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# DUTCH PAINTERS

OF THE

## NINETEENTH CENTURY.

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WITH BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

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EDITED BY

MAX ROOSES

Curator of the Plantin—Moretus Museum, Antwerp.

Translated by F. KNOWLES.

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With Six Etchings by PH. ZILCKEN, Six Photogravure Plates and over 200 other Illustrations.

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# ILLUSTRATIONS APART FROM THE TEXT.

# MATTHYS MARIS

BY

G. H. MARIUS.

"Female Head" in the possession of Mr. M. van der Maarel.

# MATTHYS MARIS.

"Moi?" returned the Frenchman, standing back from his easel and looking at me, and at the figure, quite politely, though with an evident reservation: "Je dis, mon cher, que c'est une spécialité dont je me fiche pas mal. Je tiens que quand on ne comprend pas une chose, c'est qu'elle ne signifie rien."

*Hand and soul* by D. G. ROSSETTI.

Portrait of the artist, painted by himself. In the possession of Mr. J. Maris at the Hague.

Standing in admiration before one of Thys Maris' magical female heads you might possibly find, as signature, these words: "Manus Anima" even as it might occur in the mystical tales of Rossetti; and it might likewise happen

that another Frenchman was standing near who would give, as his opinion, the same reply as you will read in the lines which precede this article.

Many might pass by the works of Maris without even noticing them; many may consider them impossible and inexplicable and pass on, almost out of humour, perhaps even angry with them; the rational spectator will put questions, to which he will receive no satisfactory replies. To understand this artist no questions must be asked; but only those, who are susceptible to impressions, will return and look again and not uselessly. And yet if some of his works are seen grouped together at an exhibition—works which seem often out of place—you will generally find that they differ very much in period and are extremely confusing, even to the thoughtful visitor. This difference between early and later work is not, in his case,—as in the case of many artists—caused by his having thrown off the trammels of the past. Thys Maris was always himself; he began life with the knowledge of a man. He did not obtain knowledge by fits and starts—these fits and starts came later—making the enigma of his life still more difficult to solve.

And as we stand in amazement before his work so we stand in amazement before his personality.

From the moment that we catch sight of his portrait, that fascinating portrait painted by himself, before the age of twenty, (the frontispiece of this article) with the eager look in the eyes; the extended nostrils; the slightly open mouth; the head thrown back with a look of happy anticipation; breathing, as it were, the very air of expectation, we feel that we are standing before a riddle. What became of those anticipated joys? What happened to those happy prospects, which lighted up those eyes? What prevented the accomplishment of his desires? And why could he not discover the harmony of life which seemed, at one time, to beckon to him with a gracious smile? That life that many find so easy and pleasant. Why did he always manage to knock up against corners which others never even saw? Did he not need friends? Was he so unapproachable, or did he not wish to be approached, excepting by a very few? What did he dislike in mankind? Or was he afraid of his fellow creatures? Was he without ambition, or had he so burning a desire for fame that he knew not how to satisfy himself, at a time when money meant fame? Or did he dream of the days when there was a Titian and a Velasquez? From beginning to end he stands before us as a nature full of contradictions, inaccessible to all, even to those who knew him from his youth. As is the case with some artists—take for instance a Rembrandt or a Velasquez or even a Jacob Maris—whose talents have developed in a straight line, the smaller events of life seem of little importance and accompany, rather than govern, their artistic career, forcing their characters into the foreground; but the life of a Thys Maris is so interlaced and interwoven with art that it is not easy to say which is uppermost, or on which side the scale will turn; either art-interpretations dominate life or life-interpretations overrule and influence the laws of art.

Looking for a solution to all this, we find ourselves confronted with fresh puzzles until, diving deeper and deeper, we are placed face to face with this great mystery; this mystery which conceals, within the folds of its garment, the hidden genius, whose breath we feel although hidden from our view.

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Was it a freak of the muse when she, with royal gesture, anointed three heads in one family with her precious ointment? Or did she know that here, in the humble circle of a compositor's family, lay a wealth of plastic arts, unspoilt and untouched: so that living and seeing, thinking and feeling, were experienced from an artistic point of view? Jacob, the eldest, who worked

Boys bathing. Museum H. W. Mesdag.

with a subdued nature in order the better to develop his great gift; Matthys whose fiery, open-hearted nature had been doubly blessed by the gods, gifted not only with art but with the power of easily imbibing science and knowledge, and William the youngest, whose early life was made easy and smooth by his elder brothers, and who did not take long to discover his own broad sunny path.

Talent; Genius—let us just for once use that big word—is even in *our* time occasionally bestowed upon a few; why doubt such a possibility. But now a days the hand does not express so fluently, nor develop so fully, this great gift, since feeling and knowledge have parted company.

The powers of representation and the complete knowledge of an artist's trade should be inseparable, so that lines and colour, expression and touch

dissolve in the object and the painting is forgotten by reason of the painted; this unity disappeared with the collapse of the middle ages, and although it lingered perhaps longer in the North, yet bookprinting, with its improvements and reformation, brought about a never to be restored severance; and however much the art of painting wandered from the immobility of the East, so much the more feeling separated itself from wills and ways, and personality and character came to the fore. See how Rembrandt, and shall we say Metsu, were moved in opposite directions. Rembrandt had to make concessions, as every idealist has to do, in order to approach his ideal; and so had every one, consciously or unconsciously, until the time came when lines and colours, standing in opposition to each other, brought about this separation.

Referring to our "crumbling" period, only Matthys Maris was inspired with the knowledge of a Holbein, and with the soundness of a van Eyck; before even his brother Jacob was conscious of what he desired. No one knew how he (Thys) came by this knowledge and no one could understand how this painter, of the nineteenth century, knew so much of the painters of the fifteenth, and, as it were, associated with them. It was indeed then a sorry time for art. Degenerated by a series of prescriptions, our own romanticism was all that could be found in the subjects, tolerably academically portrayed by the artists, but from which the soul of romance had flown.

And so this genius of a Thys Maris was like a stranger, an alien, unaware of its power and going about with dreamy eyes; yet when the Amsterdam painter Kiers took him (Thys) to Amsterdam and when he saw those unique typical town views, the impression made on him was so great, and the recollection of what he had seen so vivid and lasting, that later on, when in Paris, he painted from memory that masterpiece known in the art world, as "*Souvenir d'Amsterdam.*" 1) It is painted with the execution and after the manner of a Henry VIII of Holbein; not on account of the colour, or of the outline; not because of the light or of the character, but because of the handling. This little painting has become, by its noble realism, the unperishable type of the old commercial city of Amsterdam. It was at this period that Thys Maris had bestowed on him the full power of his strength, it was now that he produced those wonderful town views, and poor little back premises, also small interiors, after the style of a De Hooghe—though, according to his brother Jacob, finer—with the powers of De Hooghe's period and with the sentiment of his own time. A charming example of those days was: "*Achterbuurtje*" 2) (Back premises) in the collection of Jhr. Neevoort v. d. Poll, exhibited in the Pulchri Studio, not so very long ago. The touch is smooth and strong; the composition easy and natural the colouring, or rather the tone of colour, well carried out; the figure, in the foreground, does not entirely

1) Although Matthys Maris had seen this when he was, as a young fellow, painting with Kiers at Louis Meyer's studio, he only completed it in Paris about the year 1870.

2) This picture was likewise completed in Paris about the year 1872.

absorb our attention, the eye is equally attracted over the whole canvas, although the white cloth twisted around the woman's head and the patch of bright sky—against which is silhouetted the towers of an old church—may be said to impart the tone to the picture; and yet it is the peaceful humble scene, with all its detail, the child, the pig, the worn out steps, that claims our thoughts.

We know from Jacob Maris that just about that time Thys painted some very fine and subtle pieces of still-life. He was then very much in the public

A study. Museum H. W. Mesdag.

eye and he had many admirers who even dragged the works from under his hand, so eager were they to obtain them. Of that period we know but little. Jacob Maris, who was then living in Paris, saw but few of his brother's works; but he knew that Thys was painting most delightful and fascinating little pictures, and he heard that they found purchasers, but what became of them he did not know. One art collector in Scotland is supposed to have quite the largest number of Thys Marises, from which we gather that some of his work must have gone unnoticed in the market and without a bid. The history of "*The Vlinders*" (Butterflies) bears witness of this fact. *Now*, when we hear

of the enormous prices given for his works, it appears strange that *then* so few were visible or even known.

It is only when we shall see united the complete *Oeuvre* of this greatest of Rembrandt's sons—although more feeble perhaps in a feebler time—an exhibition which awaits us still—that we shall be able to judge; see, as it were, things full sized and full lengthed, all the fragments and detail of his life's work, brought together and rising as a monument to do him honour. Now we but see, we enjoy, we are enraptured, thunderstruck, but... we do not understand.

The youth who painted that clever "Ram's head" 1)—that splendid head in which every thing is said that can be said: colour; line; tone; expression; the slightly advanced head, with the soft, almost human eyes—of which the painter Mesdag spoke, in his genial manner, so flatteringly, saying, that he never entered his studio in the morning without his eye falling upon this creature and wishing him good morning, that youth I say will *then* stand before us as a giant in all the power of his strength.

With his brother Jacob Thys visited the Antwerp Academy. This Academy was and is still, in a lesser degree, a meeting place for young artists from every clime; and not only did they work under the able direction of Nicaise de Keyser but they talked and exchanged ideas and opinions to throw light upon many subjects. The steady, simple minded Jacob—fresh from the studio of van Hove—candidly declares to have derived much benefit from all this, but the enthusiastic Thys was not proof against it all. The early works of a few Germans—who maintained that Art, for its own sake had no *raison dêtre*, but that the subject should aim at influencing the populace in the right direction—found great favour with him. The outcome of it all was that he painted a scene from monastic life with the object of disgusting his spectators with catholicism. It was this picture which made Nicaise de Keyser exclaim that it was a pity to waste so much talent, had he not better turn writer.

From that moment—was it because Romanticism lingered still in Antwerp, that Romanticism which gave the magical submersion to her adepts, clouding reality and truth and allowing fantasy a free hand—from that moment I say the peace wherewith Thys Maris had produced his characteristic masterpieces, was broken, and the unrest, the unsatisfied—that real attribute of the romantic—brought him back to the great movement of his own time, at the cost however of his unbounded artistic wealth and at the cost of his soul's peace.

The German painters of the romantic: Moritz von Schwind, Kaulbach, Rethuel and a few others he greatly esteemed, but although he was too much of a "real artist" to admire their frescos and their other paintings, he valued all the more their cartoons, which are likewise highly thought of by Jacob Maris.

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1) Collection Mesdag.

*"The Kitchen Maid"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of Mr. H. W. Mesdag at the Hague.

The two brothers visited Cologne together—on their way to the Black Forest —to see the exhibition of paintings by these artists. Jacob admired without being swayed by their influence, whereas Thys was quite overcome.

From this time date the Gretchens at the spinning wheel, the realistic peeps

The Mower. In the possession of Mr. C. D. Reich in Amsterdam.

of the Black Forest, small naïve pencilsketches; also a wedding in the Black Forest and a view of Freiburg, both well known from their having been so admirably etched by Ph. Zilcken; also that pretty little "*Sunday Morning*", that miniature, from the Mesdag Museum, that might pass for an illumination

in a missal. And from this period too—that is to say 1874 in Paris, when he was doing so well—date those sunny pages of his life: "*The Vlinders*" (the Butterflies). But also about this time—he was then living at the Hague—began his dissatisfaction with himself; a feeling came over him that he could not do what he wanted to do and yet not willing to let his work go without having reached a certain pitch of perfection. His admirers began to be anxious, for they saw one work after another going to ruin, partly from the incompleteness of the painting and partly from the variableness of the man himself, and they endeavoured—an endeavour often frustrated by the artist himself—to save what there was to save. It was then that he painted "*The Bride*" (in the Mesdag collection) that mystical painting, which is now only a faint remnant of the original.

Jacob Maris, with his wife and children, lived at that time in Paris. Slowly and surely, in a calm equality, the mighty powers swelled his great talent gradually and unconsciously into that broad colouration, which like the waves of a calm sea, rolled, the one after the other, in their perfect proportions, having something akin to the antique or it may be to the moving colouration of the Lyric.

In contrast to this steady development stood his brother Matthys—whose genius was so thoroughly appreciated by Jacob—a sceptic, a seeker, an enthusiast, almost a fanatic, yet without connections with the world. Communistically inclined he desired to relieve those in want, hating all commercialism; and the fear of falling into the hands of the wealthy art-dealers, made him hide his works as well as his ability, from sheer sensitiveness.

It was then that Thys went to Paris, Jacob having persuaded him to come, hoping that he might find there the necessary rest and strength to enable him to resume work. But this hope was vain. The most beautiful pictures were begun, but that eternal dissatisfaction—which was as obstinate as that deep melancholy which penetrates into the innermost soul of a man, until the two become inseparable—took away all his powers of work and destroyed his confidence, which was already wrecked by overmuch seeing and admiring. Yet it was in Paris that he painted, with so much taste and with so supple a brush the "*Koekenbakster*" (Cake baker) (Museum Mesdag) a work, that although proving his admiration for and his knowledge of the old German masters, possesses the same simplicity—although not painted with the same devotion—as the "*Achterbuurtje*" (Back premises) and the "*Stadsgezicht*" (Town View). At this particular period we notice a Gretchen, in the same style of treatment and colouring, also a drawing—belonging to his brother Jacob—in which there is a blending of the French and German Romanticism, yet in which recur the Gothic profiles, old castles, mediaeval towns; a recollection which his memory ever retained and which, in later years, constantly appear and reappear in his work. In Paris he also painted that striking portrait of Artz, the painter; the simplicity of the style and the treatment of the features produce quite a *Hol-*

beinesque effect. We conclude, from appearances, that the Barbizon school of painting passed him by, that school which dominated our art to such a high degree at that time; yet later we infer that he was influenced by it when we see his Corot-like undulating lines—when depicting the downs—also we notice his admiration for Millet in his powerful etching of that artist's "Sower", an etching weighty and sonorous as bronze; an epic poem on Millet's picture. But all this happened later and in London.

Lausanne. In the possession of Mr. E. J. van Wisselingh, in London.

In Paris he took part in the commune; not voluntarily, although it coincided with his views, but because he was incorporated with the *Garde Municipale*, and passed with them into the ranks of the commune. He saw too, in the commune, the ideal of a freer and newer social order; and yet we may doubt whether this fanatic had the cause near enough to heart, and the will power, to take up arms uninfluenced, and of his own free will. When the war was over, Jacob Maris left Paris with his family, but Matthys remained on some time longer and then went to London, where he is now living.

What attracted him to England can only be surmised, but we conclude that Paris was no longer the home for him. Did he make friends with Swan in Paris and did he go to London on his account? Was it because of his friend van Wisselingh? Did he dread the

Hague and his old friends there? Did he perhaps know Rossetti and Millais and did he feel himself attracted by them?

Now again comes a change over his interpretations; that distinguished and charming realism, wherewith he began his career, that unlimited power of execution, and that atmosphere of bygone centuries was lost; that German romanticism, of which the sentimental and not the external claimed to fascinate him, disappeared in the main; the soul of the romantic expanded in him, so that he, as poetical dreamer, as painter of the ne'er satisfied, stood before us with his fantastic women, whose domain is the land of dreams, where Rembrandt and Shakespeare reign supreme.

A young Communicant. Museum H. W. Mesdag.

A dreamland where imagination and reality are so closely bound together that dreams become almost plastic in their realism. His dreamland was unbounded, where imagination had full play and where the outlines were as indistinct as the dreams themselves; the kingdom of a poet's soul, where the support of the poet is not required to create forms and figures; these, born of the same sentiment as were the Juliets and the Desdemonas, glide by us even as these others have done. Women, who enter upon life full of expectations, and who have nothing in common with the more humble Gretchen whose heart beats louder at the sight of sparkling jewels; they are of nobler blood and if they occasionally possess the inaccessibility of a Sphinx yet you never could accuse them of calculation. Full of life, with the corners of the mouth turned up, they show us sometimes, in their oft repeated type, the immobility of an idol, but an idol in which life is concentrated and illumined with the trembling light of an alabaster lamp.

These women are the props and stays of his inner life, proud, innocent, sphinxlike or childish, according to the painter's mood, they are his Juliets and Desdemonas, his Mona Lisas and his Ligeias, his Beatrices; the Ophelia of his Hamlet, that confiding loving bride who ends her life in a convent; they are the companions who surround his solitude, companions to which he gave form and fashion, although they appear but seldom from out of the cloudy mist of dreamland. Sometimes a happier mood moves his fancy, it is when he is inspired by the romantic of the middle ages, and then we see graceful pages and fair princesses who carry him out of the reality of to-day into the visionary past; visions too we get of elves and fairies and other dreamland creatures such as we see in his: "*Wandeling*" (The Walk.) They are the outcome of a less complicated state of mind, little stories which help to drive away those ghostlike companions, a Spenser over against a Shakespeare.

Portrait of the Painter Artz. Lent to the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam by Mrs. Sues-Schemel.

They are the play ground of his imagination, a ray of sunshine on a dark day, moments of happy indolence, but not the reverberation of his being.

This art is part of his innermost soul. The recollections of the past give his fantasy a plastic outline, which in spite of the grey mist in which he has of late enveloped his figures, brings them out with a clearness such as we see in his: "*Youthful Bride*" (collection Lebret) who, a mere child, glides hastily past us with uplifted hands; also the splendid female head (in the possession of the painter van de Maarel) (page 3)—with the air and pride of a Queen— is a broad and powerful painting, an ideal from the richer imagination of younger days. In the distance these figures appear almost like frescos; heads and faces, arms and hands seem to blossom forth from out of the pale grey or delicate green of the back ground, and the hair—who can paint hair like Thys Maris?—is an aureole, a rain of gold on a starlight night.

Primavera. Museum H. W. Mesdag.

