

THE OLD MINSTREL.

FROM THE FRENCH OF BERANGER.

An humble, aged man am I,
The minstrel of this hamlet small:
Yet people wisdom in me spy,
And I have wine—unmixed—at call.
Come, and beneath the shades this day
Haste to unbend yourselves with me,
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Come, dance beneath my old Oak Tree.

Yes, dance beneath my aged oak,
That stands our village inn before:
Discord still flits away like smoke,
Whene'er its boughs are waving o'er.
How often hath its foliage grey
Beheld our sires embrace with glee!
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Come dance beneath my old Oak Tree.

Pity the baron in his hall,
Although he be your manor's lord!
He well may envy you for all
The quiet ease your pains afford.
While he is whirled along yon way,
Cooped in his coach so sad to see,
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Dance ye beneath my old Oak Tree.

Far from a wish at church to curse
The man who spurns the church's cares—
That Heaven may kindly bless and nurse
His crops and vines, send up your prayers.
Would he to pleasure homage pay—
Here let his shrine of incense be:
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Dance ye beneath my old Oak Tree.

When with a feeble, faithless hedge
Your heritage is circled round,
Touch never with your sickle's edge
The grain upon your neighbour's ground.
But, sure that in a coming day
That heritage your sons' will be,
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Dance ye beneath my old Oak Tree.

Since peace its balm diffuses o'er
The ills that fall in clustering throng,
Oh! banish from their homes no more
The blind ones who have wandered long.
Recalling—now the skies are gay—
All whom the tempests tost at sea,
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Dance all beneath my old Oak Tree.

Hear then your minstrel's honest call,
And haste to seek my oak's broad shade.
From each let words of pardon fall,
Here be your kind embraces made.
And that, from age to age, we may
Peace fixed among us ever see,
Fa, la, ye villagers, fal, lay,
Dance all beneath my old Oak Tree.

From Chamber's Continental Tour.

SKETCHES OF HOLLAND.

STREETS OR WHAT-YOU-WILL OF ROTTERDAM.

Persons who are accustomed to see towns composed of streets with carriage-ways in the centre, behold in Rotterdam much to astonish them. In penetrating through the town from the Boompjes, we come to street, after street, each consisting of a wide harbour or haven of water in the middle, lined with trees on both sides, and exhibiting a mixture of lofty gable fronts of houses, trees and masts of shipping, as odd as it is interesting. Water and water-craft meet the eye in every direction. You find yourself in the midst of a town in which it is difficult to say whether there are a greater number of houses or ships. The deep havens stretch lengthwise and crosswise, like the meshes of a net, through the city; and at every short interval is perceived a drawbridge of white painted wood, constructed with ponderous balancing beams overhead, and raised by means of chains, for the passage of vessels to and fro. The ground beneath the trees is paved with small yellow bricks, and is chiefly occupied as quays for the landing of goods. The space from the trees to near the houses is paved in the usual coarse manner for carts and carriages, and here the foot passengers are generally obliged to walk, for small outshot buildings, flights of steps to doorways, and such like interruptions, prevent any regular thoroughfare on the small brick trottoirs close by the houses. The straggling of

foot passengers in the middle of the streets is therefore a distinct feature in all Dutch towns, and the only comfort is, that the streets are more than ordinarily clean for this mode of locomotion. The havens are in few places protected by chains from the streets, so that there is a constant liability to accidents, particularly at night, when the darkness is but poorly relieved by oil lamps, dangling, Parisian fashion, from ropes stretched betwixt the trees and the houses. Latterly, a portion of Rotterdam has been lighted with gas; but, according to a parsimonious plan, the lamps are not lighted when the moon is expected to shine; so that during many nights of theoretical moonlight, but practical darkness, a stranger would require to have a lantern carried before him, if he wished to avoid tumbling into one of the many havens which intersect his path. The deaths from drowning in the havens, I was informed, average one in the week throughout the year.

