

Two Visits to Holland.

I have visited Holland twice. A long time ago I stayed there during the summer in a little country town and in the autumn of the following year I spent a day and a half in Amsterdam and a day and a half at the Hague.

My old friend Miss Vernon - the lady who gave a penny to every little girl in Harston who wore a bright coloured frock - asked me to join her and her adopted daughter, Olive Courtney, a girl of nineteen, on a sketching holiday to Veere. Veere is a little town in Holland on the island of Walcherin close to the coast. I accepted gladly for I was due to go to friends in Switzerland the last part of my vacation and by going from Holland I should get there by, to me, an unknown route.

Veere was, and perhaps still is, an enchanting old town. It is made sketchable by its tall slender bell tower and by the shipping on the quay which is in the heart of the town. I was fascinated too by the landscape round it which some might find far from pretty for it consists only of smooth slopes of grassland that clothe angular dyke works. The costume of the country women were interesting as each village has its traditional form of cap. They all wore coral or garnet necklaces. Their black cloth dresses had very short sleeves which were finished off

squarely with a plain velvet band. Every woman reddened her arms artificially which at first gave me the uncomfortable feeling that their sleeves must be painfully tight. However I got used to it and when I saw one woman with unreddened arms I had an uncomfortable feeling that she must be anaemic.

I did not succeed in my painting of the acknowledged best view of the town which was the view from the other side of the quay. From there could be seen the bell tower rising above the brown and grey houses and, to the artist's eyes, the buildings were pleasantly broken up by the lines of masts and the rigging of the ships in the foreground. The hulls of the ships and barges and their black reflections in the greenish water of the quay helped to make the charm of the subject. I began to paint it but left off for I could not succeed in getting the clear, grey atmosphere of Holland. Ever since my failure I have looked with yet more admiration at the landscape work of the Dutch masters. I succeeded much better when I worked at some of the old red brick buildings that stretched along the water-side almost as far as the great lock gates of Veere which let the river out and keep back the sea. I have never seen before or since bricks of such fine colour. Our hotel faced the quay, only a wide road separating it from the water.

We all three worked at our subjects both morning and afternoon. One morning Olive joined Miss Vernon and me coming

late from the hotel. She said :- "They seem rather stirred up at our place. Somebody is coming whom they call Mynherr Brown. By the excitement I should guess that he must be a very important person". When I went back to the hotel for lunch I found Madame sitting on the bench just outside it. She was shelling peas. They looked such lovely young peas that I ~~xxxxxx~~ stopped to admire them. Madame spoke French for she was a Belgian :- "Les petits pois sont pour le diner. Monsieur Brown viens cet apres midi ". She had finished her peas and hurried in and I could ask no questions. We heard floating whispers every now and then from members of the staff that they were doing extra work, but willingly for it was for Mynherr Brown. We wondered if he were a high-up official, a millionaire, or perhaps he might be a popular preacher. We felt quite curious about him. We went out for our usual afternoon work and returned for tea. ~~two fishermen seemed to have been to the beach~~

We saw that in front of the hotel was a semicircular crowd. It had the bench from our eyes. As I mounted the steps I could see sitting on it, smoking a pipe, a small stout man about forty five years old. He said no word to the people who gazed at him but looked benignantlly at his adorers. I felt sure that this was the great Mr. Brown. He looked thoroughly English. ~~all was being brought out by the staff and the~~

There was indeed no doubt that he was the important guest of our hotel. The staff were very attentive to him yet he seemed merely a kindly retiring man who made no claims.

He was not like an official, he was certainly not like a millionaire nor was he like an orator of any description. The secret of his undoubted popularity both in the hotel and town was hidden from us. Mr. Brown soon made friends with our party and we liked him for his unassuming manners. He took the attention he received with sympathetic tolerance as if it were too much of a right to be noticed or questioned.

One day we received an invitation to join in an expedition in a fishin smack round the coast. We accepted and the next morning we went to the quay and boarded his vessel. So deep were its wooden walls that when I was in it I could not see over the sides. The boat had already been made very comfortable for us. The two fishermen spread the sails; we passed through the lock and reached the sea. I saw nothing as we sped along but the blue sky behind the broad brown sails.

The two fishermen seemed to know where to go without being told and we were landed on a very lonely bit of the shore. There was nothing to see but sand and sky. The country was hidden from our eyes by an enormous dyke. The side of the dyke facing the sea was a shining slope of sand. Such sand ! The finest in colour that I have ever seen. Not quite silver but not yellow - something between the two but with no tint of grey. While lunch was being brought out by Mr. Brown and the sailors Olive and I became children again and climbed up the steep slope and slid down with our own weight.