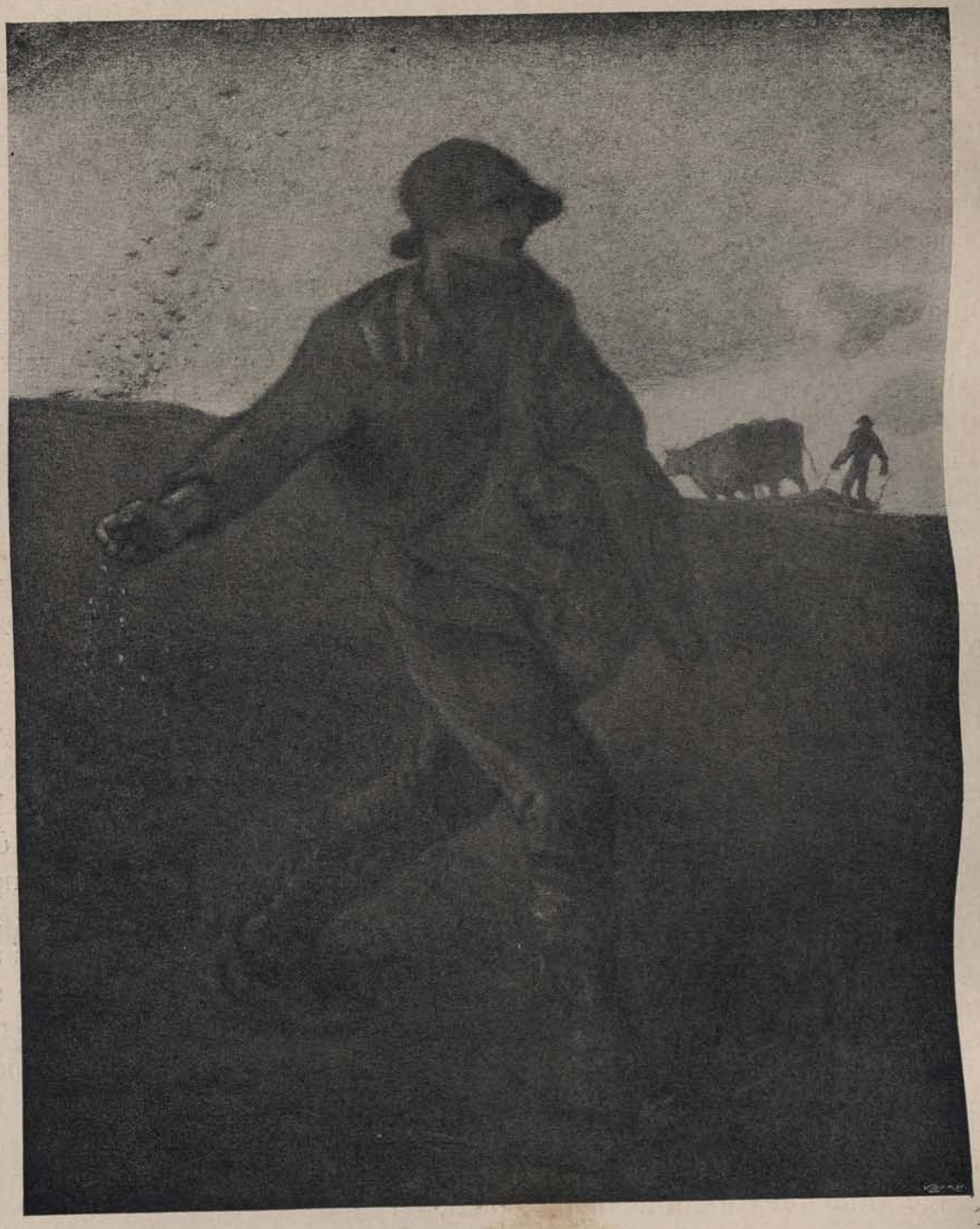
Maris does not work from the model, he maintains that nature is secondary, or rather is the means whereby we express ourselves. He ridicules people who say that nature is every thing; the English, with Ruskin at their head, who compare every thing to nature. It is not in the visible, but in the heart and soul, that the source of power must be looked for, he says.

In a letter to Mr. Zilcken, a letter of no less than fifty six pages long, he fully explains his convictions; in these pages we see the painter who knows how to take himself at his proper value and how to hold his own; his is a dogmatic contemplation of art, differing from the Englishman, who slavishly copies nature and does not look upon her as a means to express his fancy and his mood, but as the main point.

I should like to give a fragment of this wonderful letter; but the half-english half-dutch would require a little translating and thus the pith would be lost. This letter with its dignified appreciation of art and the subtle comprehension of Millet, betrays a clearness of insight into his own being that may be taken as the key to his change. "Millet," he writes in a comprehensive treatise on the latter's "Sower" "began life as a good painter, that is to say what is called a good painter, a colourist like Diaz, but now comes the struggle between matter and mind and it was but seldom that he succeeded in his projects. . . ."

In these words we find his own history; a master in the art of painting, as we see in some of his works; a master in the art of drawing, as shown in "Boys bathing" (page 5) (Mesdag collection); a master in realistic observations and execution; but his art became less sure and less steady when he tried to portray the soul and spirit of his objects. The climax of insufficiency and dissatisfaction was reached with the effort to give form to the immaterial, and the completeness of his earlier works was lost by these endeavours. We know too little of him, and his work, to be able to show any preference for either of his periods, but undoubtedly the true art-feeling within us will prompt us to give his earlier productions precedence. No one who esteems the spirit above the matter can look on that picture: "*The portrait of a child*" (in the possession of his brother Jacob) without being fascinated by the intense spirit of life which radiates from its whole being; or escape the charm of those mysterious women; or fail to admire, in his etchings, that wealth of imagination and power which the ability of thus expressing shows us to be the strength of a visionary. Few are the canvases which make us think less of paint, of colour, of tone, than do Maris's and yet the tonality is of the purest, the colour most suggestive and the method well studied, even where they are the vaguest. But it seems to us that in this struggle between spirit and matter he weighs his paint too materially and that he deadens his tones to give them the appearance of a fresco, with only the essence of colour or a suggested outline. The outlines of this dreamer remind us of some of the mediaeval sculptors; in his hand they become arabesque, similar to the deeply graven lines of his etchings; and in the confused lines of his charming "*Primavera*"

and in his "*Vlinders*" (Butterflies) or in the draperies, or in the detail of his interiors, always well balanced; always full of style and yet sometimes as innocent and playful as a child.



An etching, after the "Sower" by Millet.

And himself. What was he?

A dreamer from the misty North; a gothic disposition with the touch of a van Eyck, with the culture of a Da Vinci. A visionary wandering and lost in these unsettled times; a stranger whose sensitiveness prevented him from

making friends; an idealist, not proof against the materialism of to-day; a lonely man in every sense of the word.

Life is not easy to those who expect too much.

And Thys Maris expected too much.

The history of Maris is very much the same as that of all sensitive people and should his be less marked than that of other dreamers, it must be attributed to the fact of the work of his hands, as a painter, giving better chance of balance than the dreamland of a poet.

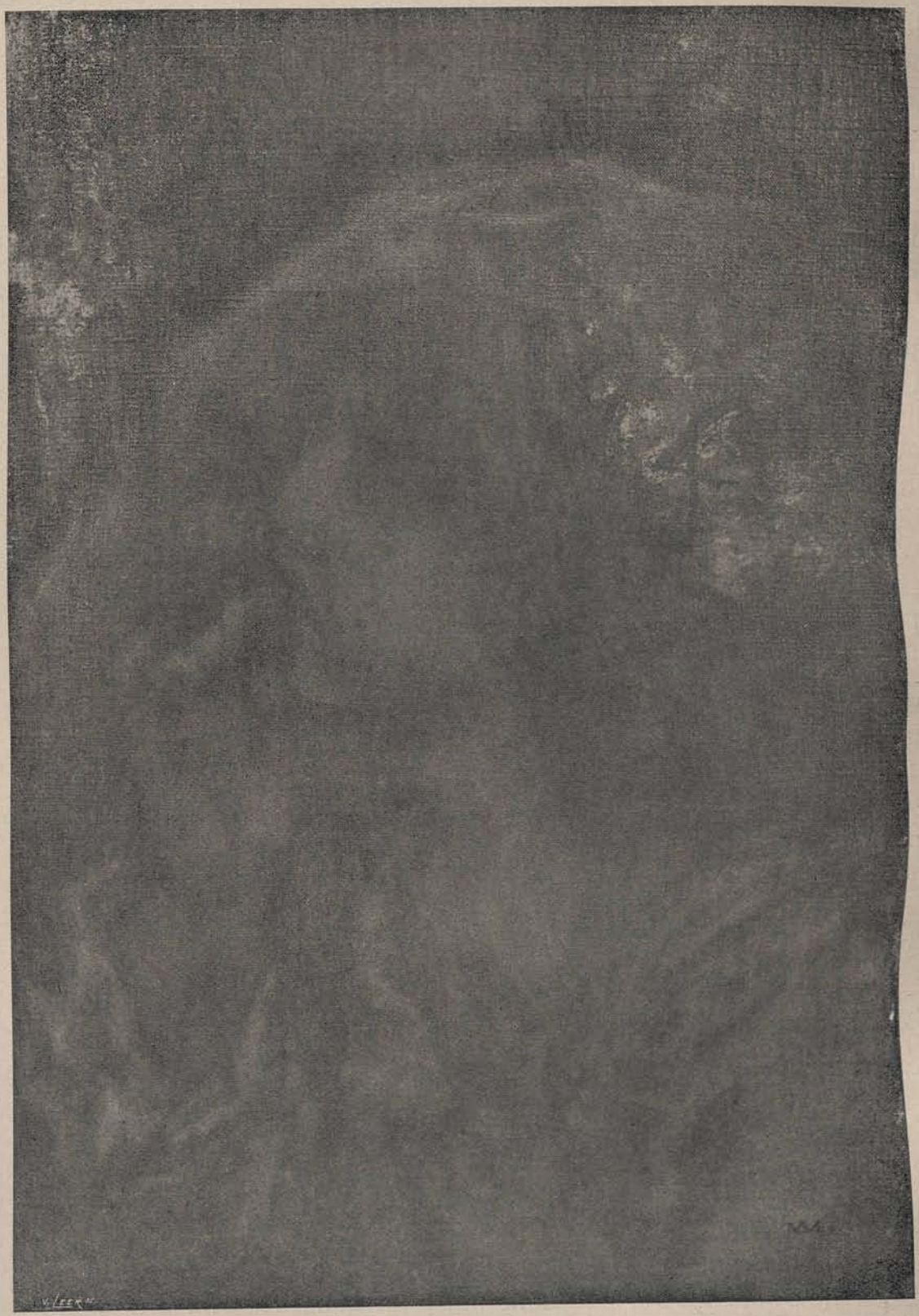
This sensitiveness hides an ambition which in our present feebler day is not so easily satisfied, and although Thys despises all fame and honour, there will come a day when he will demand both, as his right; however, to acknowledge this desire would be to create illusions for himself, which never could come to pass, and the disappointment would be more than he could bear.

A study in oils in the possession of Mr. B. J. Blommers.

Fame and honour are worth much to the man, they give support to his talent, they produce a feeling of rest, although perhaps not without a certain amount of danger.

Embittered by the sight of the worship of the golden calf and by the present-day power of wealth, he fights against these horrors with all his might, fearing to succumb to them too; he goes up stream and not down; and above all things does not allow a single concession to the trade, that is to say the public. Here too he stands as a stranger in a strange land and rather than give in he lives retired, but free; protesting against the saying: "time is money," which he, in his bitterness scatters, as reproaches, between the lines of his letters. Is he vain? Does he think much of himself? No, and yet conscious of his power; vain perhaps, yet always dissatisfied with his own productions; working, dreaming of the power of his phantom hopes.

Of a Hamlet-nature analysing all things, even himself; giving and taking, but in two complete opposite directions, giving but without looking around;



A Bride. From the collection Lebret. Lent to the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam.

fighting for every body but for himself and contented at his lonely table which appears to him as a festal board.

Hamlet sat all his life at a lonely table nor can Thys Maris find the path that leads to a life of domestic happiness; to both of them it is a book with seven seals. They are not men of deeds these two with their vivid imaginations, with their ideals, and least of all are they philosophers, and wisdom, for once, is a stranger to them.

In all times there have been people who, afraid of the outward appearances of life, have withdrawn from their fellow creatures, disappearing into corners and niches where they imagine themselves safe from all disappointments, which the world offers to them who expect too much.

This voluntary exile from the world does not come necessarily from asceticism; the moment a man is conscious of an antagonism between himself and the social world, he is deprived of all resistance and has but one idea, and that is flight. But in spite of this fear of man it sometimes happens that the heart of him who, of his own free will, denies himself the joys of a family hearth and the pleasures of festive gatherings, beats louder and faster than the heart of him who goes through life without an effort and surrounded happily by his fellow creatures.

It is perhaps the fact of that greater sensitiveness which leads people to cling together, an over susceptibility which knows that it is better to crush the desires of life's joys, than to have to bear the disappointments, which happiness is almost sure to bring in her wake.

This voluntary retirement and shrinking into oneself is not flattering to social life, but society is indifferent and cares not, nor does it make any effort to disturb this exile; neither has it the genius to consecrate it.

The solitary need not fear the fluctuation of the present day, with its caprice of ever recurring new ideas and fashions. Possibly the Reformation thought too little of that refuge the cloister, the retreat for those who were not born with the power of resisting temptation; that cloister that, in the time of the greater faith, asked little and gave much, spreading out its protecting roof over art and science and making it a place not only of refuge but of work.

These retreats, which bear witness to the true knowledge of life, are wanting in our times, it was that cloister that consecrated this retirement from pleasures and gave rest to the weary soul. But its belief and greatness collapsed and the result was that only convention remained.

Thys Maris found rest and isolation in a suburb of London; a few faithful friends such as Swan (the animal painter) and van Wisselingh, break in occasionally upon his solitude. But his ideas are still socialistic, not only theoretically but materially and without looking around he gives what he receives. On this point he is likewise very sensitive. To be waited upon by another,

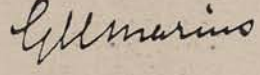
although that service is paid for, he considers humiliating and in order to avoid such a possibility he lives without the comfort of attendance.

Would he have been happier had he lived in a less complicated time? We

"Back Premises." In the possession of Jhr. J. R. H. Neervoort van de Poll at Ryzenburg.

could not venture to say. There is a law of equilibrium; Genius, too much burdened and unable to follow this law, remains a stranger in the social world, at least in the present overcrowded and hurried state of life.

Not by the favour of Princes, not by the benefit of money and certainly not by the quantity of his works has Matthys Maris made a place for himself along side of the greatest artists of our day; but no century has reproached a Da Vinci that the number of his works were too easily counted and in all ages the power of will is greatly honoured, as well as the conscientious man who, rather than succeed with facility, remains true to himself and to his own convictions. This courage is the courage of the brave.



# THÉOPHILE DE BOCK

BY

LOUIS DE HAES.

"Birch Trees." A study. From a painting.

# THÉOPHILE DE BOCK.

When I went to see de Bock, in 1893, and told him that I was asked to write this article, about himself and his pictures, he looked at me ironically out of his blue eyes. Then passing his hand rapidly through his fair hair—not exactly silky or wavy, making some of the locks stand out like wisps of straw—he said, in a calm laconic manner, as one who knows that his death

warrant has been signed, asking only that the sentence may be carried out quickly and decorously:—

"Write whatever you like, but let it be the truth!"

"All right, I'll do my best, but I suppose you will not mind if I *do* speak the truth here and there? But *à propos* of the truth, it seems often out of place now a days, and few people take it literally. Does not every one see the same thing with different eyes and does not every one consider his own point of view the right one?"

"I say old fellow, you're beginning to be rather prosy."

"You ask me to be truthful; let us therefore first decide what we understand by this?"

"You don't know?"

A *Plas* (lake) in the Downs. From a sketch book.

"As regards myself I have formed something of an opinion and should like to put it to the test by comparing it with the opinion of others, therefore. . . ."

"It would be better to start a correspondence on this subject, we can safely spoil a few pages of clean paper and at all events waste much less time than by discussing it. Such discussions have a beginning but no end."

"Then I'll begin to be truthful, according to *my* views, later we can quarrel over and thrash out this profoundly deep question."

This proposal apparently satisfied him, at all events he assumed an attitude of resignation, willing and ready to submit to the rack and to say and do all that was expected of him.

"I was born . . ." he began.

"Of course you were born, that goes without saying, but do you think that the public cares to know the exact date? Those who might be interested can find out for themselves by going to the Register's office for births, deaths and marriages; besides there is something spicy in omitting the age; it creates a curiosity. Miss A. thinks you are 40—Mrs. B. says 35, her guest puts you down at 27 . . . some one else suggests. . . ."

"Stop you silly fellow, you haven't come here to make a fool of me; I'm just going to run upstairs to fetch something that will interest you; in the mean while my dog will entertain you."

Gone was mine host and I was left alone with his pretty little white Pomeranian, who, not considering me an intimate acquaintance, sniffed me all

Near Scheveningen.

over in a mistrustful sort of way and became very suspicious when I attempted to examine any of his master's art treasures.

De Bock attaches naturally much importance to his artistic surroundings, he has indulged in many beautiful *objets d'art*; old tapestries and Persian embroideries cover the floor and tables. Oriental luxury and Dutch decorum join hands, and in numerous cabinets you will find splendid bits of porcelain from China and Japan and old Delft ware.

In the course of time some of these have bitten off each other's noses, or given each other a black eye, but on the whole nothing worse has happened than a cracked skull. De Bock calls them his flowers and next to his art he cultivates this taste assiduously.

A background, of dark green Utrecht velvet, shows up splendidly some

etchings after Rembrandt and some woodcuts after Durer, and here and there an old Spanish copper vessel or a dull green bronze.

Notwithstanding this apparent confusion of art treasures and small heterogeneous objects there is a pleasant air of repose and the indication of a happy possessor.

A tall brass lamp sheds its soft rays on a table, where we find the last publications, showing that our artist keeps in touch with literature as well as with art.

The Pomeranian followed closely at my heels during my peregrination, watching me closely, a faithful intelligent dog.

At last when he saw that I was not insensible to the beauty of his master's treasures and not only admired but respected his master's property, as much as he did himself, he looked at me knowingly and sniffed and sniffed until he drew my attention to the back room, which opened at right angles to the large drawing room.

This back room was rather dark and I could not see clearly what was in it.

"Lie down old boy and don't bother so much."

After sniffing about my legs for some time he suddenly ran to the corner of the room and began to sniff at the wall. Then I noticed, for the first time, a patch of what looked like a piece of old embossed wall paper, but as it appeared as if belonging to the wainscotting it had escaped my notice (the surest sign that a thing is pretty) and upon closer inspection I discovered that my *enfant terrible* had, in his innocency, betrayed a little trick of the master.

It was only a simple bit of embossed paper, stretched on the wall hanging loose and limp to which de Bock, by adding here and there a flower and a dab of colour, had given the appearance of old gold leather.

