

anned by a constant breeze of our own making which tossed us a bouquet of perfume from flowery fields as we slipped by, the only sound in our ears the cry of sea-going gulls overhead, and the delicate fluting of the water as our bows shattered its crystals among pale, shimmering sedges and tall reeds.

Tiny canals of irrigation wandered like purple veins through a maze of blossoming pink and gold in the sun-bright meadows, and as far as the most sweeping glance could reach, the horizon seemed pinned down to earth with wind-mills.

Suddenly the land lay far below the level of the canal, and people walking the main streets of villages, behind the dykes, were visible for us only as far as their knees. Quaint little houses and sat themselves down close to the water's edge, as if determined to miss detail of canal gossip; and from their bright windows, like brilliant eyes, they watched the water with a curious expression of self-satisfaction and contentment on their painted, wooden faces.

Verandas, half as big as the houses themselves, the life of the family went on. Children played, young girls wrote letters to their lovers; mothers busily worked sewing-machines, but saw everything that passed on the water; fathers read newspapers, and white-haired old grandpas nodded over long-stemmed pipes. Every garden blazed with color; and close-planted rows of trees, with their branches cut and trained (as Miss Van Buren said) "flat as trees for paper mills," shaded the upper windows of the mansions.

Little things which were matters of every day for me in this country so characteristic of the Netherlands, tickled the fancy of the strangers and kept them constantly exclaiming. The exquisitely polished wood of the houses; the lifting cranes protruding from the gables; the dairymen in boats, with their shining pails; the bridges that stood round to let us pass through; drawbridges that opened in the middle and swung up with leisured dignity; the bridgeman in sorrel-colored coats, directing tolls in battered wooden shoes; the dogs which they call "Spitz" and are really "who barked ferociously at our motor, from every barge and lighter; yellow carts with black, bonnet-like roofs, from which peasant heads peeped joyously out at us, from shore; and, above all, the old women or young women with ropes across their breasts, leaning to just enormous barges like that dark, following whales.

What can Dutchmen be like to let them do it, while they loaf on board?" Miss Van Buren flashed at me, as if I were responsible for the faults of all male countrymen.

It isn't exactly loafing to steer those barges," said I. "And the whole family take turns, anywhere between the ages of ten and a hundred. They don't know what hard work it is, because nobody has told them, and our river people are among the most contented."

Starr was interested in seeing me take the men of passing craft, and in a grave return of the courtesy. "No, he could imitate my motion," he exaggerated it slightly, letting his arm float gracefully out to length before it came back to his somewhat, as he remarked, "like a stem blown by the wind." When he got the knack he was enchanted, and every yacht, sail-boat, lighter, and barge had a theatrical greeting from him as it slipped silently past, perhaps to be seen again by my eyes.

But are they happy?" he asked. "You never hear bursts of laughter, or intermingling of voices, as you would in our countries. The youngest children's faces are grave, while as for the men, they look as if they were paid so much money not to shed a smile, and were very conscientious about earning their money. Yet you say they're contented." "The Dutch are a reserved people," I explained, under Miss Van Buren's critical gaze. "We don't make much noise when we're glad, or sad; and it takes something funny to make us laugh. We don't do it to hear the sound of our voices, but prefer to rest our feet and our minds."

Some of these bargemen look as if they'd rested their minds so much that

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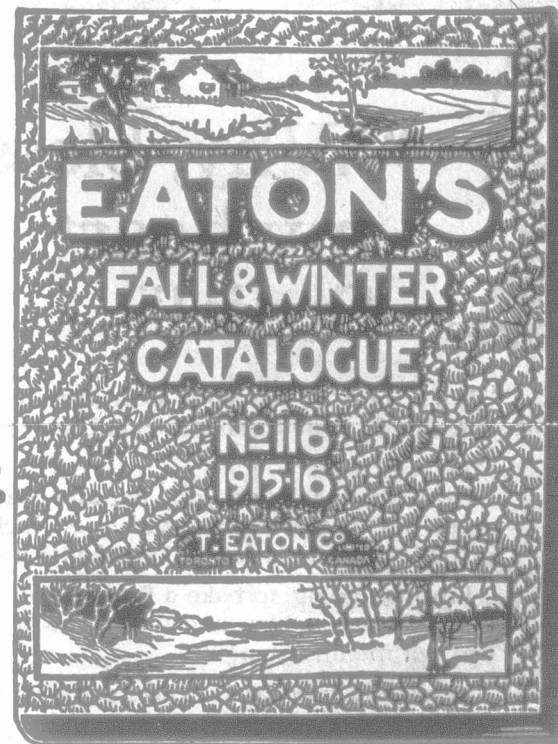
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vegetables had grown on them," mused Starr, which made Miss Van Buren giggle; and somehow I was angry with her for finding wit in his small sallies.

"You'll discover on this trip that as you treat the Dutch, so will they treat you," I went on. "If you're impatient, they'll be rude; if you show contempt, they'll pay you back in the same coin; but if you're polite and considerate there's nothing they won't do for you in their quiet way."

"We shall never be rude to any of them, shall we, Nell?" said Miss Rivers. "Not unless they deserve it," came back the answer. And I knew what Dutchman in particular Miss Van Buren had in mind.

It was about two hours from Gouda when a blaze of color leaped from the distant level to our eyes, and everybody cried out in admiration for little Boskoop, which in summer is always en fête among garlands and bowers of bloom. The rhododendrons—that last longer with us than in England, like all other flowers—were beautiful with a mid-die-aged clinging to the glory of their youth; and the tall, straight flame of azaleas shot up from every grass-plot against a background of roses—roses white, and red, and amber; roses pale pink, and the crimson that is purple in shadow.

Miss Rivers thought she would like to live there, and cultivate flowers; but I told her that she had better not negotiate for the purchase of a house until she had seen the miles of blossom at Haarlem.

We had not kept up our average of

speed, to nine miles an hour; for, though we made ten when the way was clear, and no yards of regulation red-tape to get tangled in our steering-gear, the custom of these waterways is to slow down near villages and in farming country. Besides, we met barges loaded to the water's edge, and had we been going fast our wash would have swamped them. As it was, we flung a wave over the low dykes, and sent boats moored at the foot of garden steps knocking against their landing-stages, in fear at our approach. But after Alphen we turned into a green stream, so evidently not a canal that Aunt Fay was moved to ask questions.

Her face fell when she heard it was the Rhine.

"What, this the Rhine!" she echoed. "It's no wider than—the Thames at Marlow. I was there last summer."

"You stayed with Lady Marchant," broke in Starr, hastily. It was not the first time he had cut her short, and the little masquerader bristled under the treatment.

"Oh yes; that was when you were painting my portrait, wasn't it?"

Starr flushed, and I guessed why, remembering his Salon success, and recalling that it was his portrait of Lady MacNairne which had been exhibited this year. Of course, I had been stupid not to put the two facts together, and realize that his success and her portrait, must have been one and the same.

The girls had probably heard of it, and must be asking themselves at this moment how a portrait of this little spectacled thing could have been possi-

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