Towards the end of lunch Mr. Brown began to tell his story.

It was the story of an adventure that he had had at this spot about five years before. Since then he had tried to visit it every year on its anniversary. To-day was the anniversary and the weather was the same as then.

Mr. Brown's voice as he told his tale mingles with, but was not deadened by, the little waves lapping on the shore. I listened with such interest that I feel that I can tell it best by remembering the words he used.

This is how Mr. Brown told his story :- I came to Veere on a holiday about five years ago and planned to spend a day in walking about the island and along the dykes. I got up very early one fine morning and started. I walked on until I reached the dyke above this spot. I looked down and saw the slope of gleaming sand. The sea was blue and the waves were mere ripples. I cannot swim and I am very cautious about sea bathing. However this little cove was so retired and lonely and the sea looked so safe that I climbed down. I laid my clothes on the sand and was soon enjoying the luxury of a bathe. I was splashing about in by no means deep water when I felt that the ground had slipped from under my feet. I was ignorant then of how dangerous a waveless sea could be. I was pulled away from the land as if mermaids arms were pulling me and I sank down drowning. It came into my head that I must try and float. You see, I am built in the right way for it but I had never done it as far as I remember. It took only a moment to realize my danger and

another to take my one chance of life. I am a townsman with few opportunities of practising any sport. I turned on my back and got into the position that I had at least heard about and perhaps as a boy had learned, and I found that I could float. I was relieved but wondered how long I could do it before I was sighted and rescued. Although I thought with dismay of my plight I had no idea of what I was going to suffer. As time went on the effort to keep in the right position became an ache and then an agony. The sun burnt hot on to me. My eyes became inflamed. Midday passed. The afternoon wore on and the torture began to affect my brain. I became slightly delirious and then half conscious. I wonder how I stuck to my position but I held on. The sun was sinking towards the west when I woke up to find that I was really resting on solid earth although I was still in shallow water. It was some time before I had gathered sufficient strength to roll to the dry sand and still more time before my head was clear enough even to wonder where I could be. I sat up at last and crawled to some grass. When strong enough I stood up and looked about me. A fisherman's cottage was not far off and a woman was at work outside. I realized with a new emotion what had been the plight of Ulysses. The woman saw me and did what Nausicaa's maiden did. She fled. But she was not in her cottage for long. She came out and flung some old fisherman's garments towards me. She had understood my appeal. She again retreated. Clothed and thankful I tottered to her cottage. I do

not know the Dutch language but I could at least tell her that I came from Veere. When she shook her head I repeated : Veere, Walcherin. She looked at me pityingly and soothingly and gave me a hot drink. Her husband came home. He also thought me touched in the brain. At last I managed to make them believe that I was in my right senses and - whether mistaken or not - that I really did wish to be taken to Veere and he on his part managed to make me understand that it was a long way off and only a fishing smack would be able to take me there. I was not on Walcherin but on another island. I think he was intent on verifying what I said or perhaps he wanted to get rid of me quickly for though it was beginning to get dusk he hurried off and found his mates and a vessel was soon ready. When we arrived at Veere it was night although the men had made as much speed as they could to enable the boat to get through the locks in time. I could see a good deal of artificial light on the quay as we neared it and there seemed to be a great number of people opposite my hotel.

My fisherman hulloed loudly as we approached the town and a roar went up from the crowd. By the time I was landed nearly all Veere was on the quay side to welcome me. I received an ovation but my troubles were far from being over. I wanted to get into my room, to be clothed in a suit of my own and to have the wherewithal to reward my fisherman, but outside my doors which was officially sealed up, were two gendarmes who absolutely refused to let me enter. They paid no attention

even to my puzzled, excited landlady. I could see that they did not believe her when she said the room was mine. "What is to be done?" I enquired. There was much talk and then they made me understand that I must go to the Mayor and prove my identity. I was escorted to the mayor's house by most of the inhabitants of the town it seemed to me. I felt as if I must still be delirious. It was twelve o'clock at night when we reached the house and then the Mayor had to be roused from his sleep and get dressed. He questioned me until I was yet more exhausted and I naturally failed to prove my identity there and then. I could however describe minutely my clothes left on the beach and which were now in a sealed packet in the sealed-up room. They had been found and it was judged that there could be no doubt that I had been drowned. My story seemed so incredible that the Mayor looked at me as if I were a visitor from another sphere. He told me that the currents between those great islands about the mouth of the Scheldt are so strong that a swimmer, no matter how powerful he might be, would be swept out to the open sea and drowned. When my clothes had been found on the shore it was regarded as a certainty that I was lost. There must have been a rare wind affecting the currents but, even with the help of such a wind, - only the fact that I was floating on the surface of the water and not swimming saved me. I owed my life to a chance that was almost a miracle.