"Well done good dog, you know how to praise your master; you know a good thing when you see it! All right! All right! Now lie down and be quiet," for he would jump up against me and get in between my legs, and in my way generally, till at last, tired out, he lay down on his back with his legs stretched out and his head turned towards me as if inviting my caresses.

But the moment he heard his master coming down the stairs he jumped up in the twinkling of an eye.

Enter De Bock with a book under his arm.

"Has the dog been troublesome, has he bored you?"

"No, not a bit, he took me to see something in the back room, it looks well, I can tell you!"

"Yes, and with a couple of antique cupboards and an old picture or two against it. . . ."

"I should think so indeed, you don't see the like very often, you got the idea from some old castle? Eh!"

"Yes, from one of my old castles. Now *do* sit down and look at this, a most curious book."

"What is it called?"

"*Promenades Japonaises* by Guimet. Do you know it?"

"No I don't... I see it was published in 1878."

Beukenbosch. From a painting.

"What does that matter. Once good always good; it is a clever book on Japan, but written in the French style."

"No one can take that amiss of a Frenchman."

"I mean to say that later Guimet *did* do some serious work."

"You seem to go in for Japanese art."

"Yes, that is my evening amusement, at least when I am not too busy!"

"I understand, . . . the club, Eh! . . . and . . . ."

Here De Bock interrupted me impatiently: "Now *do* read this."

He had been turning over the leaves of Guimet's book and now he laid it down open before me. As explanation he added: "Guimet arrives in Japan and is asked, by the curious, what has brought him there. Now read what follows:

— Monsieur vient au Japon pour faire du commerce?

— Non, monsieur.

— Alors, c'est pour faire de la banque?

— Pas davantage.

— Sans doute, monsieur est appelé ici comme employé du gouvernement japonais?

— Encore moins.

— Monsieur est probablement dans la diplomatie?

— Pas le moins du monde.

— Peut-être dans le journalisme.

— Du tout.

— Vous voyagez donc pour votre plaisir.

— Pas precisement. Je ne voyage ni pour mon plaisir, ni pour celui des autres. Je viens étudier les religions de l'extreme Orient.

— . . . . . ?!

Apres un moment de stupéfaction on revient a la charge.

— Monsieur est missionaire catholique?

— Non.

— Pasteur protestant?

— Non.

— Vous êtes litterateur et vous voulez faire un livre sur le Japon?

Mais, Monsieur, vous n'en saurez pas le premier mot.

Nous qui habitons ce pays depuis quinze ans, nous nous garderions bien de publier une ligne sur cette contrée incompréhensible."

"Clever, isn't it?"

"Yes, and truly French."

I appeared to de Bock very much as Guimet appeared to the Japanese. In order to avoid any more unpleasant moments, I anticipated his question which very naturally would have been: "Do you know me?" by asking him officially: "Mr. Bock, do you know yourself?"

Now this is a stupid question to put to people of ordinary intellect, but so many stupid questions are asked now a days, and as this was put in self defence, it is excusable.

He replied, as most people in his position would have replied:

"I am busy studying myself, and I sincerely hope that before I die I may have solved, at least, a part of this difficult question."

"Just so, that's what I thought and I am here to tell you, in a few words, *who* and *what* you are!"

A View in Gelderland. From a painting.

"That may possibly become interesting, and do you think you already understand me? Have you looked me through and through?"

For a moment we looked into each other's eyes, then with an ironical smile

he stretched out his hand towards me as I rose to leave. I thought it was the right moment to do so. It is not always easy to find that right moment.

At the door he said: "I wish you every success with my humble self and with the correspondence about truth."

"All right, you shall have a letter to-morrow. Mind you reply.—Goodnight."

"*Au revoir*, and don't dream too much about it all!"

THE HAGUE, Jan. 10th 1893.

*Amice*,

I should like to return to my question of yesterday about truth. I know I was rather dull and prosy, but they say that the heavier truth weighs the

Near Renkum. From a sketch in chalks.

better. We won't quarrel about this. Latterly I have been under the impression that this article was losing weight.

He who is serious is truthful, for he talks and acts conscientiously, according to his own view of what is right; thereby he not unfrequently becomes partial. Two thoughtful characters, starting from a given point, and without keeping in touch with each other, will one day find themselves brought face to face in direct opposition; the one will call the other a liar and a perverter of the truth.

Truth, like wisdom, is the private property of numberless people; he who does not own it has it on lease and the rest of humanity ride rough shod over it. It is not fenced off, probably because it has so many part owners.

This is surely something worth talking about, and I ask you in your answer, to these lines, to give me your personal artistic opinion, such as might interest

*"In the Veluwe"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of the Firm of Boussod Valadon & Co. at the Hague.


Th. de Bock

the readers of the sketch, which I am about to write, and which will greatly add to my remarks about yourself.

Please do me this favour in exchange for the truths that I am to conceal.

Yours De Haes.

La Haye, Jan. 15th 1893.

Friend de Haes,

These are indeed difficult questions to take into serious consideration. I feel that I cannot tell you any thing new or startling. Pilate, long ago, asked the question: "What is truth?"

How has it come about that a spider can spin its web, that a bird can fly,

Shipbuilding Wharf. From a painting.

that a fish can swim, that a worm can crawl, that a frog can jump .... and that I. .. can paint?

Why was it necessary that there should be in the firmament a sun, a moon and many stars .... why are there forests, seas, rivers, people, animals .... and why am I myself?

To trace the cause and effect of those things that surround me, I neither can nor will; for instance those shapeless things, in my scuttle, which we call coke, I can only reduce them to the coal period. For profound things I have no more feeling than a mummy; this proceeds perhaps from the fear of being discovered to be but a poor philosopher. My idea of life is to reproduce and interpret all that I see and feel to be beautiful around me.

Let the spider spin her web; let the bird fly; let the fish swim; let the

Towards Evening. From a painting.

worm crawl and let the frog jump ... *but let me paint and in my own way*, the glorious light of the blazing sun; the silvery light of the moon; the twinkling of the stars, in the deep blue atmosphere; the lovely green woods; the sparkling waters; every thing, yes every thing that appears to me as beautiful; for I believe that all things were made for me and are mine.

"Stop a minute," I hear you say, "just answer me first this question." Oh yes, I know, "two thoughtful natures, who start equally, and then some day find themselves going in exact opposite directions, etc., etc." Without fearing the Sphinx a feeling of uneasiness creeps over me when I am asked to answer this *quite* truthfully.

There are many who start from the same point, but their natures, their temperaments and moods differ, and if their intellects stand equally high they will eventually stand along side of each other, instead of face to face.

In art there are works which kill each other if placed in juxtaposition; the simple solution, to this danger, is to keep them apart and consider each work on its own merit.

In that manner we make the discovery, that seeking after the beautiful, we reveal our own character.

I do not know whether I am an artist and render art; I do not know whether I am sincere or insincere; I do not know to which school I belong; the critics must discover this. But well I know that I am restlessly seeking to satisfy my eye and ease my conscience, neither of which I have, up to now, been able to do; nor do I think they will ever be satisfied.

I put no faith in miracles, I do not expect to find myself suddenly able to express myself perfectly, but I *do* believe that after much study an original work may be accomplished.

The latter I appreciate most of all, in whatever form this may be revealed with determination and with steady resolve, and above all by discarding all conventionalities, we learn that art can take on a variety of shapes.

To trace the beautiful in all this may require some exertion. The consciousness of steady improvement gives an artist happy moments, however miserable he may be.

I have now tried to answer your letter according to my conception; perhaps it would have been better to have put off answering it for a time, for then self criticism might possibly have caused the reading to have been different. If however this sheaf of ideas can throw any light upon the subject in question, namely myself, I feel that I have done you a service and truth a good turn.

Yours De Bock.

The beginning of de Bock's career, as an artist, was very much the same as with most artists: a strife between the artistic calling and the dire necessity to earn a livelihood.

The last mentioned weighed the scales down and explains why he accepted a rather lucrative berth in a railway company.

Without detracting anything from his usefulness I am not in the least

Wolfhezen. From a painting.

surprised that his *chefs* considered him more suited to paint pictures than to do the work assigned to him; according to an eye witness he was always, when on duty, accompanied by his paintbox.

Now I can quite understand that an artist must find it difficult to keep his mind down to rails and sleepers, when he sees a lot of workmen, in picturesque blue smocks and faded red shirts, working along the sunny track of a railroad.

Such a state of affairs could not last very long, and no one will blame the company for dismissing their official, whom they had appointed to do other work than to portray the beauties of their line.

When told of his discharge de Bock naïvely asked whether he might have a free pass on the line for at least three months, because he was busy taking some sketches in that neighbourhood.

To his great indignation even this was refused.

This was really most unreasonable!

Now what was he to do? Here was an advantageous berth lost and worse still the very chance of being able to make any thing out of himself, as an artist, knocked on the head; all his sketches had to be abandoned for the want of a free ticket on the line.

Fate seemed altogether against him, at that time, for a small painting that he had exhibited at the Hague, was very much laughed at: "that ugly grey thing" was considered ridiculous and some people went even so far as to say that they wondered that the artist dared show his face in public.

"How did the man conceive such ideas?"

"It was rubbish, complete rubbish!"

Poor de Bock! he often turned away sadly after having over-heard these ribald remarks about himself.

Was *he* in the wrong?

Was it altogether a mistake, or did those who saw his work see it not as he saw it?

At this time of doubting his own powers—an experience which comes to every artist of importance—there came into de Bock's life an unsought for competent judge who bought "the ugly grey thing," which had aroused the mocking laughter of his co-artists.

The purchaser was no one less than Jacob Maris who had just returned from Paris.

This was encouraging.

If Maris approved of his work then *he* could afford to ignore the derisive shoulder-shrugging of his friends.

It was no small matter to fight against the doubts which now and again seized and over-powered him.

It was a question to be or not to be, and this made him place his shoulder to the wheel and strain every nerve.

At this period of his life he saw, for the first time, the works of the great French masters of the Barbizon school and they took complete possession of him, and amazed him.

And no wonder, for they were the realisation of his own ideas, which up to then, he had not been able to express or give form to.

He was overwhelmed.

A sunny Road. A drawing from nature.

The grandly expressed figures of Millet, the dark woods of Diaz and Rousseau overmastered him.

Immediately his trees became more vigorous, his skies more luminous, his lines broader and the arrangement of his foreground bolder.

Then came the idea of grouping great masses of nature against heavy skies, with compact clouds, and the burning desire to depict the silent imposing giants of the forest, in their solitude and greatness.

Desire seized him to see the country, where these great men had begotten their ideas, imbibed their impressions and where they had lived and worked.

It was not very long ere he was able to realize this wish. His sojoûrn at Barbizon may truly be called the most important period in de Bock's artistic life. Important and yet short; it had an influence over his future and developed his talent and powers.

Upon his arrival, as he stepped cheerily and hopefully out of the old yellow coach—which had carried him safely although joltingly to the land of his dreams—he had to step aside to give place to a funeral, which was just then passing along the road; a simple funeral it was.

And who was being carried to his last resting place?

And what did it matter who it was!

It was only a young artist who had taken his own life. Why? Because he could not reach the desired end. What was the use of living under such circumstances? 1)

The driver of the coach cracked his jokes with a couple of farmers standing by. "This is not unusual," he said, to the new arrival, pointing to the humble hearse, vanishing slowly in the distance, amongst the beautiful trees.

And such was de Bock's arrival at Barbizon!

Now commenced a period of hard work: up early in the morning and working as long as there was any daylight to work by; varied by occasional long prospecting walks.

Even now, in the midst of his hard work, there came times of doubt; after which followed days of depression which were not enlivened by the darkness and solitude of his forest surroundings. He was determined however to apply himself closer to his work so as not to let his spirits run down altogether; it is therefore not surprising that this depressed mood showed itself in some of his work.

Only one of the great masters (contemporaries) was working at Barbizon at the time when de Bock was there, this was Masson.

Masson could allow himself many luxuries; he was driven in a well appointed carriage to where he was painting. His history was short but tragic. When

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1) It is just possible that this funeral may have been the laying to rest of Vallardi, the friend and protégé of Théodore Rousseau, who took his own life in a most tragic manner. Rousseau having gone to see his wife, who was lying ill at his father's home in the Franche-Comté, left Vallardi by himself in his house in Barbizon (Vallardi had been living with him for a year or more). Left to himself he became melancholy mad and committed suicide by stabbing himself with a pair of scissors, which he had taken from Madame Rousseau's room. In the absence of Rousseau, his friend and neighbour, J. J. Millet, was called in. He gives a graphic account of this tragedy in a letter to Sensier. It appears that after stabbing himself several times he fell upon the ground, knocking his face against a table, after which he struggled up on the bed, where he was found the next morning in a sea of blood. By a miracle the house and studio were not burnt down, for a candle was found on the floor, within an inch of the bed curtains. Fancy what damage such a fire might have caused, reducing to a heap of ashes. the many canvases and sketches of the great painter Rousseau. (Trans.)

Before the Storm. From a painting.

in his early youth, and very poor, he worked at Barbizon, he showed a promise of future greatness, and much was expected of him; but alas! a stroke of good luck did for him from a true artistic point of view. He was offered the decorating of Oriental palaces, which was a brilliant and lucrative opening for a young man. He yielded to the temptation, to the glitter of gold, and deserting France and his artist friends, he chose riches, and comparative ease, which up to then had been denied him.

He remained many years in the East and when at last he returned, in prosperity, to his own country, he found most of his contemporaries dead. But they had left behind them not only many glorious works but brilliant reputations and never-to-be-forgotten names; and he....?

He stood forgotten and solitary, in the midst of a younger generation;

The Meadows around the Castle. From a painting.

unknown and unloved, deserted by his art. His wealth and his independence were a bitter irony to him.

Fortunately for De Bock he was not exposed to a similar temptation during his stay in France. His mind was only disturbed by the lovely apparitions which he saw in the forest of Fontainebleau.

But his admiration for this scenery did not last for ever for we find him back in Holland, painting on the Drenthe heaths, or else in the Hague downs.

At that time he painted a good many views from a certain lane leading to the downs, near the Hague, running at right angles to the Scheveningen road. This lane he nicknamed "Corot lane" (Frankenslag really) and although he may not have been the first discoverer of this picturesque spot it was he who christened it with so great a name.

Here in this lane we find many of those tender little birch trees, with their frail graceful forms and pretty silvery leaves, rustling and trembling and always coquetting with the sun.

Trees, that one sees daily, become like intimate friends; they find a place in our hearts even as our pet animals do. They are mysterious silent friends who stand motionless, but for wind and weather; after some great storm we go out tremblingly to see whether they still stand in all their glory; do we find one down we truly mourn the loss.

De Bock dearly loves these tall stately friends, he is on intimate terms with them, and in order to distinguish them from each other he gives them names, according as their shape and size appeal to his fancy.

At the end of the "Corot lane" stands the "Disappointed Lady" further on we find the "Poor little Orphan." At Doornwerth he has his "Fair Caroline," a large beech tree with pale coloured leaves . . . but they are not all females; we have the "Tipsy Labourers," these are four contorted oaks, twisted together, which suggest the appearance of four drunken men, staggering.

And there is "Charles V": a huge giant in full verdure, crowned with a heavy wreath and standing, in Royal Majesty, amongst his subjects.

You must therefore be somewhat initiated into the peculiarities of the artist, not to think he is stark staring mad, when he talks of having been to see Charles V or informs you that he has paid a visit to the fair Caroline.

If Holland attracted him by the soft undulations of her downs, and Gelderland by the vigour of her beeches (centuries old), then Drenthe must have had a peculiar influence over his susceptible character with its heavy imposing farm houses and colossal barns, and the mysterious tumuli, for we see the impression of gloom more pronounced in the pictures and sketches which he made in that part of Holland, than any where else; those dreary, and apparently endless stretches of heath-land, have a sad, cut-off-from-the-world appearance; and even the character of the simple minded country folk—who seem as if part of the soil—appeals to us from his canvases.

During the long evenings he would often visit some way-side inn, in order to study the character of the people of the district, and with only a few outlines, present to us their inner and intimate life; (even as he studies the trees) just a line, a *soupçon* of colour, but exact and even humourous.

These sketches, of which a couple were published in a well known periodical a short time ago, recall the work of Rudyard Kipling; short and forcible; neither too little nor too much, but with a bright light thrown upon the local scene of action. They are sketches that do honour to the artist, ranking him with poets and humourists.

His "shipbuildingyard" period, as he himself calls it, is coincident with his sojourn in Drenthe; for a considerable time he worked in the neighbourhood of Deventer, at Out-Rande, in Diepenveen, near Zwartsluis, and round about those districts. It was there that he found much material for his brush amongst

those picturesque shipbuilding wharfs, along the banks of the rivers, with all their scattered rubbish and the men in their quaint jackets, tarring and caulking the boats and ships on the slips.

One of the principal canvases, of those days, is his "*Zwartewater*" (Blackwater); a powerful picture, dark and gloomy in tone. The Zuiderzee attracted him greatly and he has portrayed, more than once, the waters of that inner sea, dashing up against the protecting dykes, and generally with a heavy sky overhead.

But the sea did not attract him very long; we find him, soon after, taking trips inland and hovering around farm houses and taking a deep interest in trees; the love of the latter drew him to Doornwerth, and here he found what he was really and in fact seeking. In no part of the country can you find better specimens of beeches; noble trees, their bright shiny trunks often overgrown with dark green moss.

Stormy Weather. From a sketch in chalks.

De Bock had an extraordinary taste for old country houses and historical castles. The loan of some old place is to him a windfall, he knows how to make himself comfortable in these ancient dwellings, and when he is allowed to pitch his tent in one, his joy is complete.

His winter quarters are at the Hague, and even there he is not satisfied with a simple room in an ordinary house; no indeed, he has chosen a well known tower, at Scheveningen; well known to all artists. One would suppose that this gothic tower, with its dilapidated look, was the remains of some old historical castle. But this is only a delusion, for it is nothing but an erection of our own day. If however de Bock should continue to work there much longer, it will probably be dubbed "De Bock's tower", and as such become in time an historical monument.

At present he has made his studio on the first floor. On the door you are greeted by a massive brass knocker, taken from some old Gelderland castle, and underneath are these significant words: "We come and we go."

Having got so far, we may as well enter, hoping that our host will spare us a few minutes of his precious time, so we let the heavy knocker drop, with a clang, and without waiting we step in.

Of course we find him busy

"Do I interrupt?"

"Not in the least."

"Go on then! But you can't do two things at once?"

"Of course I can! Sit down!"

