14.900	13.500	3.400
1850	8.500	11.500	18.200	19.100	11.400	2.300
1851	9.700	12.300	13.500	21.500	11.500	2.200

Source: Compte Rendu

Graph 6: France to Belgium by Quiévrain



Graph 7: France to Belgium by Mouscron



4. Epilogue

To what extent the findings for Belgium deviate from current research? The question is difficult to answer for several reasons. Bertho Lavenir indicates the three main stages in development of touristic guides and the influence of the train in the conception of the travel guide. The period considered here falls directly into the second stage of that evolution, the period of network building which creates new possibilities for travellers going faster, farther and having other impressions

whilst the movement from origin to destination. It is the success period of Murray's Handbook and others will follow. Therefore it is strange to see guides appearing with picturesque descriptions along the railway line. This kind of travel guide will not be frequently used, as far as actually seen, but new initiatives are taken in the late twenties or in early thirties of the last century and another one by the end of last century, but that will be an initiative for only one section of a railway line, between Leuven and Mechelen. The first one is not edited and exists only as manuscript. The last one is a leaflet, although the concept is very interesting and is based upon views people have whilst traveling. The descriptions are discreet but the picture adds a certain value to the trip. Apparently, there is no demand for that kind of travel guide, although travel information might be appreciated. For a nascent tourism and for international mobility, the picturesque guide is not the most appropriate tool.

The first example of that type of information is still a combination of both early travel guide and early picturesque description, because of the combination of railway information and depiction of the landscape, with an integration of the railway line into that landscape. Both publications from 1840 shows travel guides in evolution: a separate chapter with global information on the use of the railways and a large part with representation of the highlights for departure and arrival. There is still information left on the line sections and in the picturesque guide of Wauters, even different plans and views are given.

In the Handbook by Murray and later in Baedeker, attention for the railway sections travelled is diminishing. Thus the success of Murray and other guides of the same type, helping the user not to lose time and money in changing trains, or looking for hotels, etc., by leaving out large descriptions of panoramic sight. On the other hand, other products appear: the so called picturesque guide by the French author Texier pays some minor attention to the landscape, whilst leaving more time to do other things during the movement from origin to destination. Since the early railway period, a lot of railway fiction sees the light, a process that still is going on. This raises another question: to what extent there has been a long lasting demand for travel guides or was the demand for something to read greater than the need for travel information. The success story of Murray, Baedeker, Guides Richard and others is without doubt important but the appearing bookstalls in the early railway stations might suggest that reading was more important than enjoying landscape. Combining the findings of Schivelbusch with research on travel and tourism might give new research opportunities and new views on an old topic: was writing on the landscape important for making us tourists or was it the quill of novelists that helped us become travellers? Was it the excitement of the landscape or was it to read about the excitement of the landscape?

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