ARISTOCRACY OF ROTTERDAM.

Rotterdam, with a population of eighty thousand persons, is essentially a city of merchants. It has no aristocracy of birth or rank. Merchants are the greatest of its citizens, and in themselves constitute an aristocracy which has no parallel anywhere except in Amsterdam. They are an unostentatious, hard-toiling set of men, and seem to confine their attention to their own private circle and their business. Though in many instances possessing much wealth, they very rarely show any fancy for recreations of refined character. Many of them, as I was informed on different occasions, scrupulously adhere to a practice of keeping always at least one-third of their savings, in the form of hard cash, in a strong box in their own possession. If such be the case, and it is quite consistent with that I learned of the economical habits of the people, the amount of coined money locked up from public use in Holland must be immense. While at Rotterdam, I was told of various merchants who had realized great wealth by a lifetime of the most assiduous labour in their kanttoors. One of the most remarkable men of this class is Mr. Van Huboken of Rhoom and Pendrecht, who lives on one of the havens. This individual began life as a merchant's porter, and has in process of time attained the highest rank among the Dutch mercantile aristocracy. He is at present the principal owner of twenty large ships in the East India trade, each, I was informed, worth about fourteen thousand pounds, besides a large landed estate, and much floating wealth of different descriptions. His establishment is of vast extent, and contains departments for the building of ships, and manufacture of all their necessary equipments. This gentleman, until lately, was in the habit of giving a splendid fete once a year to his family and friends, at which was exhibited with modest pride the porter's truck which he drew at the outset of his career. One seldom hears of British merchants thus keeping alive the remembrance of early meanness of circumstances.

PALACES OF BURGER-PRINCES.

All these, however, are inferior symptoms of commerce to those which are observable alongside the havens. There the houses are constructed strictly with reference to great process of trade, and in a very peculiar manner, which I am not aware has ever yet been described. Each house may be considered the castle of a merchant, who both resides with his family and carries on the whole commercial transactions within the same set of premises. The front part of the building exhibits an elegant door of lofty proportions—fifteen or twenty feet high, for instance—at the head of a flight of steps. On getting a glimpse into the interior, you see a lobby paved with pure white marble, and a stair of the same material leading to the story above, which consists of a suite of lofty rooms, and is the main place of residence of the family. Some of the rooms are finished in a style of great elegance, with rich figured cornices and roof, silk draperies to the windows, smooth oak floors, and the walls most likely painted as an entire picture or landscape, in oil by an artist of eminence. Near the door of the house is a *port cochier*, or, in plain language, a coach-house door, which, on being thrown open from the street discloses a wide paved thoroughfare leading to an inner court, the buildings around which are devoted to the whole warehousing department of the merchant. A small office within the entry, with the word *Kantoor* written over it, points out the counting-house of the great man of the establishment. Such is a merchant's house of Rotterdam. The bulk of the edifices of this great trading city are of the kind I describe, and therefore it may be readily supposed, that with little outward show a prodigious deal of solid business is transacted. On being conducted through a few of the establishments, I have felt surprise at the extraordinary amount of goods which were piled away in places where nothing of the kind could be supposed by a stranger to exist.

HOW HOLLAND WAS FORMED.

The manner in which the country has been rendered habitable to human beings, is one of the most surprising facts in physical geography. The whole of the territory, from the Texel on the north, to pretty nearly Calais on the south, comprehending a large part of Holland and Belgium, and part of France, is in almost all parts perfectly level, and if it had not been indebted to art, would have been a general marsh, or included within the influence of the sea.