The Mayor, after talks with our landlady, unsealed my room and my belongings with much formality. I was allowed to

take possession of my room. You can all guess at my feelings when I sank into that haven of rest - bed. The result of my adventure is that I am regarded as a wonder here and the tale of my exploit is one of the tales of the town.

That was the story that Mr. Brown told us that sunny day by the sea.

He lived in London, he said, and worked for the Kodak Company. All the cameras of the Company passed through his hands to be tested before distribution. The little inexpensive Brownie Camera ~~isxxxxxx~~ had been named after him. When I see a Brownie Camera it calls up a picture of blue sea, shining sand, a boat in the near distance with a brown sail and I feel myself again sitting on a heap of sand facing a small stout man and listening to him telling of his adventure.

Many years ago an Exhibition of Rembrandt's pictures was held at Amsterdam. I had decided in the beginning of the Autumn term to give lectures on his life to my pupils so when I heard of the Exhibition I felt it was necessary to see it. For would-be visitors the Railway and Steamship Companies arranged very inexpensive week end fares via Hook of Holland. The ticket also gave entrance to the Exhibition. These special boats and trains were run between the ordinary services. It was a cheap way of getting to Holland for excursionists but a certain amount of discomfort was certainly included with the ticket. My partner

in the Studio, Gertrude Chataway and I determined to go. We should travel by a night boat reaching Amsterdam very early on Friday morning. We should be able to have a long day in the Gallery taking notes and still have time to see a little of the city. We could return to Cambridge early enough to start our Studio work only missing Monday morning's class.

We had rough weather crossing. We were both ill but I soon recovered but Gertrude did not. We had to wait some time in the station at The Hook for our train to Amsterdam. It was very early in the morning and still dusk. The waiting rooms were locked up and also the refreshment rooms. There were people on the platform standing up or filling the few seats. Gertrude looked as white as a sheet. "Please come with me" she said imploringly, "I must lie down". She staggered to the end of the platform and hurried along the lines. She found a space where there was a little grass between the lines of rails and sank down on to it. I saw with dismay that the rails each side of the grass were shining with use. I sat near her on the ground and looked well up and down for any hint of a coming train. At last she got up and it was only just in time for the train was due. I supported her into the train. We arrived at Amsterdam too early even for the station restaurants to be open but I saw through their glass doors that on tables were inviting looking round golden-brown cheeses for the Dutch breakfast. We found a conveyance and drove to our hotel where we had booked

rooms but only for one night. When I was shown to my room I found that it looked on to a court, pleasant enough, but I had hoped for a view of a canal. I expressed my disappointment and the manager with alacrity ordered the maid to exchange so and so's room for mine. We had breakfast and then forgot how early in the day it was and made for the gallery which of course was still closed. We wandered about and by the time we got back to the gallery I felt that I had already spent a very long day.

I revived when I entered the first picture room. I shall never forget the start it gave me. There were people in it, and compared to the glow of the pictures, the living people seemed dead. It was not through strong hard colour that they seemed to overpower the living spectators but by a golden light that radiated from the canvasses. Especially in the room dedicated to the "Night Watch" was this noticeable. It is a marvellous picture. What unbelievable fools were those old Dutchmen of the Town Guard who rejected it and refused to pay for it or hang it in their Hall.

Gertrude and I spent the morning and early afternoon in taking notes of every picture. We returned for lunch and then I found that I had made a mistake in changing my room. It had been a hot summer. It was a warm autumn and the classic smell of Amsterdam canals was at its richest. After our work was over in the gallery I wanted to rest in my room and have some air but, oh, that smell! I felt ill. I thought it was canal sickness but I am sure it was only that I was tired out. I

declared next morning that one night of the air was enough so we would go to the Hague. We telegraphed for rooms in an hotel and then wandered about Amsterdam. I dont remember one detail of the city. Fatigue and Rembrandt's pictures wiped it off the slate of my brain.

We arrived at the Hague in late afternoon. It was already dark and it was pouring with rain so we took the hotel omnibus. A lady and gentleman were in it also. The moment it stopped the man hurried his wife our before us and they sped up the low steps to the entrance. We found them in the office trying hard to force the manager to give them rooms and I realized that it was a battle for our rooms that they were waging. Perhaps my tired face helped, (Gertrude never looks tired) but the Manager said firmly "These ladies have telegraphed" and the pair of would-be grabbers retreated.