Stretching myself comfortably on a settee, with cushions at my back, I had a full view of the picture on which he was working and to which he was apparently giving the last touches.

A moonlight scene, at the moment when the moon, rising from the distant horizon, sheds her fairy silvery light over the surrounding landscape. The atmosphere seems to vibrate and quiver. The moon, after having dispensed her soft rays seems as if desirous to absorb them again.

A sad and dreary landscape, enveloped in a hazy vagueness. The river glistens in the distance.

The figure of a woman is seen as if moving towards the cottage, which is hidden amongst the foliage of the trees; from one window we see a small faint stream of light issuing. It is a sympathetic tender subject.

Unnoticed, De Bock had slipped around to the back of his easel and produced, for my benefit, another canvas which he placed along side of his moonlight.

"Now what do you think of this?" he asked.

The contrast could not have been more complete. I rubbed my eyes and forced myself to look at it: here we had the dazzling sun, its bright beams trying to pierce through the leafy vault above; a leaf here and there touched with gold makes a bright patch on the ground; the light, which strikes the pale trunks of the beeches, makes them stand out boldly. These patriarchal giants of the forest, grand and imposing, are caught by the rays of the sun which strike through the dense foliage.

"What splendid fellows, have you ever seen them in the loneliness of winter, and covered with snow?"

"Yes often, it is a grand impressive sight, it makes one think of some forsaken temple."

"And did you never try to make something out of it all?"

"Yes, I did once, but the picture never came to any thing. I went there after a very heavy fall of snow; there was no sun, all was cold and white and the sky grey. The only sound that I could hear was the cawing of a couple of crows, such a melancholy sound which only seemed to increase the loneliness; I can but compare it to a majestic silence; I felt as if I was

offending nature by the imprints of my feet on the virgin snow and respectfully withdrew.

I committed the impression to memory as well as I could and turned to go

The Woodman's Cottage. (Doornwerth), from a painting.

home, fully resolved to do my very utmost to produce something worthy of the subject.

When I got into the village I turned into a public house to warm myself. In the tap room I found four farmers, smoking stumps of pipes, and sitting as near to a red hot stove as they possibly could; they were talking politics and discussing some article in a newspaper, several days old, which one of the four had managed to get hold of.

"Oi! Oi!" said one, with a very grave face, "*I* say that the fat rises to the top!"

This fellow seemed to be somewhat of a philosopher for we never got further than: "the fat rises to the top."

When I left that public the thoughts of the majesty of the forest, and those noble stately trees, were completely and entirely destroyed by these stupid vulgar words.

"Well?"

"Up to the present moment I have not been able to make anything out of it. Every time I begin, the fat rises to the top.... it is perhaps very silly; really some things *do* seem to hang upon a mere trifle!"

"And how about the summer?"

"Oh then I find my best friends back again, Charles V and the fair Caroline. I start from my castle on my crusades, like the knights of the olden days, although my intentions are of a more peaceful and artistic character, yet not less determined."

"How your boys must enjoy the country."

"I should just say that they did, but as it happens all my boys are girls!!"

"I say that's a good thing I see over there in that corner. Let me have a look at it."

"Certainly, do you like it?"

"I should just say so."

"Not bad perhaps!"

"No, very good, excellent!"

"But I know another excellent thing."

"And what's that?"

"Food! The inner man is not satisfied to live on art alone, it wants something better. Just you sit down here and go on with my work, you can do it as well as I can, while I run off and get something to eat. Why it is nearly two o'clock! No wonder I'm hungry!"

"What a funny fellow you are."

"Funny! Hungry you mean."

Flinging down his palette and brush and taking off his painting coat he said, with a twinkle in his bright eye: "Well after all you had better come along with me. Eh!"

It did not take us very long to find some suitable place to relieve the pangs of hunger, nor were we long in choosing our menu. While we were waiting for our lunch to be served, our *garçon*, who seemed of a talkative nature,

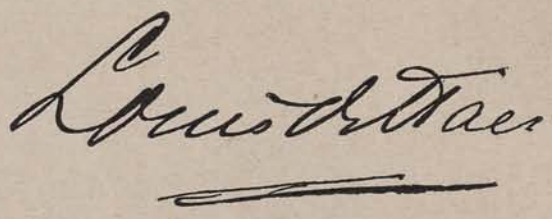
A rising Storm. From a water colour. Belonging to the portfolio of Mrs. H. G. Tersteeg.

discovered on de Bock's ear a dab of Prussian blue, which in trying to wash off he had considerably increased.

"Thank you John," said de Bock smiling, "thank you for your kind attention."

After a few minutes pause John replied, in a most solemn tone of voice: "If you play with dirt you must expect to be bespattered therewith. If I was you Sir, I should get some one else to handle those paints!"

But up to the present day I do not think that our artists have found the means of following out this artless advice of John.



# AUGUST ALLEBÉ

BY

A. G. C. VAN DUYL.


A study. From the collection of the late Mr. D. Franken Dzn.

# AUGUST ALLEBÉ.


Aug Allebé

Allebé was born in Amsterdam, on the 19th of April 1838. At that time his parents lived on the *Keizersgracht*, not far from the *Spiegelstraat*. His father was the celebrated physician Allebé, whose book, on the treatment of children, is still looked upon as an oracle by young mothers. I remember him, and no doubt many others do likewise, as one of the very best fellows of his time. A clever, intelligent, kind hearted man, very simple in his tastes,

somewhat shy perhaps, yet with a something that made one feel that he was a staunch friend, and a man of sound convictions. Those who know the son will often involuntarily be reminded of the peculiarities and good qualities of the father.

I never knew Allebé's mother—née N. Scheltema; but I have often heard her praises sung and have been told what a good wife and mother she was. If August's characteristic inheritance from his parents could be weighed in the scales, I think the scale would go down on the mother's side. She was a virtuous woman, who lived a well ordered life; rejoicing with the joyful and sorrowing with the sad.

It is hard to say whether Allebé the younger ever felt any inclination to take up his father's profession. But I do not think he did. The sons of physicians see too much of the unpleasant side of the trade to be attracted by it. But I *do* know that he took a particular interest in the old prescription papers, for upon these he was allowed to scribble.

This in itself is not so very surprising, for an irresistible desire to scribble is the inclination of every child. But in young Allebé's scribblings there must have been something to attract his father, for the sensible doctor considered it worth while to put this apparent talent to the test and to try, by proper training, to develop what might possibly be there.

To this end the painter P. F. Greive was consulted, the result being that young Allebé was put into his hands. The boy was, at that time, attending a day school and had only the evenings to devote to drawing.

The Weather-Glass. From an engraving of J. H. Rennefeld.

Many years later, after Allebé had gone through a course of lessons at Felix Meritis; had studied for some time at the Royal Academy, and had been to Paris, he returned to Greive, working at his studio. Before proceeding with this account of August Allebé I think it is necessary to say a few words about his master, that master who had such an influence over him and his whole life.

Greive saw the light of day on the 25th of March 1811; he was a born artist, not only highly gifted but skilful and intelligent. That he nevertheless failed to make a name for himself was probably owing to adverse circumstances. He began early in life with troubles; sickness and death came his way and made him over anxious for the future, not only for himself but for others,

which baulked his career somewhat. He began by taking pupils till at last he had too many, for he never had the heart to refuse any artistic spirit. His studio was merely a room, of ordinary dimensions, in the Academy. At last the room became too small and therefore he and H. J. Scholten, one of his best pupils, (now the valued conservator at Teyler's Institute) determined to build themselves a suitable *atelier*. For this purpose they bought a piece of land, on the borders of the town, between the Utrecht Port and the old gas works. In this part of Amsterdam there were then, in 1857, small so-called "tea gardens," belonging to the richer townspeople who sent their children there to play on fine days; (all these nice old-time ideas have vanished.) In

one of these "tea gardens" the two artists built their *atelier*. (This too has since disappeared, in 1867, when the Amsterdamers commenced rebuilding and improving their city.)

But this new and larger studio did not help matters much, for it also soon proved too small, as pupils kept on flocking in, and Greive's own personal work suffered in consequence and was relegated to the background. But he was an excellent teacher: a sure and certain eye, sound judgment and the gift of being able to explain, in few pithy words, what he meant; which words, by reason of their originality, were easily seized and remembered for ever. He had the greatest respect for the peculiarities of his various pupils. He never urged any particular style. Whatever ideas were in their thoughts he brought

to light, and these ideas he assisted in developing. But if they wandered too far, or if their art inclinations became weak and wavering, he endeavoured to bring them back into the right path.

Of the many who worked with Greive I well remember, first of all, H. J. Scholten and J. C. Vaarberg; later C. Westendorp, J. Walgraven, L. Lingeman, J. C. Greive junior, J. J. Storm van 's-Gravesande, August Allebé, D. F. Jamin, Mauritz Leon, J. Taanman and A. C. Cramer.

Still later, in another *atelier*, I can mention Joan Berg, Coen Metzelaar, J. van Essen, H. Kever, J. J. L. ten Kate, Ten Hoet, de Haan. Also the ladies Cateau van Hoorn, (flower painter;) Marie Heinke and Betsy Repelius.

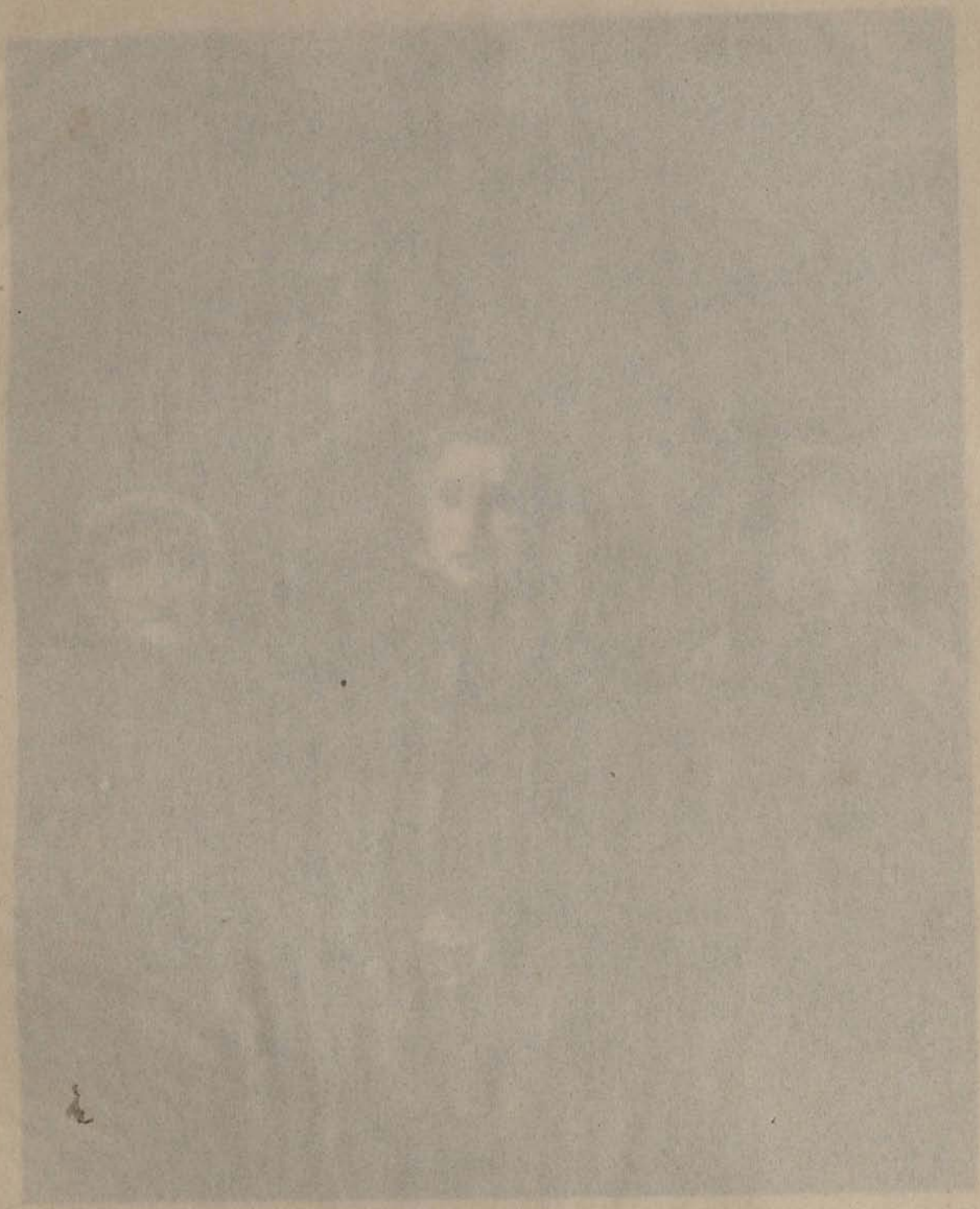
I do not mean to state that all these artists worked at Greive's studio at one and the same time.

Allebé entered the studio in 1860, after it had been established some thirteen years. His fellow students were probably Jamin, Leon Greive and his younger brother Coen. The latter could tell some tales out of school, if he so liked, for August Allebé used to be his *bête noire*, at least in the beginning. It was the fellow's studiousness and scrupulousness, his artistic tendency, to say nothing of his industry, that made him soon a favorite, not only with Greive himself, but with van Scholten, who often took the master's place. And let it be said here that many of the pupils have as keen a recollection of him, as of Greive and are as thankful to him for valuable aid and instruction, as they are to the *chef d'atelier*. All the Greives are musical and Coen devoted too much of his time to the Muse of music to please his uncle, who was always holding up young Allebé as a pattern of industry and quoting him as an example. This annoyed Coen so much that at last he determined to put an end to all this by applying himself to his work, heart and soul, and trying to convince his uncle that there were other good boys beside August Allebé.

Mother's Tyrant. From an engraving by C. L. van Kesteren.

But here we must hark back a few years.

Allebé had been studying painting for some time before he entered Greive's studio. Amongst other things he had successfully painted in 1858, when he was barely twenty years old, the portrait of his father. At an early age he handled the brush cleverly and had a particularly firm yet light touch. He developed a special talent for the art of lithography, which in those days was as favorite an accomplishment as etching is in the present day. Mouilleron, the celebrated lithographer, was in Amsterdam in 1853 making a drawing of Rembrandt's "Nightwatch" for a lithograph. Allebé was too young then to



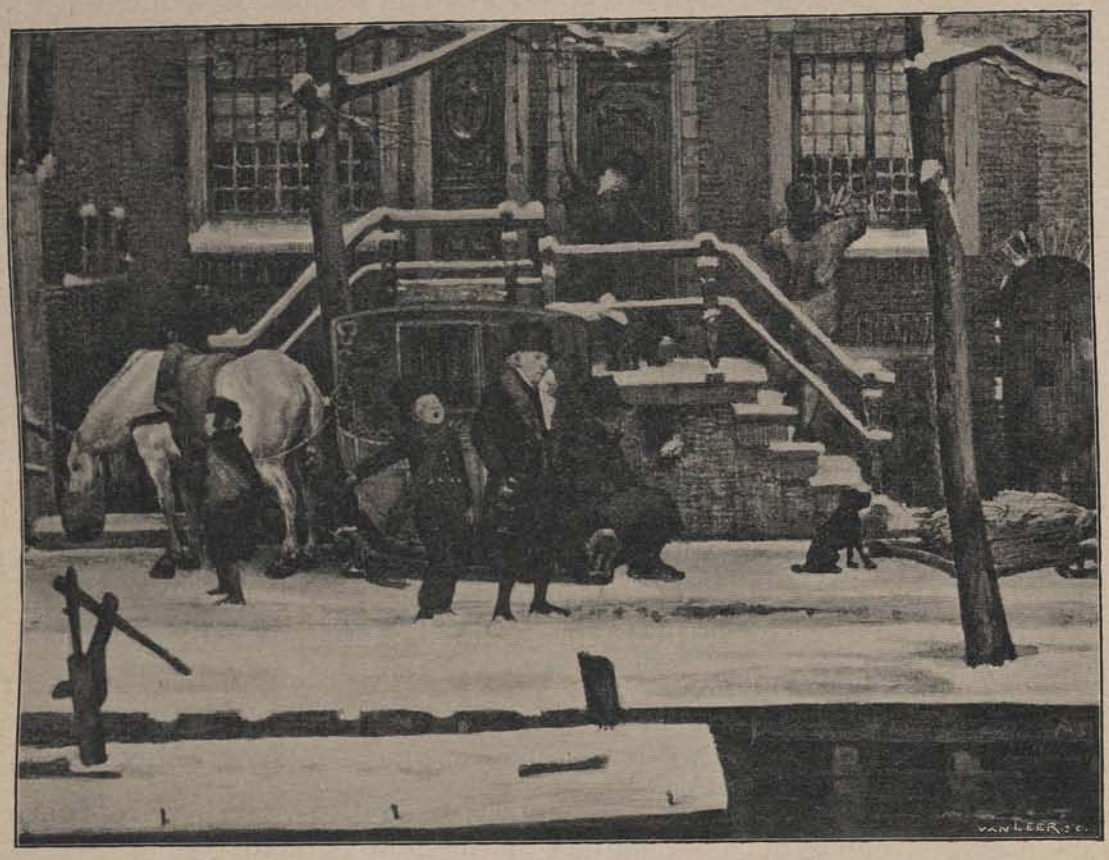
"*Early in Church*"

FROM A PAINTING

In the National Museum in Amsterdam. (Legacy van Lynden).

have profited by association with him, but there is not the slightest doubt that he heard him much talked about, as being occupied with so important a work. It is therefore not surprising that when he went to Paris, in 1857—to study at the Louvre and at the Luxembourg and to follow a course at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*—he failed not to go armed with a letter of introduction to the man who had made himself so famous in the art of lithography. His acquaintance with Mouilleron will no doubt have been of great service to him, for we hear of several good copies, and not a few lithographic reproductions, that he made.

Soon after his return from Paris he made an excellent reproduction of



"Collecting for the Poor." Lent by Mr P. J. J. Ras.

Schwartze's "Pilgrim Fathers." (Schwartze was the father of Thérèse and Georgina Schwartze.)

Sad to relate the original was lost. It was destined for New York and the ship, by which it was sent, was run down by the Alabama during the American civil war, (1860—1861). This large canvas of Schwartze was exhibited in 1858 in Paris, after having been on view in Amsterdam where Allebé was much struck by it. Schwartze, who had seen some of Allebé's work, did not hesitate to place his picture in his hands for reproduction. This was a work of much greater importance than the young artist had as yet ventured upon. The drawing was done in Allebé's studio (at that time on the Buttermarket) where

Schwartze (who lived in that neighbourhood, in the very same house where some of his family are still residing) looked in frequently, to offer some suggestion, or give a word of advice.