On looking at this extensive territory, and then proceeding inland to the higher regions of Germany, the conclusion naturally arises, that the whole of the low countries are simply an alluvial deposit, washed from the alpine regions of the interior. The land everywhere on being dug is sand or clay. You may travel hundreds of miles, and never see a stone. At this present hour land is forming on the coast of Holland, and by a very obvious process. The waters of the Rhine in all its branches are exceedingly muddy, or loaded with particles of clay and sand, washed from the upper country, and these are carried out to sea, where they are sinking to the bottom, and forming sandbanks. At the mouth of the Maas, long sandy reaches, produced in this manner, are seen at certain states of the tide. Already they exhibit tufts of herbage, and are resorted to by flocks of sea-birds; and there can be no doubt, that, by a very little trouble, many square miles of new land might at present be added to the coast of Holland. The exact process by which the low countries have been saved from the sea, has never yet been fully detailed. Nature having in the first instance produced an alluvial marsh, a certain degree of art has been employed to raise barriers to prevent the influx of the sea; and this point being secured, the next step has been to drain the land, piecemeal, by pumping, the water being so raised as to flow off by channels into the sea at low tide. Much stress is usually laid by writers on the prodigious trouble taken by the Netherlanders to keep out the sea, by means of artificial bulwarks along the coast. But on this point there is some exaggeration, and one very material circumstance is nearly omitted to be noticed. It is only at certain places that great exertions are made, by means of artificial dykes, to keep out the sea. Nature, as if anxious to save the country from tidal inundation, has for centuries been energetically working to increase the magnitude of the mounds on the coast. At low water, when the bare beach is exposed to the action of the winds from the German Ocean, clouds of sand are raised into the air, and showered down upon the country for at least a mile inland; and this constantly going on, the result is, that along the whole line, from Haarlem to about Dunkirk or Calais, the coast consists of sandy mounds or downs, of great breadth, partially covered with grass and heath, but unfit for pasturage or any other purpose. In some places these downs look like a series of irregular hills; and when seen from the tops of the steeples, they are so huge as to shut out the view of the sea. The traveller, in visiting them from the plains, all at once ascends into a region of desert barrenness. He walks on and on for miles in a wilderness such as might be expected to be seen in Africa, and at last emerges on the sea-shore, where the mode of creation of this singular kind of territory is at once conspicuous. Loose particles of sand are blown in his face; and as he descends to the shore he sinks to the ankle in the drifted heaps. In some parts of these dreary solitudes, the sandy soil has been prevented from rising with the wind and injuring the fertile country, by being sown with the seeds of a particular kind of bent grass, and in a few spots fir-trees have been successfully planted.

DUTCH STAGE-COACHES AND ROADS.

The Dutch diligences are well fitted up and roomy vehicles, equal to the best in France, and are generally drawn by three powerful horses yoked abreast. Travellers in Holland can never be at any loss in making their way by these commodious conveyances; for, by a law of the country, the proprietors of public vehicles are obliged to provide for all passengers who may make their appearance before the hour of departure. They have thus frequently to yoke additional coaches, just before starting, greatly to the comfort of the traveller, though perhaps to their own loss. Although the distance from Rotterdam to Delft is nine English miles, the fare of each person by the diligence is no more than a guilder, or one shilling and eightpence.

The highways in Holland are among the best in the world. They are fine broad roads, running for miles in a straight line along the summits of the dykes; and are paved with small bricks set on edge, so as to be very smooth for carriages; and are usually ornamented with a row of trees on each side, so as to form beautiful and cool avenues. Alongside of the roads, and only separated from them in some cases by one of the rows of trees just mentioned, is a main canal of considerable breadth, and sufficiently deep to permit the progress of moderately sized sailing-vessels. These canals, with their minor branches, form the chief thoroughfares. Few wheeled vehicles are met with on the roads, and the whole transport of goods and farm produce is carried on by means of water conveyances. Sometimes you may see the dairy farmer pushing off in a small boat for market with his large bottle-shaped milk-jars, formed of brass and glittering like burnished gold; at another time you may see a boat of a larger size loaded with hay like a stack, and moving on its way from a distant polder to the farmyard. Water, therefore, which is in one respect a source of constant trouble to the country, is in another an engine of national wealth and prosperity.

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