We found that we had been given beds in the Ball room. The huge chandeliers were draped in linen bags. Enormous mirrors were hung all round the wall. My bed was right up against one. I felt inclined to talk to my reflection as I lay with my head on the pillow and saw myself lying so near. I slept, and Gertrude slept, well and long.

Just as we had finished our very late breakfst the manager came in and said a few words. Gertrude knew alittle Dutch so understood what he said, she almost picked me up, (she is very ~~strong~~ big) and hurried me to the entrance. There were many people outside and in another moment cheer after cheer

sounded and a carriage and pair passed and in it was the Queen of Holland, Wilhelmina, then very young. She looked exceedingly pretty with a complexion that shone in the morning sun all pink and white.

Gertrude and I passed through the market place on our way to the Cathedral. We enjoyed the sight of the country people in their costumes. We went into the Cathedral and then decided to ask if we might go up the tower to see the country round so we went to the Minister's house to ask for permission. His house was attached to the Cathedral wall. A maid opened the door. At first she looked puzzled by Gertrude's Dutch and also at her request that we should be allowed to go up the tower but she did not trouble to ask for permission for us. She gave us the key, showed us the door in the hall that led to the tower and left us. We went up the stone stairs which were easy. We reached a story where there were no more stairs only a ladder - the longest that I have ever seen. It stretched up and up to a hole in the roof. "I am not going up that ladder" I said. "Nonsense" said Gertrude, "You go first. I'll go behind you and catch you if you fall". "If I go up I shall never get down". "I'll help you. Do come" she begged. I started to climb up that awful ladder. I was frightened quite enough by the ladder for I am a lowlander - no good at heights - but I was still more ~~frightened~~ terrified when as I mounted I saw a strange and ghastly face peering down the hole. It was

splashed with red which added to its ghastliness. I stopped. "Go on!" said Gertrude giving me a push. She might not have seen the face for it disappeared quickly and I was in front. "I must have been mistaken" I thought, "it was the light that made it look like that" and on I went. I crawled on my knees well on to the outside platform which surrounded the pinnacle of the spire. There was no helping post to hold on to. Gertrude followed me in the same way and after we had struggled to our feet we looked round us. Standing a little way off was the man with the splashed face. Pots of red paint were near him in a corner. He had a thin monkey-like figure. He was not very tall and was dressed in a strangely cut suit which looked as if he himself had made it after a model dating from the early middle ages. He watched us, he grinned and decided apparently that he liked us. I felt nervous of him and looked at Gertrude's strong figure with relief. She was much startled by the man's appearance. We both thought it would be safer to be friendly and did our best at it and succeeded beyond our expectations. There could be no doubt that the poor man had gone out of his mind. He seemed to be the bell keeper. Perhaps he lived up there and his nerves had been affected by loneliness. He showed us with pride the instrument that controlled the 36 bells and to please us, as he thought, he made chime after chime ring out. We were on the top of a high tower and in the centre was an open work spire which contained the bells. The noise from these

bells made me giddy in spite of the fact that their tone was beautiful. What the people down below thought of the chiming I cannot guess. When the man fancied that we had heard enough of that entertainment he began to show off his agility by climbing like a monkey down the bell-ropes until he disappeared into the darkness of a pit. Then he came up again grinning and chattering. He did not want us to leave him and therefore he wished to show off all he could do. He left us at last for a moment, to climb up some girders. Gertrude whispered "Now is our chance. Come !" and was at once on her knees with her foot on the first rung of the ladder. "Quick !" she ordered under her breath. I had fancied that I should be too terrified to go down but I was far more terrified to remain up for the man's excitement had been increasing so I was very quick. I had not got far down before his face appeared in the hole and he began to shake the ladder. How I held on ! He disappeared. "He will be climbing down the ropes " cried Gertrude. "Come along". We reached the floor, hurried across it and down the stone stairs to the lobby. The door was open that led to the Minister's rooms. No one was there. We laid the key on the table, went unattended through the entrance and down the steps. We felt thankful to be safely walking in the street. I confess that my knees for a time felt tottery.

We went later to the Mauritius Gallery and fell in love with Vermeer's pictures. I did a successful watercolour of the old red brick prison by the moat on the steps of which De

Wet was murdered. We made the night journey back at the end of our three days expedition and I felt as if I had been away for a fortnight.