When the drawing was almost ready for the press, the two artists went together to Paris, where it was to be printed by Bertauts. Schwartze often spoke of that trip and how much he enjoyed it, and relates many amusing incidents. He also spoke of young Allebé's good judgment in the works of Millet, Corot, Daubigny, Dupré, Courbet, artists as yet little known in Holland and certainly not valued at their true worth in their own country. The older artist did all he could to aid and encourage the younger man who paid as much attention to his words as if he had been his son. And not only in the art of lithography but in the art of painting did Schwartze encourage young August, for he saw that the fellow possessed more than ordinary talent in that direction.

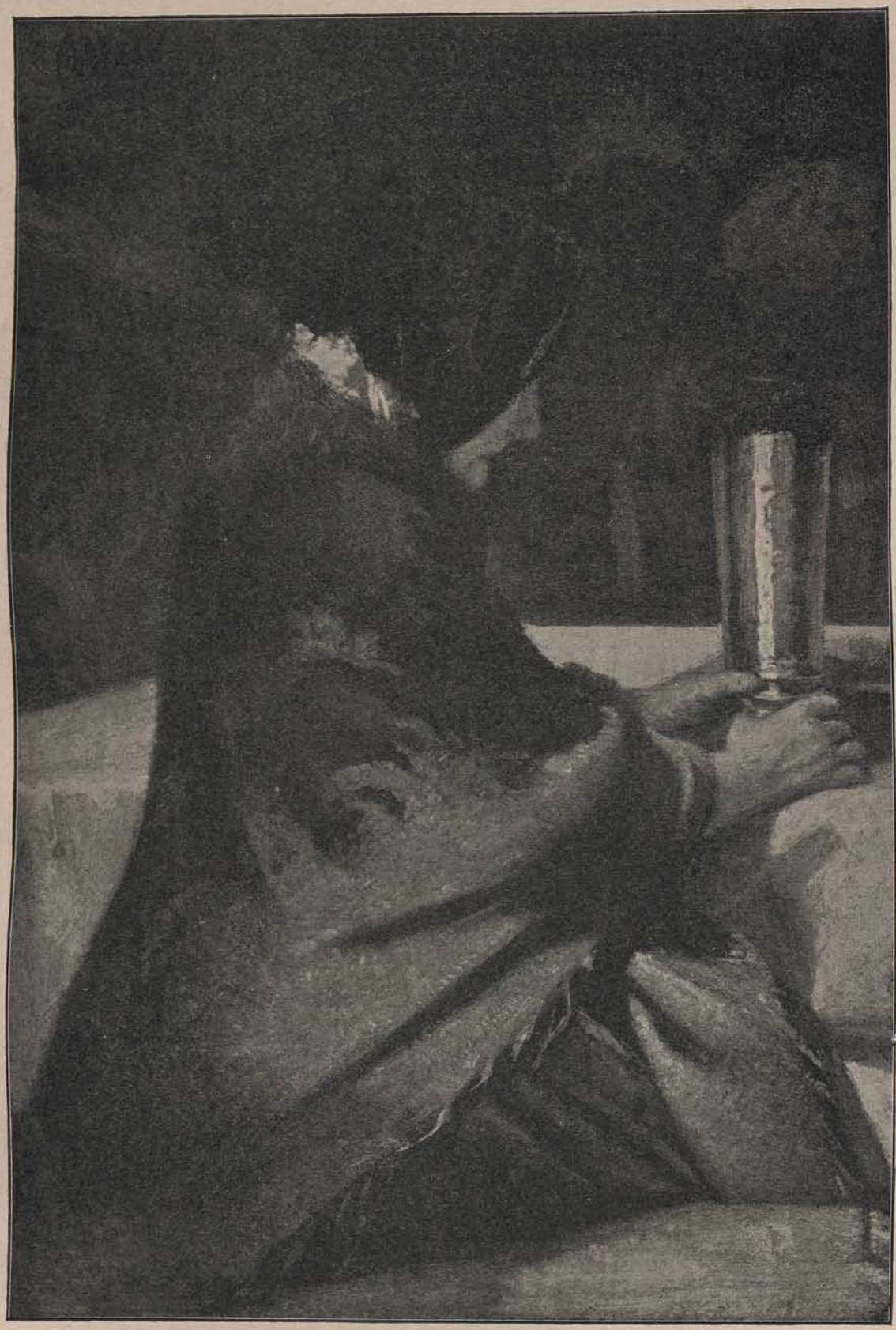
From 1860 Allebé began to exhibit his works regularly. By preference he painted scenes from the life of the poorer classes, not only on account of the greater picturesqueness of their surroundings, but because of the humour that can often be found in that class of life and which an artist, with a keen eye, can easily detect. Allebé was not only intelligent and witty but he had inherited an amiable and pleasant disposition from his father. His pictures were not intended to hurt any one's feelings; in his character there was something grave as well as humourous which was a combination to make a man perceive the pathetic and amusing side of life. If a painter has such sources within him we are not surprised to see pictures that, although representing the poorer social circle, are refined and appeal to our taste.

It has always seemed to me impossible to give a clear idea of any one's peculiar and particular talents in a written article, unless the reader can be made acquainted with some of his or her works. Now this difficulty seems particularly great when writing about an artist, as the very best reproductions convey but a poor idea of the beauties of the actual pictures.

Allebé's sincere admiration for the works of the French school (of those days) was not without influence upon his work, even up to the present time. But I certainly mean to state that he was no imitator; no blind follower; he was and is thoroughly and entirely original, and depicts every thing according to his own particular idea. That his productions were out of the common was seen by the way they attracted the public eye.

In 1861 he exhibited: "Early in Church" (page 55); "The First Visit" (an old man standing near a barometer); "A sick Child of the Poor." The latter a water colour, although it appears to me as if I had seen it in oils.

After these followed: "Mother's Tyrant" (reproduced in these pages); "The Applemarket"; "A Child's Portrait"; "The Head of an old Man" (study); "*Léthe*" and many others.



Taking the Sacrament. From the collection J. H. van Eeghen.

The last named picture is generally known as the "Podagrist" (gouty); it is now in the Dordrecht Museum. It represents a very old man, in an eighteenth century room, musing over the fire. "Nadagen," (In later life), is another canvas equally fine. This represents a woman in tottering old age. It was reproduced by Dekker in the *Kunstkronyk* (Art Chronicle), of 1864. At one time it was part of the collection of the late Mr. D. Franken Vésinet, but now hangs in the National Museum in Amsterdam.

There was a time when Allebé worked a good deal in North Brabant, and the following pictures are undoubtedly the fruit of a summer's trip in that part of the country: "The Weaver" (Exhibition of 1865); "The St. George Guild at Dongen"; "Consolation" 1868. These last two mentioned are now in the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam, as well as another picture entitled: "A Child of the Poor."

Arcachon.
From the water-colour, lent by Mr. P. J. J. Ras.

There are other works I can mention, namely "Provisions" (1867); "Daily Bread"; "Soliloquy." The last belongs to the collection which the members of *Arti* and *Amicitiae* offered to H. M. the late King William III.

This list is far from complete I regret to say. If I were even able to mention all the drawings and water colours of our artist, to trace their where-abouts would be a hopeless task. They are doubtless scattered all over the world. Of Allebé's sketches the late Dr. D. Franken had a very fine collection.

Allebé made some interesting and clever sketches on his various tours and trips: in France; along the borders of the Rhine and in Belgium. He made also many conscientious studies of his own immediate neighbourhood and surroundings, and especially clever are his peeps of the gardens of *Artis*, where he passed much of his time. There must be a great many of these drawings in somebody's portfolio; it is difficult to say where these things go to. There are a number of sketches and drawings by Allebé, done in quite a different style: detailed compositions, intended for pictures which however never came into being.

There has always been a certain shyness about Allebé; his scrupulousness becomes almost timidity. If there arises in his mind only the shadow of a doubt, or if he cannot clearly see his way with the work in hand, he abandons

A study in the garden of Artis. Lent by Professor Dr. Max. Weber.

From a sketch-book. Lent by Mr. J. A. Sillem.

it. He would never follow the dictates of others nor would he copy. This was perhaps a pity, for although there might have been something similar to the subject or style of others, the carrying out would have been quite original.

As far as I know, Allebé has not painted many portraits, but those he has undertaken are decidedly good and are certainly distinguished for the natural pose of his sitters, and for the general manner of interpretation. I have already mentioned his father's portrait, painted when he was but twenty years of age. His best known portraits are those of Madame de Beaufort and of Dr. Helding. He made an excellent picture of his youngest brother shortly before the latter went out to India. It is only a drawing but I consider it

one of his best portraits. If you have only seen this one drawing you will quite understand why Vosmaer wrote these words about August Allebé's portraits: "to my mind they are the very ideal of the art of portrait painting; they are noble and full of genuine feeling; well drawn, with a light yet firm touch, and apparently done with little effort." Vosmaer was right, for these qualities are undoubtedly to be found in his portrait of Dowes Dekker, and in the portrait he did of his master Greive. This last named was reproduced in the Art Chronicle of 1874. (Greive died on the 4th of November 1872).

If all lithographers were artists as were Mouilleron and Allebé, the art of lithography would not have deteriorated so much. You have merely to look back at old Art Chronicles and such publications, to see how the art of

lithography rose conspicuously above all other methods of reproducing. The difficulty is that lithograph plates have to be handled separately, not after the manner of book printing, where many copies can be made at once, making the process less expensive. This is no doubt the reason why this beautiful art has been supplanted by other and cheaper methods, all based on photography.

In 1870 Allebé was offered the post of instructor at the drawing Academy which was then being organized in Amsterdam. To refuse was difficult, to accept even more so. With Greive's experience before him he could not help seeing the danger he would run should he accept the berth, in as much as it would occupy a great deal of his time and interfere with his own work and advancement. He would be teaching others while he would be neglecting himself. How few people there are in the world who can absolutely follow their own inclinations. Many young fellows, when studying at our Academies and Universities, are fired with the desire to live only for Art or for Science, but how soon have these cravings to be crushed by the many and pressing obligations of life. And what *then* becomes of their ideals?

Study. Collection D. Franken Dzn.

"This is the rubbish room" said Allebé to me, one day, as we stood before the door of his studio, in the Academy of Plastic Arts, of which he is now the Director.

He said these words in a tone of voice that I knew so well and understood so thoroughly. Had I not often heard this particular intonation in the voices of many of our most deserving men, when any trifling circumstance brought them face to face with a former time, when the duties of life, pressing so hard, had deprived them of all power of resistance, making things turn out, alas, so different to what they might have done.

Let me hasten to explain that the word "rubbish" was used by Allebé from a sense of humour and to suit the occasion. You would be a complete stranger to Allebé if you thought for a moment that such a word was applicable to him. On the contrary, the room was by no means a rubbish room, but wonderfully tidy and bespoke order and organisation. This was the very reason perhaps of the suppressed sigh.

I must confess that I did not expect to see the room in such a state of neatness. As long as he was one of the teachers at the Academy, there

might have been the time for such order, but since he had been made the managing Director of such a large establishment, and with so many calls upon his time, it was the more surprising. Again I say that you would have to know little of the man if you supposed him capable of neglecting any thing under his care. No, he was more likely to do too much than too little. But you must not tell him so. At this moment I sit here in doubt, like a sceptic, wondering whether I ought to mention all this.

Of the Emperor Charles V it is told that he feigned death in order to find out what the world thought of him; but I know some people who would like to return to life —were such a thing possible—to prevent any undue fuss being made about them. For a biographer, who is desirous of knowing all the most important points in his subject's life, it is very difficult when the said subject makes a wry face as if he were preparing to have his wisdom tooth drawn.

The Castle of Poeldyk. Collection D. Franken Dzn.

Allebé's face brightened up when I, unintentionally, tapped the outside of a large portfolio. Of course I expected it to be full of his own charming work. But the contents were quite different. With the greatest delight Allebé began to show me each drawing in turn, honestly acknowledging that he was glad they would draw me away from his own personality; and yet these works were, in a measure, his own too. They were the drawings of his many pupils, presented to him upon the occasion of his celebrating his twenty fifth year of association with the Academy.

It is a great pity and much to be regretted that Allebé has had so little time, during the last years, to produce any work of his own. His life is almost entirely given up for the benefit of others.

A man such as Allebé must have exercised a great influence over the young artists who came under his tuition: clever in his profession, as few are; many sided and with an eye always quick to see and appreciate the beauties of nature; never wanting in artistic zeal and in enthusiasm; ready to help those

who need help; easily able to distinguish between good and bad qualities; kind and courteous; ruling with a soft yet firm hand, such a man must have always been a great support to men of true artistic tastes. And no doubt he often sighs when he thinks what *might have been.*

In his studio hang many things which will testify to what I have said and they will speak of what he can do and what he has done. This must surely be a great satisfaction to him.

There are people—and why not—who know so well how to conceal their good qualities that a mere acquaintance cannot even guess what they are. Such men should be honoured. I do not exaggerate when I say that Allebé finds the greatest pleasure in praising others. Those people who think they know the *man* Allebé cheat themselves if they only know the busy Director of the Academy. There are many grateful hearts who will gladly testify to this. And so *Sapienti Sat.*

A. G. C. van Bruyk

# JOHANNES WARNARDUS BILDERS

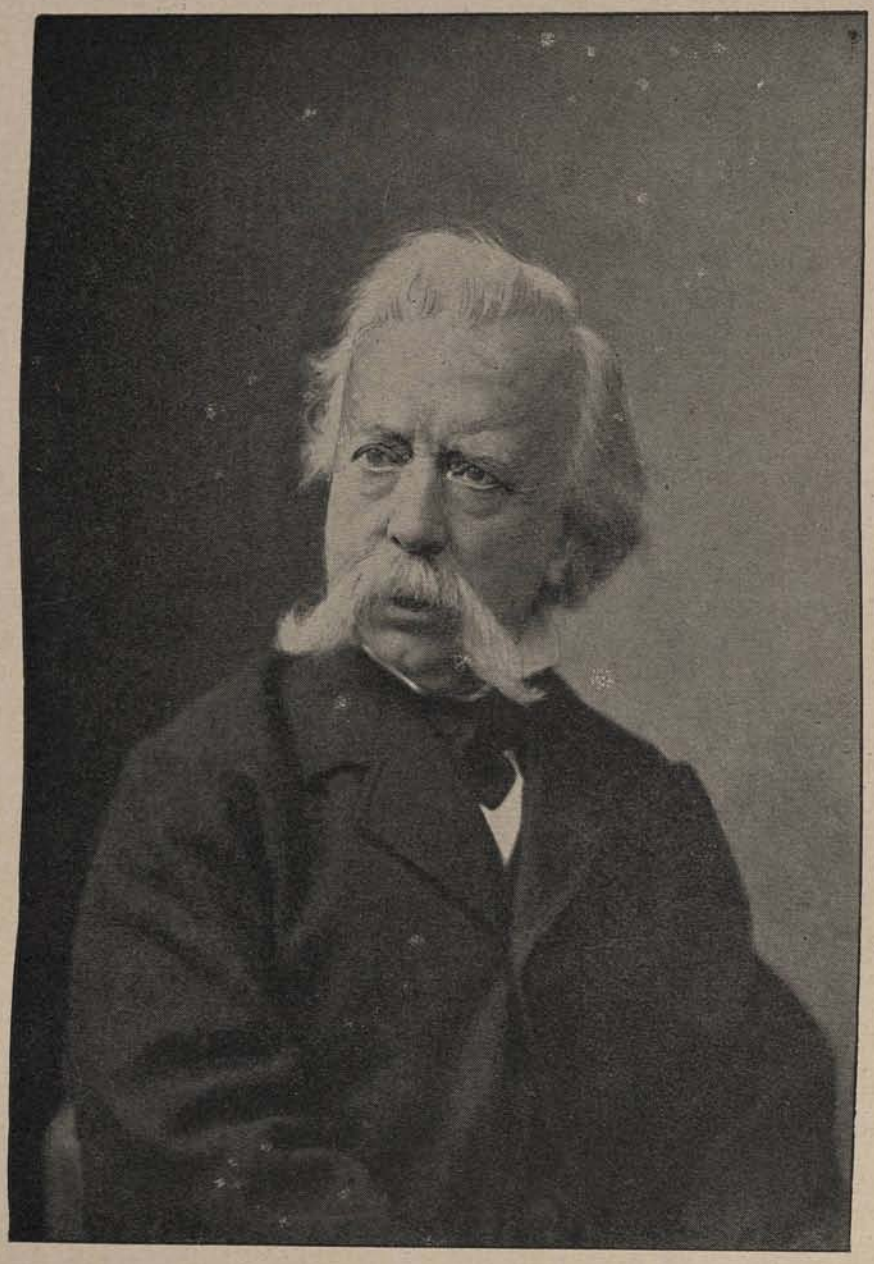
BY

A. C. LOFFELT.


"Evening at Hackfort." From a painting in the National Museum in Amsterdam.

# JOHANNES WARNARDUS BILDERS.

1811—1890.



I was a boy about twelve years old when I first began to visit Exhibitions of pictures. How well I remember the time. I was then learning to draw from little lithographic cuts, as was the custom in those days, when instruction, in the art of drawing, was at a low ebb. People looked upon it more as a pastime and amusement than as an actual serious study, and considered it quite sufficient if they were able to draw little pictures in birthday books or in keepsake albums. My father possessed a huge portfolio—tucked away in

some out of the way corner of the old home—filled with English and French lithographs and steel engravings. These prints, which I was allowed to look at occasionally, awakened in me, at an early age, a love for art. Years afterwards I saw with astonishment, in foreign Musea, the original paintings of those prints, known to me in my childhood, and *then* I learnt that they were the reproductions of celebrated works. Amongst others, landscapes by Claude Lorrain and by Poussin, and dogs and still-life by Oudry. Not so very long ago I saw, in the Museum at Stockholm, Oudry's celebrated "Sporting dogs" which I discovered to be the friends of my youth. And so it came about that when, as a boy, I visited the yearly Exhibition of pictures in Utrecht, I went with a certain air of importance, in my own estimation, owing to my acquaintance with the contents of the father's treasured portfolio. I had my heroes and demi-gods among the painters, but I think the preference lay with Bilders and Gudin. At the house of the well-known Dr. Wap—whose son was a school-fellow of mine—I often heard art and literature discussed, for Wap was acquainted with many of the leading artists and writers of those days and wrote about them in his periodical "Astrea." In sifting a lot of old papers and documents about Bilders I came upon these fragments of verse by Dr. Wap, written probably upon the occasion of a picture by Bilders being exhibited at the Art exhibition in Amsterdam, in the year 1852:

"Thou who doth uphold the glory of our school of yore...."

also:

"Thy trees, thy prospects and thy skies,
Ruysdæl's spirit they embrace and Berchem's art...."

