

DOWNBEAT

*The harsh winds fade
And sunny skies
Melt the gleaming snows.*

*The deep burrowing cold
Retreats, and ice becomes
Life-giving water.*

*The long sleep broken,
Trees bud, animals frolic
All Nature comes alive,
Spring.*

Y.E.

SPRING IN HOLLAND

The winter is dark, cold and wet. The spring is bright, colourful and alive. But more than all else, the spring is tulips and raw herring.

Don't turn up your nose at herring — no where else but Holland in the spring will you get "nieuwe haring" with such a delicate flavour. Towards the end of May the herring fleet, with flags flying, ceremoniously sails from Dutch ports for the season's first catch. For about a month thereafter you can eat new herring or watch the Dutchman buying them at street stands and sliding them into his mouth as he holds them by the tail.

Spring is flower festival time. Front lawns in Lisse and Hillegom are carpeted with hyacinth blossoms as householders compete for prize-winning designs — even the bargemen join in by decorating the decks of their craft. Annually, too, there is a long parade of floats gaily covered with blossoms depicting the year's central theme and including maybe a windmill, maybe birds in flight, maybe a castle. Bicycles, cars and their riders are festooned with garlands of daffodils. And you can buy an armful of flowers for a couple of guilders.

Introduced from Asia Minor in the sixteenth century, tulips have become one of Holland's greatest export industries. Planted in the sandy sterilized soil, nurtured under straw through the winter, constantly perfected by scientific care and experimentation, millions upon millions of bulbs burst into bloom in late March or early April. While tulips are grown in the greatest number, narcissus, daffodils and hyacinths are also cultivated and the fields are a vast mosaic of brilliant colours. The Keukenhof at Lisse is the show place where the Dutch bulb growers display hundreds of varieties in a natural and lovely setting. You can wander through the gardens marvelling at stately tall proud tulips of every shade imaginable or those with lacy frilled petals, or giant hyacinths of deep blues and pinks. It's magnificent — and you'll find on a Sunday that thousands of other people think so too. Or you can go to the flower auction at Aalsmeer. Barges laden with flowers bring their cargoes daily to this market for sale throughout Europe. But be careful — an American tourist who casually lounged in his chair during an auction was said to have unknowingly bid for several million flowers by pressing with his elbow on the counter in the arm of the chair.

Seeing this profusion of flowers, the air of festivity that greets their blossoming and knowing with what meticulous care the bulbs are grown, you can say with Cornelius van Baerle in *La Tulipe Noire* "Oh! monsieur, comprenez-vous bien ce que c'est que d'avoir trouvé la tulipe noire, de l'avoir vue un instant, d'avoir reconnu qu'elle était parfaite, que c'était à la fois un chef-d'oeuvre de l'art et de la nature".

E. W.