In Utrecht, about that time, there was quite a revival in the world of music and art. When I look through my kaleidoscope I see a great variety of colours appear and disappear; in these colours I perceive the men who were then pointed out to me as celebrated artists; I see young and old; amongst the old I notice Wonder, the tasteful portrait painter; and van Wisselingh, the landscape painter. Amongst the young there passes by the promising painter Mollinger, tall and slight with the bloom of youth on his cheek, alas! to be mourned at an early age, cut off on the threshold of success. His works are much sought after in the present day in England. Then my kaleidoscope shows me the art-fanciers and patrons. Kram and the Van der Kellens—who were nicknamed the "Art-Historical ferreters";—Munniks van Cleef and Suermondt—the Mint Master—(father of the well-known art collector of Aix-la-Chapelle). As the saying goes: "As the old sing so do the young pipe," the younger brothers of the Van der Kellens (just mentioned) used to take little pictures to school which they bartered for pencils and marbles, and the bigger boys, of the higher class, attended the auctions of De Kruijff (behind the Cathedral) to bid for portfolios full of pictures, which were looked upon as future fortunes.

I cannot however recollect having seen Bilders in those far off days, yet his pictures—of which I saw so many at the Bilders-Exhibition in 1891—recall the days of my youth. His charming landscapes and the turbulent seas by Gudin —seen generally in rather fantastic light—I was never tired of admiring as a boy. It speaks for itself that I did not know *then* the value of those pictures, but it certainly says a great deal for the artist who can depict a bit of nature so perfectly, that even a *gamin* will stand before it and gaze in silent amazement. But let me add that those pictures did not only attract the juvenile eye, but were praised by those of older age and versed in the knowledge of art. Indeed is it strange that such a power should exist in an art which represents the beautiful, the distinguished, the impression-arousing in Nature and in Life? I am happy to say that my first art-impressions were formed by the creations of artists who depicted nature as she really is, and not by those

The Convent of St. Clara near Wiesbaden. Museum of Modern Art at the Hague.

who seem to have a careless and eccentric aversion to the truth. I really cannot help feeling sorry for the youth of the present day who see, at our various exhibitions, a great deal of what may be called theoretically ugly; not art inspired by nature herself, but apparently inspired by the tricks and freaks of a degenerated Parisian art, which may be said to play at literature and art instead of taking both seriously.

My acquaintance with Bilders dates from a more recent time. A few years before his death I visited him at his summer residence at Oosterbeek. He was not able to do much work after 1883 on account of a severe chest complaint which attacked him and troubled him greatly. Most of the things that he told me, upon that visit, I wrote in two articles for "*Het Vaderland*" (The Fatherland) and for the "*Nederlandsche Spectator*" (Netherland's Spectator)

after his death in 1890. I also mentioned him in a *causerie* about Mauve in the Elsevier monthly Magazine (June 1895). In this article I described his close connection with the Oosterbeek Art fraternity and how he had christened the celebrated old oaks, known by the name of "*Wodanseiken*" (The oaks of Wodan).

The following year Johan Gram wrote his introduction for the catalogue of the Bilders-Exhibition in Arti, an article full of scientific and sympathetic praise, and the "*Utrechtsch Jaarboekje*" (The annals of Utrecht) published a similar record of the much lamented painter. Since these essays have emanated from the very best source, I have been permitted to extract ideas from them, and make quotations in this account of Johannes Warnardus Bilders.

Bilders was born in Utrecht on the 18th of August 1811. His father was a baker; his bakery was on the old *Gracht*, near the *Smee* bridge, where Johannes was born. He was a very observing child and susceptible to impressions which he retained till his old age. He possessed a wonderful memory and was an excellent *raconteur*. We know many little incidents of his life from the amusing tales which he delighted to relate to his friends. He could, even when quite old, recall the time when he was carried into the great Cathedral, by his mother, where his infantine mind received quite a shock upon seeing the huge windows, and for very fear of which he hid his little face against his mother's breast, that very Cathedral where later on, as a boy, he used to play with his comrades in the cloister passages or, if in a more serious mood, would try to decipher the names on the old tombstones. Who knows how often, years later, wandering amongst the great oaks and beeches of Gelderland, the painter thought of the great arches in the Cathedral, under the shadow of which he was born. Who would doubt the relationship between the great pillars of a church and the mighty trees in a quiet wood? Bilders and Bosboom were both equally inspired, the one by the living forest, the other by the simulated; the one by the vaulting roof of nature's verdure, the other by the noble arches made by the hand of man; have we not seen and admired, for many years, the inspirations of these two men; both of them worked to a great age and both to near the end of the chapter. What a charm it would have been to have overheard those two ancient enthusiasts, so far advanced in years, discussing their personal opinion in the dominion of art. Which would have gained the day? The glimmering light playing hide and seek between the great pillars of an old church, or the green arbours in the peaceful woods, where the sun has oft difficulty to penetrate and throw a shadow. Both equally solemn subjects and both carried out to the honour and glory of God. If an art collector had to decide the question he would undoubtedly say: "Give me a wood by Bilders and I will hang it along side of a church by Bosboom."

When Bilders was very old he loved to talk of the days when he went to

Master Ras' infant school, where Ras—who ruled with the rod—dressed in a flowery Japanese robe, made his pupils drone away at the Alphabet: "A is an Apple... down to Z is a Zebra...." As light refreshment the mistress (Mrs. Ras I presume) poured out the very weakest tea, Ras keeping time with a ruler, while a hymn was sung. Weak tea appears to have been, in those far away days, a sort of opium in the Utrecht schools, and even later too, for I remember the Rev. Dr. Riet, forty years afterwards, serving weak tea for his pupils (boys and girls) in the St. John's schools and saying solemnly, as if tea was a sort of alcohol: "Milk and water for those who prefer it." But we got no cakes.... I dare say we didn't deserve them, I am convinced we

The Wodanseiken. (The Oaks of Wodan). In the possession of Mr. M. J. van Bosse at the Hague.

didn't, for we made sort of gutters, on the wooden tables, so as to convey the spilt tea and milk and water (principally water) down on to the parson's trousers 1). Yes, almost every one likes to look back to the days of his childhood and these recollections are often very pleasant. The past is like the old moons in the fairy stories, which are cut up and made into stars which shine all the brighter.

Children's small sorrows are harder to bear than their elders think they are, but their troubles are easily healed by a ray of pleasurable sunshine. So are sudden contrasts good for artists who are still in their shell; they help to

1) The inundation was caused by the overflow from the spout of the huge steaming tea pot and from the many cracked and leaky cups. I can still hear the uninviting invitation to the feast: "The girls who drink tea!"—"The boys who drink tea!"—"Those who drink milk and water!!!"

develop the feelings and emotions of life. As a very little chap Bilders had to carry the hot breakfast rolls to an old lady, who lived in a large house. Sometimes he had to ring more than once, perhaps the lazy servant was still in bed and would not make haste to answer the bell, leaving poor little Johannes standing on the door step, shivering and shaking in the early morning frost. Perhaps he warmed his hands on the hot rolls, just out of the oven, for the old lady had been known to complain that the rolls were not warm for her breakfast. We sincerely hope that he took that liberty, not only for the sake of his poor little frozen fingers, but for the old lady's sake, as hot bread, in the early morning, is bad for the digestion.

Gram also tells us that Bilders, as boy, was very fond of fishing and that he made many excursions with rod and worm. This circumstance is not as unimportant as it may seem, for there is nothing that can develop the taste for nature's beauties better than wandering along ditches and streams or sauntering through the meadows, when the early dew is still on the grass, each drop shining like a diamond in the rays of the rising sun; it is a royal pleasure to an enthusiastic mind. The accusation of cruelty made by Byron so humourously against all anglers—maintaining even that an angler must be a bad person—he withdrew later when he got to know Walter Scott and other enthusiastic brothers-of-the-rod and disciples of Isaac Walton. To every angler it will be a consolation to hear that the good and worthy Bilders was a keen fisherman. Amongst our present day artists I know several who love nothing better than to outwit a pike or a perch, and who delight to spin yarns about their fishing adventures. An angler, standing on the banks of a river or stream, under the willow trees, or a fisherman in a boat, or on a lake, are favorite items in many works of our most famous landscape painters. Weissenbruch, Gabriël, Roelofs, Du Chattel, Offermans you can see by the arrangement of their figures that *they* know the exact spot where a perch or a dace is likely to be found. And these pictures remind us of the old Dutch painters, who delighted in depicting scenes from the many sea-fishing ports of our country. The love of fishing seems to be born with every Dutch artist, it is in their blood, born and bred within them. But let us not reverse the picture and say that in every fisherman there is born and bred the talent of an artist; it would be difficult to find any thing artistic in the minds of many of the louts we see hanging over walls and bridges, with a rod and worm, or perhaps only a line with a crooked pin attached, and the bait anything that may come to hand.

"*La Légende des artistes*"—which surrounds the life of every artist of note, like the light that surrounds the tail of a comet—tells us that Bilders, as a child, when he saw other children drawing ears and noses, bothered his father till he got permission to take lessons in drawing too. A great pressure had to be brought upon the worthy baker ere he gave in. The idea of his boy thinking of "becoming an artist" was too ridiculous. We really cannot take it amiss of parents objecting to such a precarious profession, unless of course

the child in question shows signs of unmistakable artistic talent. Should the father have sufficient means to give his son a modest allowance, enabling him thus to devote years to study and improvement, without thinking of £. s. d., there is then more chance of success. There are so many young people who are attracted by the Bohemian life of an artist, and carried away simply by enthusiasm; these men are sure to be failures. Without mental power and a determined will and above all an unflagging industry, it is quite impossible to expect to be anything of an artist. Bilders *père* was a quiet respectable citizen and his son a clever wide awake lad, who had firm convictions and plenty of spirit, coupled with very industrious intentions; the father wisely thought the matter over, with all the pros and cons, the end of it all being that Johannes was placed with Jonxis, one of the members of that artistic Utrecht family, of which nearly every member was a painter. One was a landscape-painter, whose works I remember seeing in many of the good old homes in Utrecht, where my people visited; another brother was a miniature-painter of whose work I possess a very good specimen. There was a tragedy connected with this miniature. It represents a young woman who was the lady-love of some young warrior, who was killed in the Citadel of Antwerp, and this portrait was found on his body. Bilders studied, for a time, with one of the Jonxises but I am not certain with which of the brothers. Bilders Senior had now to dive into the depths of his pocket to pay for his son's drawing lessons. The fee was twelve guilders (£ 1.0.0.) quarterly, but as old Bilders was a careful man, perhaps a bit close, he bargained until he got it reduced to 18/4 (eleven guilders instead of twelve).

From all this we gather that Bilders evinced, from his early youth, a disposition decidedly artistic, and with a pleasing exterior—which no one will dispute, even if they never saw him till he reached his three score years and ten—he may be termed, with truth, the poet-painter. The Napoleonic age had awakened in our quiet Netherlanders a certain emotion and excitement so that even the children, who were born in those days, seemed to bring with them into the world something poetical and almost heroic. We are not surprised therefore that in our artist glowed a poetical hero worship, a fire of enthusiasm, such as moved Byron to pawn his worldly possessions and with the money, thus obtained, equip a little army to go to the help of the oppressed. There may have been something theatrical in the choice of Byron's helmet with these words: "*Crede Byron*" something that would make our dry-as-dust philosophers growl and grumble, yet there are many, I feel sure, who appreciate and understand such an enthusiasm. The great poet was willing to sacrifice all to accomplish so great a thought, and if those Greeks *were* the unworthy sons of a former sublime generation, the idea remains the same: a desire to release those that were oppressed, a sympathy with the descendants of the most civilized, most developed and freedom loving people of remote antiquity.

As Byron's heart beat under a coat of mail, so the heart of Bilders beat under a school jacket when he heard of the oppression of the Greeks. "The names of the modern Greek heroes: Kolokotrini, Kariskaki, Nicitas, were as

The old Birch. Wolfhezen. Charcoal drawing. In the possession of Mrs. Bilders-van Bosse.

if engraven on his heart," so wrote his widow, and Bilders himself tells the following: "I arranged with my father's baker's assistant to go together, on the sly, to Greece; every thing was arranged when my father got wind of the plan. Upon this occasion I had my first and only beating." The hungry

critic may, with some right, ask whether this story is not somewhat exaggerated and too highly coloured, notwithstanding the lad's poetical and hero loving disposition. Those who do not doubt the psychology in Multatuli's "*Woutertje Pieterse*" will not perhaps believe in the young fellow's warlike intentions towards the Turks, but they *will* believe in a childlike illusion which would or could lead to an equally childlike imaginary start for the field of action. The boy had read Plutarch and Plato, and loved Cicero and Homer (translated of course into his own tongue) and took a wild interest in the travels and adventures of Vaillant and Bruce, a taste which he carried with him into old age for when Stanley's book, "In Darkest Africa," appeared, he read it with the greatest interest. All this kind of reading fired the enthusiastic brain of the youth and we may consider, and wisely too, that the father's "gentle reminder" was a good and sound antidote.

Such as he had of really good sound common sense, coupled with enthusiasm, was luckily not beaten out of him by the matter-of-fact father, for when, a few years later, the drum sounded and volunteers were asked, "to bring the Belgian rebels to order," J. W. Bilders was the first, or very correctly speaking the second, to offer himself as ready to serve his country. Burlage, a well-known Amsterdamer, must have signed the paper a few hours before Bilders did, though each was the first to come forward in his own town. This took place on the 26th of September 1830. Both these men were, in course of time, decorated with the Iron Cross. I feel sure that Bilders treasured it more than his *Leeuw* and *Eikenkroon*. You need not be a soldier to understand this. And what recollections to ponder over in later years!

When I saw the old gentleman, for the first time, with his fine noble head and long white moustache, I fell at once under the influence of his eloquence. He told me much more of the 1830 period of his life, and of the sound of the drum, than of his artistic career which I had come especially to talk about; however I got him on the topic at last, and when I left I was completely under the impression that I had been conversing with a brave general and not with the father of our Dutch landscape-painters. I was therefore not in the least surprised when I heard that he was called "the General" by his artist friends.

But when the "General" got animated on the subject of his dearly loved Oosterbeek, and his adored Vorden, and warmed up over the account of his sojourn in Drenthe and discussed the beauties of the wild parts of Groningen, *then*, by the Grace of God, he appeared to me not only as painter but as poet.

De Bosch Kemper recalls, in the introduction to his "History of the Netherlands after 1830," the adventures of the first twenty-four volunteers who were sent to Antwerp by way of Rotterdam. (Bilders had spoken of this in his conversation with me.) The little band was received with cheering in Rotterdam, where they embarked. As the ship approached Antwerp, the commander gathered his little flock on deck, and ordered the "*Wilhelmus*"

to be struck up, meaning to make a good and impressive entry into Belgium. But the officer, in command in Antwerp, came on board and with an anxious face said: "My God, what are you about, keep still, we are not a moment safe, the quay is crowded and the people are in a very excited state." Whereupon the little band of Volunteers was landed in silence and taken to the *Estaminet "Jan de Dief"* (John the thief) while the Belgians hooted and cried: "Dutch Cheese! Dutch Cheese!" At the said "John the Thief" they were regaled with soup and bread and then taken to the East India Company's warehouse for their night's quarters. The following day they were marched to Malines, and according to De Bosch Kemper this little company of *braves* had to suffer a great deal from the rudeness and unseemly behaviour of their less well-mannered brothers-in-arms. "In Tournay" writes Kemper "I was billeted, with another volunteer, on a highly respectable family. We were all very young looking fellows, not at all of the usual stamp of warriors. The wife of our host, a regular lively buxom Brabant woman, laughed outright when we two entered her house and was at once ready to crack jokes with these "fair haired boys of the north, who expect to conquer *les braves Belges*." And the husband, by no means intimidated by our presence in his house, smoked his pipe in our company and talked with us about the revolution. He informed us that all Tournay was against us because we had tried to make them Calvinists, and after I had, to the best of my ability, tried to defend the cause and stated boldly that our greatest desire was to be completely separated from them, I think we became almost friends." Here Kemper mentions, in a foot note, that his bed fellow was no one less than the celebrated landscape-painter J. W. Bilders. These two men did not meet again till some forty years had passed over their heads, *then* the one was a celebrity in the world of Science and the other in the world of Art. Each had climbed to the top of his own tree.

Camp life at Ryen was by no means unpleasant to the young soldier. The officers set him to paint their portraits, allowing him often to be free of duty. He did not seek promotion, wishing to remain on equal terms with his comrades.

Those who have heard old soldiers talk about camp life know that Cupid often knew the password. My friend, the late Dr. Donkershot of Dordrecht, has told me many an amusing story about Cupid on the battle field. Gram, in his introduction to the catalogue of the Bilders Exhibition, tells amusing tales about our artist. He writes: "Bilders was most entertaining when you could get him on the subject of his love affairs, especially those of his soldiering days. He relates that he was badly smitten with two sisters Janneke, daughters of old Parson Janneke, who would look over the hedge, and call out, in a threatening voice: "Janneke, Janneke, beware, beware, trust not the man with the gold buttons!" In telling such tales Bilders never became vulgar or broad, he was always a poet, and his account of the flirtations with the buxom country

girls was refined and remained ever fresh in his memory, partaking of the nature of a paintable idyll.

Later in life, when he understood better the importance of education and the forming of character, he was thankful that he had had a three years lesson in the school of military hardships. He has often been heard to say: "You should have spent a few years in barracks." He must therefore have been an advocate for conscription, notwithstanding that his first night in barracks at the Hague—on his way from Utrecht to Rotterdam —taught him that the best sleeping quarters were very "lively."

The entrance Porch to the Castle of Vorden. In the possession of Mr. L. Walterbeek in Amsterdam.

With pleasant recollections and with the best passport, namely the Iron Cross on his breast, he returned to Utrecht, but the quiet and dullness of the Cathedral town seemed to him a void and empty, compared to his former life, so much so that he almost wavered whether he would not become a regular soldier and give up altogether the idea of going in for art. He told me that one day he counted the buttons on his jacket saying: "Soldier, Painter, Soldier, Painter, Soldier, Painter .... the last button said *Painter* and so the die was cast.

He then made up his mind to return to his old master Jonxis, who had increased the number of his pupils considerably and whose school had become quite the fashion. "I stood," said Bilders, "quite shy, my slim figure clad in old fashioned garments, amongst the sons of the richer citizens, but when it came to the question of drawing .... well then I surpassed them all."

The Jannekes, who had so enflamed his heart, were soon forgotten and

some one else took their place. He became acquainted with a young German girl who was staying in Utrecht; Frederica Standenmaier from Stuttgardt, a very beautiful creature. He soon again vowed everlasting faithfulness not, as before, to the god of War, but to the god of Hymen. Full of adoration and love, although foolish and inconsiderate, the marriage knot was tied. They were both young and handsome, they adored each other and what more can be said in excuse. But, sad to say, troubles did not take long in appearing. The husband sold occasionally a small picture, but that would not keep the pot boiling. As the means were now wanting for sketching tours they decided that it would be better to go and live entirely in the country and to be as economical as possible. "One fine day" continued Bilders "I packed up my goods and chattels and went to Oosterbeek; seeing a man leaning out of a cottage window I called to him: "Any rooms to let in this village?" "Yes, plenty. Just walk in here!" I entered, saw that the rooms were nice, asked the price and closed with the man on the spot; I offered him an extra ten guilders if he would do up his garden, which was in a state of neglect, and suggested that he should plant plenty of red cabbages, telling him that I was so fond of them. We took the rooms for three months and we ended by remaining three years."

Coming now into daily contact with nature, our poet-artist saw that he had misunderstood her. And yet his pictures had been bought. But he and the public were mad, absolutely mad! Nature was totally unlike those "much admired" paintings that he had sold. "With what different eyes I saw the woods at Oosterbeek" continued the old artist smiling, at first nothing went right when I discovered that I should have to unlearn all I had ever learnt and begin, as it were, from the beginning." I had noticed a picture at the Bilders—Exhibition in 1891 called "A Gelderland Landscape" belonging to Mrs. Kneppelhout van Sterkenberg-Drabbe, which seemed to be painted by an other hand, so totally different to the other exhibited pictures. I feel sure it was painted before Bilders went to Oosterbeek. It made me think of an early Koekkoek, or of a Van der Sande Bakhuyzen or a Van Os, in fact of the style of painting between 1820 and 1850. In the present day it is easier to distinguish between artist and artist, for each one seems to have his own technique, his own execution and more or less his own style. In former years there existed, in a measure, a stereotyped mannerism in art; yet it would be folly to wish to consign all those old pictures to the dustheap. Many of the old painters knew how to bring a certain amount of graceful artistic taste into their conventionalities. In the Gothic art of the middle ages, in the Italian renaissance, there was much that could be termed conventional and unlike nature, but we may be thankful that they did not do away with these canvases during the rage of some new fashion. I have heard celebrated modern painters praising and lauding the works of Koekkoek and Schotel, without the least intention of following in their foot-steps.

The village of Oosterbeek and its neighbourhood were, long before the days of Bilders, a happy hunting ground for poetic souls and art students. The historical antiquarian Robidé van der Aa built himself that beautiful place known by the name of "Mount Heaven," the name alone speaks volumes.

Old van 's Gravenweert, the translator of Homer, lived for many years at Oosterbeek; he now rests along side of Jacob van Lennep who also made Oosterbeek his home. When Bilders went to settle there Kneppelhout—author of "*Studententypen*"—had become the possessor of "Mount Heaven" and in later years Bilders occupied one of the many villas of this Oosterbeek Marquis of Carabas. Kneppelhout owned much land in and around Oosterbeek, he was a man of great wealth. "Mount Heaven" is a right royal residence. The house is large with many towers and turrets, standing in a great stretch of its own land; the cattle grazing in its rich meadows or wandering under the noble trees, each cow hung with a musical bell, making sweet sounds as she moves about; the roads broad, lined on each side with splendid firs and grand beeches, to say nothing of the huge oaks; lakes with swans and ponds with ducks; many driving roads and bridle paths all kept like the residence of a royal prince.

This description would lead you to think that Oosterbeek was completely modernized, but there is still much left to nature's care. When Bilders went there, the well-known property, known as Dreien, was not yet cut up into villas, the beautiful trees were still intact. Sonnenberg was a hunting box with an old farm attached. And there were great stretches of heathland and not neatly kept little gardens as you see now a days. The great trees stood in their Royal Majesty. The firwoods of Wolfhezen were not thinned out as they are now. The feudal castle of Doorwerth, owned by the van Brakels, was in those days inhabited after the style of the knights of old, and the desire of the owner was to make it an echo of the dead past. I need not stop here to mention that Bilders preferred Oosterbeek in its state of nature, as his pictures will testify, and that the neatly laid out gardens and all the modernizing of the place made him more than sad. How bored he must have been when he was commissioned to paint "views" from Elswout (the property of Mr. H. M. J. van Loon). These "views" were such a contrast to the pictures he painted at Vorden. When Bilders was residing in Oosterbeek, as a young man, the small *rentiers* of the neighbouring towns had not yet built modern villas there, nor had big *rentiers*, with more money, damaged still more the picturesqueness of the place. Our artist had a favorite spot, near the water-mill of Gerritson, where he made many a lovely sketch; but alas! on an evil day, a rich Amsterdamer comes and sweeps away all the beauties of nature—from a landscape-painter's point of view—by buying the land and building a big house where the poetical mill had stood. Not satisfied by making it appear the newest of the new he calls it Villa Nova.

Those first three years of Bilders' sojourn at Oosterbeek had a very happy

influence over his artistic career, and indeed over his whole life. At the end of those three years he returned to Utrecht, fearing that he was getting too much out of touch with the artistic circles of that town, but it did not take

Solitude. Charcoal drawing. In the possession of Mr. Rudolf Keyser in Amsterdam.

him long to discover the absolute necessity for him, as a landscape-painter, to live in the country. I think he only remained in Utrecht about two years. He was the artist who greatly influenced Mr. Suermondt in buying a Troyon from

the art dealer Van Wisselingh. The latter was such an enthusiast in regard to the new French school of those days, and was a man of developed taste on the territory of art; he was happy to see a younger generation springing up, who had an eye to the beauties and poetry of nature, and wishing to break away from the new theorists and *procédés*-seeking apostles of modern times.

The young painter was always a welcome guest at the house of the etcher and stamp engraver Van der Kellen, who was so long connected with the national Mint. His son David wrote, after Bilders died, an account of his youth, to the best of his recollections, for they had been boys together 1). After speaking of Bilders, as having been the very soul of *Arti* in his riper years, he goes on to give an account of him when the first sign of down appeared on his upper lip. "Those were the days when I knew him best. To me it was always a delight when young Bilders visited at my father's house and I loved to hear him converse on the subject of art, which was a favorite subject with my people. The flame of art was burning within the breast of the young man, but he could not find an outlet for his enthusiasm. His early works are not altogether free of something conventional, yet they are less so than those of his colleagues."

We know, and have already mentioned, what the artist himself thought of his early productions. Of the man's influence over others, by reason of his enthusiastic eloquence and warm disposition, Miss Thérèse Schwartze can testify. When Bilders went to reside in Amsterdam, for the benefit of his children, he was always a welcome guest at the house of the portrait-painter Schwartze. His daughter Thérèse (who afterwards became a celebrated artist herself) has told Mrs. Bilders—the widow—that as a child she used to beg to be allowed to sit up late to hear the animated conversation between her father and Bilders.

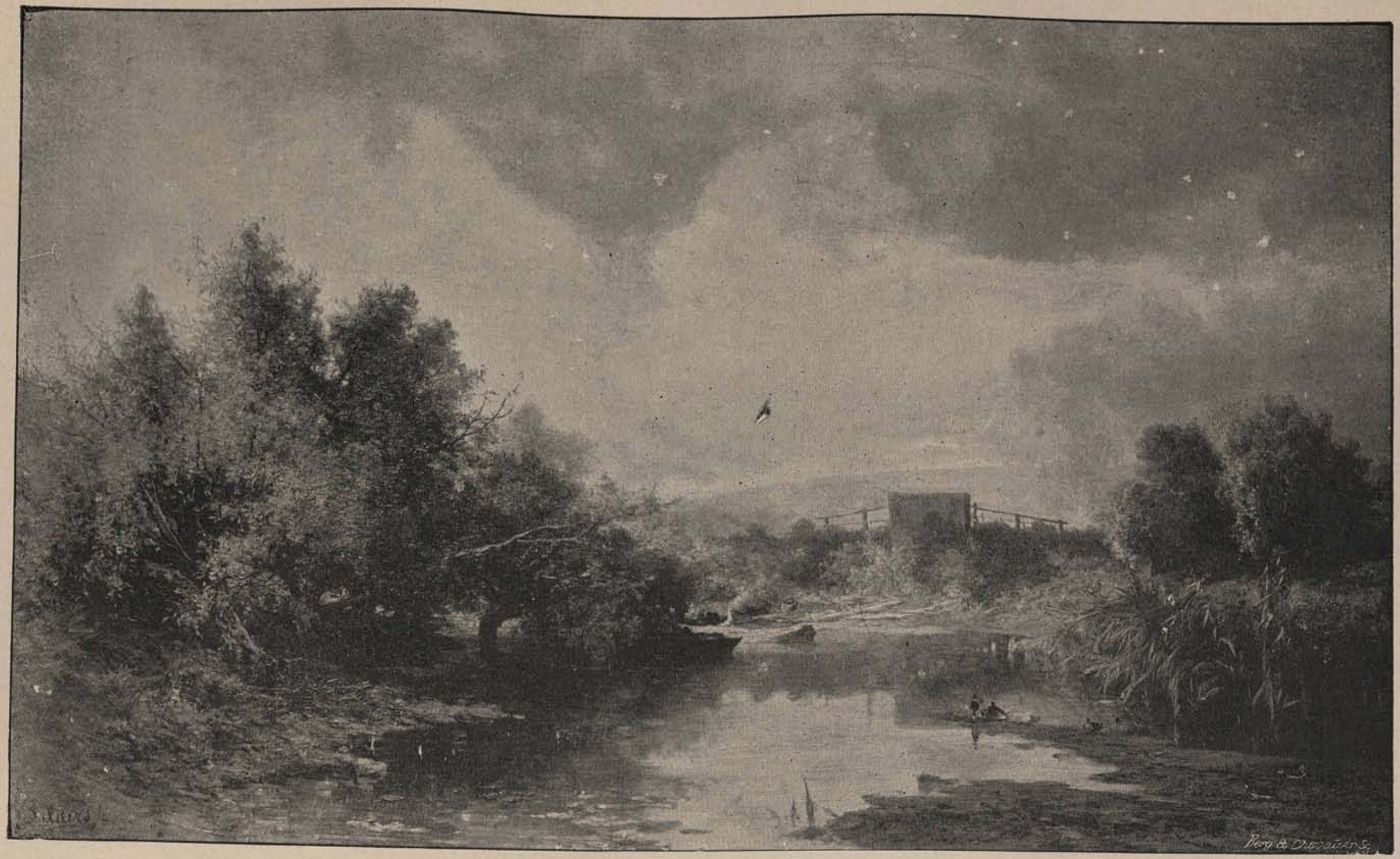
As I have already stated, Bilders did not remain more than two years in Utrecht; he longed to see Oosterbeek again. He must have been about 25 when he resumed his life in his beloved country village where, after much seeking, much reflection and musing, he found what were the essentials for his poetic-artistic inspirations, steadily making a name for himself and setting the example to many young artists by taking nature as his model. In time artists, young and old, flocked to Oosterbeek and its environs. It is said that at one time no less than twenty artists were busy, at once, painting the little bridge over the stream at Wolfhezen. At least so runs the tale and really one is inclined to believe it when one remembers how, in those days, painters flocked and herded together; partly from a desire to follow in each other's footsteps, in the way of art, and partly from the love of sociability. If one of them announced that he had discovered a very paintable part of the country then immediately dozens followed suit. This peculiarity reminds one of a certain

1) "News of the day" 1891.

class of anglers who think that, by throwing their line in the exact spot where some other fellow has caught a fish, they are sure to have a bite. From this fact, we may consider, proceeds the monotony of many of our art exhibitions. Even foreigners—especially Americans—took at one time to flocking to Oosterbeek and to Laren expecting to become a Mauve or a Kevers. Is it not the same with inferior writers, who think that the secret of success lies in the peculiarity of the paper, or in the manner of holding the pen. Young painters should go forth and seek for themselves and rely on their own taste and judgment. Looking through the eyes of another is never a wise plan. Much of our beautiful country and picturesque old towns has until now been overlooked. There must be many a painter, of town views, who would be delighted could he but see and study those charming quaint little towns in North-Holland and Friesland. Go and see for yourself the haven at Hoorn, in the vicinity of which you will find represented the battle of Bossu, carved in stone, on the frontage of an old house. Or go to Hindelopen or to Alkmaar, Medemblik or Enkhuyzen. All these old-time little towns are full of delicious picturesque bits, so speaking and inviting to an artistic eye. And these are only a drop in the sea. Yes, there is plenty of food left for the artist's brush, the late John Weissenbruch did not take off all the cream, there is something left but skimmed milk.

Sometimes you hear people talking of an "Oosterbeek school" but where the pupils and followers have got to is hard to say. Hanedoes showed a certain similarity to the works of Bilders, but his outline was more delicate and his colouring less serious and not so rich. The style of landscape by Julius van der Sande Bakhuyzen recalls a little the manner of painting of our lamented artist, yet I never heard him mentioned as an enthusiastic Oosterbeeker.

Of late years Mrs. Bilders—the widow—and Théophile de Bock have been depicting scenes from Bilders' beloved Oosterbeek, and many a charming canvas has been produced by their clever artistic hand. Those of the latter in excellent style and good composition, and the paintings by Mrs. Bilders fresh and sunny. But certainly they do not constitute the so called "Oosterbeek school," they were not amongst the twenty who together were copying the pretty little bridge at Wolfhezen. The art of the Rotterdam painter Tavenraat had something of the impressionist style of Bilders, but I think that Tavenraat was a much older man and studied, for the most part, in Brabant and in Germany. I, for my part, think that Bilders and his art stand by themselves and have formed no particular school, in spite of the power which emanated from him. Since we are drawing comparisons I should say that Théodore Rousseau might be called the older brother of Johannes Warnardus Bilders. The "*Wodanseiken*" (reproduced in these pages) is to my mind so beautiful that I can only compare it with a Rousseau; in fact many a Rousseau, seen at exhibitions, cannot be compared to this admirable work of Bilders.



The Ooi at Nymegen. Painting. In the possession of Mr. G. van Tienhoven.

The picture I allude to is in the possession of his widow's brother who allowed me, not long ago, to admire it.

Of the industry of our artist and of the number of his canvases, in and around Oosterbeek, we have ample proof by the pictures and sketches that were exhibited at the Bilders-Exhibition in 1891. I remember at the time being particularly struck by the following pictures: "Behind the old Church at Oosterbeek" (9), a picture very much after the style of Corot; "Autumn" (19); "Drift ice on the river at Oosterbeek" (80); "October;" Studies for the first mentioned (12—20) and a very clever representation of fowls (61). There were many more of course but these took my fancy at the time. Bilders worked industriously up to a good old age, and many canvases of

A sunny day in the village of Vorden. From a sketch.

importance proceeded from his studio after the age of 67, and we must say that many of his last works were amongst his finest and best. Bilders was not a fantastic decorator. In judging his work we must be more careful not to give his occasional romantic style too much prominence; we must try to remember that, although full of poetical ideas and thoughts, he was a studious observer of nature and was not carried away by eccentric imaginations or by out of the way ideas. "That a painter should walk about with his eyes shut to the beauties of nature, allowing much to go unnoticed, was utterly wrong," these were the words that his clever pupil wrote to me; she who in time became his wife and made the winter of his life as bright and sunny as the summer.

In connection with Bilders' poetical art propensities I wrote the following in

"*Het Vaderland*" at the time of the Bilders-Exhibition in 1891: "It must not be thought that this great interpreter of nature was a slave to fashion and to the spirit of the age, a sort of Nuyen, seeking his happiness in fantastic romanticism of colouring, forgetting entirely to go first to the school of nature. You must not use the word Romantist, in connection with Bilders, as a reproach, unless you condemn all the beautiful realities of nature, and this romantic element which he possessed to such a high degree. In later life he embellished his fine works, not with conventional ideas, but with soul exalting scenes, which were more in touch with his poetical taste and inclination. The man took his art seriously, and very earnestly, and not as if viewed from an express train, or with the eye of a stage decorator, but with the loving mood of a pantheist. I should therefore call him a landscape painter of the right sort. If he had wished to be considered an impressionist it would have been merely a case of calling his sketches finished pictures, and we would have had an impressionist of exceptional power, long before the impressionism in him had been discovered. Look at the charming effects of light and shade in his studies; and the hand that could fashion the noble oak and the shade-giving beech, could likewise understand and value the soft hazy moments of nature such as attracted Corot. Bilders portrayed his friends the trees, and all plants, in characteristic style. To him a tree was more than a tree, not merely a dark spot against a light sky; he examined the colour, the leaves, the graceful branches and he desired that the spectator should see and admire as he did. That the upshot of all this was an occasional sacrifice of delicate tone and softness of colour, speaks for itself. But how much must we not give up in the present day interpretation of art by reason of the incompleteness of pictures, far less complete than the sketches by Bilders."

For painters, and all lovers of nature, there is a great variety of beauty to be found in the neighbourhood of Oosterbeek, a variety that must surely suit every taste. Walking along you see the undulating borders of the Veluwe, you pass along the Duno and Hunnenschaus and through the woods of Doorwerth, which form a natural shore to the river, with the soft green meadows opposite. The botanist will find a great variety of wild berry and brambles: the *clematis vitalba*, the chicory etc. You walk on till you get to Doorwerth, where the old historical castle stands over against the "*Uitspanning De Zalmen*" (The Salmon Inn). That the picturesque old castle, with its fine timber and wonderful old creepers, was enthusiastically adored by the poet-painter goes without saying. In mid-winter, when the tide is high and the river overflowing its banks, there is often a great quantity of drift ice floating down stream. Bilders and his wife have both depicted the river in a wintry aspect. At the Bilders-Exhibition I was particularly struck by a picture called "View of Dordrecht" (lent by Mr. Bonsema Bakker), where the painter has given us some magnificent birches. The birch was his favorite tree, although he was the friend of every tree and every plant. The overhanging branches

of the birch in the "Watermill at Vorden" (lent by Mr. Boxman) was an other example of the master's love for the birch. But we have not yet reached Vorden, we are anticipating, we have first to admire the "Summer landscape near the fountain of Doorwerth" belonging to Mrs. Kneppelhout—Van Braam. In this picture we see a fallen beech, drawn with a power which fills us with amazement. These Doorwerth landscapes date from 1863 to 1865. Wolfhezen was likewise a favorite resort for our artist, the many fine firs, with their shiny brown branches, that are seen in that part of the neighbourhood of Oosterbeek, made a fine show and charmed the spectator; the celebrated "*Wodanseiken*," the stream, with the oft painted bridge, the sheep pens and the little church at Heelsum, were all favorite studies and material for his brush.

In our country there is so much that is beautiful and there is so much variety. Bilders realized this after taking a trip in Germany in 1844. This trip had some connection with his first wife's nationality and was not taken entirely for the sake of art. The portrayal of that hazy soft atmosphere, commonly called the "Grey School" was never quite his *genre*. However much he may have admired the art of his friend Mauve, he preferred the more decided and more powerful contrasting moods of nature. He was a great admirer of Calame nor did he turn away from the Dusseldorf school. Yet there was a time when he put out of sight a portfolio of engravings and prints, by German and Swiss artists, which he possessed, "for fear of being influenced by them." He made a few sketches in Germany, chiefly in the Black Forest and on the Rhine, but nothing of very great importance. He had a German pupil for a short time, a young fellow called Frommel, whose father was Director of the Museum at Carlsruhe and whose uncle is, I believe, court preacher to the Emperor William. In the Museum at Carlsruhe there are paintings to be seen by Bilders, in fact his works are scattered far and wide, chiefly however in Russia, Germany and in England. When Frommel *père* died he left Bilders a nice little legacy which was quite unexpected. In 1860 Bilders was bidden to Wiesbaden, by our late King William III, whilst he was taking the waters there. The King desired some views painted of that lovely part of Germany. Bilders was a favorite with the King; the genial open-hearted painter, with his military propensities, found favour with his Majesty. Besides they had been brothers-in-arms at the camp of Ryen, and the King loved to hear the volunteer relate his stories of camp life. One day the King was immensely amused at hearing Bilders sing a song, which had been sung at Ryen upon the occasion of the King's visit to the camp, as Prince in those days. King William remembered the occasion perfectly and hearing Bilders sing the song delighted the Royal soldier's heart. The King often reproached Bilders for so seldom appearing at the Loo, although he had a standing invitation. Bilders I think did not care for court life, he was heard to say that the painter was more in his place in his own studio than in the palace. The Queen Regent visited the Bilders-Exhibition in 1891. Mrs. Bilders—the widow—was officially notified of Her

Majesty's intention but unfortunately the good lady was lying ill at Schlangenbad, whither she had gone after arranging and organizing the Exhibition of her husband's works in *Arti*, the fatigue and anxiety of which, coupled with her sad loss, had brought on a complicated illness. Both Queens visited the show and the Queen Regent expressed herself as much gratified and pleased. Queen Emma said that the late King, her husband, generally called Bilders "Father Bilders." The picture lent by the Historical Gallery attracted H. M. very particularly since she had not yet visited that Exhibition.

A souvenir of Bilders' second visit to Germany hangs in the Municipal Museum at the Hague. It represents the Convent of Clarenthal in Wiesbaden (reproduced in these pages).

An old Barn at Veele in Westerwolde. From a sketch.

The visit to Wiesbaden, by invitation of the King, must have been a great pleasure to Bilders and no doubt it did him a great deal of good. He was then living in Amsterdam for the benefit of his children. It had been a great sacrifice to him leaving his dearly loved Oosterbeek, where he was so well known and loved by all, young and old, rich and poor. His house, on the "*Prinsengracht*" in Amsterdam, where he had lived for twenty years, appeared to him at first like a prison. But he soon found consolation in the pleasant intercourse with artistic people. Israels and Rochussen became his most intimate friends and Mauve, who was a younger man, looked upon Bilders as a sort of father. As militaire he enjoyed social gatherings and was a well

known frequenter at the *Kneip* of *Schwabe*, on the *Warmoesstraat*, the oldest Bavarian beerhouse in Amsterdam. He also founded an art club and was head of the Round Table of *Arti* and a general favorite with every one.

During those twenty years residence in Amsterdam black clouds of sorrow passed over the head of our artist, and saddened his life. First of all he lost his wife, the beautiful Frederica and shortly afterwards lost his son Gerard who, judging by the pictures which were exhibited with those of his father, must have been a most promising young man. Somehow every thing went wrong with the young fellow. A Mæcenas has sometimes mistaken ideas of kindness. Mr. Kneppelhout, who had undertaken the education of the much loved Gerard, had got it fixed firmly in his head that the youth was more inclined to literature than to art, and that a brilliant future awaited him. He sent Gerard to travel in Europe, made him acquainted with celebrated men and seemed determined to make something unusual out of him; Kneppelhout was a better pedagogue in theory than in practice. To give the son of a poor artist (for Bilders had not made his fortune) an education more suited to the son of the owner of "Mount Heaven" was foolish, however kindly it was meant. Gerard became of course discontented with his home, worried and fretted that his success was not more rapid, and not having a strong constitution he pined away and followed his mother to the grave. After this blow the painter lost his daughter Caroline, who was married to the well-known cattle painter J. H. L. de Haas, and who had been living in Brussels.

These words, written in the "Utrecht Annals", may be termed one little ray of comfort: "Bilders was bowed beneath the weight of sorrow, but as the deepest wounds in the tree produce the sweetest gum, so did the sorrows, which passed over Bilders' head, produce the most tender poetical works of exceptional beauty. It is true what King Lear cried:

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods—"
"They kill us for their sport."

Those who love nature find in her the comfort of a tender mother in the days of sorrow or trouble. She knows the best balm to put upon her child's wounds. Bilders went to Vorden, to seek consolation, after his many family troubles. In fact he spent many summers there between 1865 and 1879; quiet, undisturbed and working industriously.

Yes, Vorden was his comforting mother. Great trees awaken often great emotions; they are like heroes, and the sight of these noble creations of God is calming to a troubled mind, and one feels inclined to call out with the poet: "Thou art a great and noble oak, thou art mighty and strong, thou delightest in thy strength and in the luxury of thy verdure." The ash, the birch and other more tender dwellers of the forest seem, in comparison to the great oaks and beeches, like delicate women, who stand silently musing, but whose

*"The Castle at Vorden"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of Mr. J. E. Banck at the Hague.

thoughts we can tell by the whispered sound which comes to us through the faint rustling of their fairy like leaves, and by the graceful bending of their branches. Charm and coquetry hover in the trembling shade which they cast upon the rosy tinted meadow; the sun winds along the river's edge like a woman's brightly tinted ribbon, the early dews dance in the rays, like diamonds glittering on a Queenly breast, or they may be compared to the rogueish laughter of a happy child. Only elves and fairies dare break this solemn silence. What beauty too in the game of hide and seek played by the warm beams of the sun on a fine bright day: darting in and out of the mass of entangled underwood, smiling like happy infants who play bo-peep with their adoring mothers. Yes, these beauties of nature help to drive away the sorrows of the heart. These were the sentiments of Taine, as he wandered through the Forest of Fontainebleau and these were the thoughts of Bilders, as he stood in the woods of his beloved Vorden.

Do you know Vorden, reader? If not, lose not a moment. Make her acquaintance, that picturesque spot of Gelderland, brought within our homes by the able brush of Johannes Warnardus Bilders. And do you like walking, reader? Then go from Lochem to De Cloese (this can now be done by steam tram) the property of Sickesz, pause in admiration before a noble beech, with enormous outstretched branches, which stands at the cross ways, and thank the owner of the land for not having allowed it to be cut down for the horrible modern mode of locomotion. Hats off for Mr. Sickesz!! And for the great tree, more than a century old, always standing in the same spot, and never seeming weary! I measured it one day as I often measure patriarchs when wandering in the country. 1) It measured, at the height of a man, 420 centimetres in compass (this was six years ago). After having admired the castle of De Cloese, now restored and modernized, then you return to the big beech and take the other road which will lead you to Lochemsberg, from the summit of which you will see the Zwiepsche bank, the Belvédère, the Witten Wivenkuul and other districts and points of interest and then, after partaking of refreshment at the "*Dollenhoed*" (a corruption of *Old Hat*), you go along a sandy road at the back of the inn to Wildenborch. We now find ourselves in the land of Bilders and Staring, the land of old castles and legends, low-lying marshy ground and yet well wooded. The botanist will enjoy himself

1) When on a walking tour through Gelderland I saw at least twenty old castles, each one standing in thick overgrown woods, some of the trees were very fine. The largest and grandest of these castles were Cannenburg, Nyenbeek, Doornwerth, Keppel, Ruurlo, Slangenburg, Wierse, Twickel (Overyssel) and Medler. Some were mediæval, some fortified and others country houses of the seventeeth century. The largest trees were near Ampsen, Twickel and Ruurlo. In front of the inn "*Carelshaven*" (Twickel) there stands a magnificent oak, the circumference of which, at a man's height, being 4.26 metre. The fir trees in the Twickel woods are splendid. About four years ago they were thinned out to get an outlook! There was one beech, the trunk of which looked like a silver column, yet nevertheless down it came. The oaks in and around Ampsen average from $3^1/_2$ to $5^1/_2$ metre. In the meadows of Castle Ruurlo, there stood, at the time I allude to, a chesnut 4.18 metre in compass. But to go still one better: an oak (La Briarée), not far from Barbizon, is six metres in circumference and at about fifteen metres high the trunk divides into two columns almost as thick.

particularly, he will find the *flora* of the marsh and the bright flowers of the field and the ferns of the woods. He will be able to pick at least three kinds of orchids; brilliant yellow plantains, gentians, fly-catchers etc. There is not much left of the original castle, which dates back to 1372, or even earlier perhaps when it was called Borchvrede. This is the Castle of Vorden! In the court yard there are two fine poplars, stately and erect. We walk in through the gate, thanks to the liberal minded owner, a certain Mr. J. J. Brants (the only son of Staring's eldest daughter). The small wood, within those gates, is like a reminiscence of antideluvianism, a sort of fairy wilderness through which you make your way with difficulty. About five or six years ago I remember

The old Church at Heelsum. From a sketch.

finding two huge trees blown down and lying across the moat, in truly paintable fashion. We find plenty of maiden hair ferns in this nature's wilderness and many lovely flowering weeds, though this is a misnomer. After half an hour's dreamy contemplation of all these charms of nature, you go out through the same gate and on to the village of Vorden.

Perhaps the road may have been hot and sunny, in which case the tired traveller wants rest and refreshment. At the entrance to the village you will find a charming little inn kept by a Mrs. Ensink, commonly called "Widow Ensink." There you will find yourself as comfortable as at home. Far more comfortable than in country hotels, where the *kellner*, with his black coat and white tie, has imported to the country the prose of the town. I hope that Vorden will long be spared. I always grumble when I see those ugly black

coat tails daring to show themselves in the peacefulness of a picturesque country village. When the country inn becomes an hotel immediately the quality of the food goes down and the bill goes up. When I am in the country I want to be waited on by the natives, who have lived in the place all their lives, and their ancestors before them: the clean farmer's wife, the buxom daughter, the labourer's child. You then feel at your ease and say with Falstaff: "I'll take my ease in my inn." Well, to go back to widow Ensink, I have the pleasantest recollections of my rest under her hospitable roof. Every thing beautifully clean, every thing good and the best of its kind. The mineral water, which she placed before me on that hot day, was as good as Falstaff's sack,—I can see the stone bottle now, it is engraven on my memory. And as for the food, nothing could have been better than the widow's *cuisine*. The inn was rightly named the "Gelderland Arms", I think that any foreigner, who wants to taste Dutch cooking, cannot do better than to look in upon the hostess of the "Gelderland Arms", they would get a far better idea of our Dutch cookery than by going to the big hotels in the large towns. Such delicious unadulterated soup, such veal cutlets, such pancakes! Go and taste them and then tell me whether I am not right. I am not surprised when I hear that Bilders was a great friend of the widow's husband. Amongst the many anecdotes, related by our artist, I remember distinctly the "Ensink sandwiches" always provided by the thoughtful woman for her artists when going out sketching for the day. Another amusing story Bilders tells in connection with these celebrated sandwiches: Painting one day near an old *chateau* he perceived a very old servant coming towards him. It proved to be the old attendant of the equally old Baron, who inhabited the said *chateau*. The nobleman had sent his servant to invite the artist to come and partake of a cup of coffee. At first Bilders refused, being quite satisfied with what Mrs. Ensink had provided for him, but reflecting that, as it was September, he might possibly get a plump partridge and perhaps other good things, he laid down his palette and followed the ancient servant. What was his disgust at receiving nothing but a cup of coffee, which was very weak and served in a cracked cup and on a kitchen tray. Was this worth the loss of time? And did he think of his sandwiches? He afterwards learnt that the Baron was an eccentric *célibataire* and well known for his closeness.

Bilders was a great admirer of Hobbema and Ruysdael, *he too* fell under the spell of the water-mill at Vorden, not far from the castle, which has now been restored and is inhabited by Baron van der Borch. The van der Borches were Bilders best and truest friends. He often gave the young Baron a word of advice at the time of the restoration of the old historical castle. Although the gates are no longer thrown open to the public, yet, if any one shows a particular desire to see the old mill, he is not refused an entrance. The closing of the gates is owing to the number of the cheap trippers, who invade the country in the summer, through the enterprise of the railway companies.

I confess to have been somewhat disappointed with the old mill, but perhaps the light was not just right on that particular day. The beauties of nature depend much upon the lights and shades and atmospheric effects, and sometimes it requires more than one visit to see the charm. Certainly Bilders knows how to select the right moment. Look at his painting of the old castle. (Page 93).

It is here that I mean to quote from Vosmaer's essays on Bilders, from his "Our modern painters": "To listen to his (Bilders) conversation on the subject of art, and on the charms of nature, is to understand his poetical rapture when on the subject of this particular spot: the deserted castle; the ancient trees, so patiently keeping watch, the creepers of equal antiquity, climbing up to the top of every thing and clinging even to the turrets, making suitable and safe homes for the fowls of the air; it is a ballad; a romance; in fact it is the story of the Sleeping Beauty in the woods. Bilders awakened the Beauty, but not after the manner of the brave knight of fairy-land fame, but as the poet, the romantic art-lover. And not only the beauty has he awakened but the sleepy pools, with their bright reeds and rushes; the old raven, who looks upon the place as his own, the trees understand him, those trees of centuries old, not the stunted underwood of the Provinces of Holland, tall and lanky with but a tuft at the top, no, trees of large dimensions, covered in summer with masses of foliage, the bark overgrown with moss and creepers, and ferns growing in adoration at their feet. Every thing and all things came under our artist's magic wand."

Beautifully expressed, but.... as if inspired by the fantastic hand of Doré and not by the true nature-loving brush of Bilders. And.... in the Provinces of Holland you find more than underwood, the trees there are not merely long and lanky with but a tuft at the top! Vosmaer is too romantic in his criticisms, far more so than Bilders in his art. One can admire the Provinces of Holland as well as Gelderland. In Gelderland nature is grander, broader; the undulating lines of the country more pronounced; the verdure thicker and stronger; but the ground is drier and the shades of green less tender than in the Provinces of North- and South-Holland. I, for my part, would rather see the simple daisy growing at my feet than the grander blossoms of Gelderland, I prefer the soft green grass, always fresh and brilliant, to the *melampyrum* and other plants of greater pretentions. In Gelderland the influence of German colouring is already felt. I remarked at the Bilders-Exhibition that some of the pictures were more fascinating by reason of their soulful composition than by reason of their colouration. It is even as David van der Kellen wrote—and he knew the artist from the early days of his career—: "there was something left to be desired as regards colour, notwithstanding the poetical and elevating tone of the pictures, and some are melancholy by reason of their darkness and want of colour. On the whole he just misses to portray that freshness in the landscape which we have, of late, got accustomed to by seeing the works of the younger school, whose

The Castle of Vorden. In the possession of Mr. G. van Tienhoven.

pupils dare use the bright green unmixed. The older men do not dare, or do not care, to do so, but if applied with knowledge, it brings freshness into the canvas and produces a charming effect of clearness."

Not only the water-mill and Castle of Vorden have been immortalized by our artist, there are other parts which took his fancy as well: the lake, the river; the meadows; farm houses; the picturesque shipbuilding yard and the more distant Castle of Hackfort.

I examined this old *chateau* from all sides, it is a great big brick building, discoloured and moss grown, and not inhabited. The lake at the back is full of weeds, like a green carpet. Weeds in fact growing every where, creepers and underwood so thick that it was almost a puzzle to find the old brick pile. It gave me the impression of an enchanted castle, where the fairies come and make merry in the moon beams. This was indeed a paradise for naturalists and botanists. As the shades of twilight were drawing in I noticed, near a ditch, a red calf, on which fell the rays of the fast setting sun. These rays produced a wonderful effect on the glossy hide of the animal, a colour that not even a Rembrandt could have excelled. My companion was equally struck by the "illuminated calf" and both of us remember the circumstance till to-day and frequently allude to it, when chatting together about the past. Now I tremble when I think what has happened to this enchanted castle, in its surrounding wilderness, and to the stately oaks and to the elves and fairies, for I hear that the word "Restoration" is sounding even at Hackfort and the owner, a certain Baron von Westerholt, is soon to inhabit his baronial hall, when probably the sound of children's voices will take the place of the songs of the fairies and sprites.

At the Bilders-Exhibition I particularly noticed the following pictures: "Lake at Hackfort" two views (4—31), the damp atmospheric effect is cleverly done, the place looks thoroughly deserted; "The Parsonage at Vorden" (13); "Behind the Inn at Vorden" (38); "Ship-buildingwharf at Vorden" there were several of these (3.42.45.5). These were painted after Bilders had spent his 67th birthday. "Early morning at Vorden" (41) and "Gates of the Castle of Vorden" (17) both decidedly of a Corot style.

The National Museum in Amsterdam possesses a fine canvas by Bilders. It represents some part of the country at Hackfort. This painting was presented to the Museum by Mr. Zimmerman. This was undoubtedly a favorite spot, not only of Bilders himself, but of his pupils, especially in the fall of the year when the river rises very high and overflows its banks and the old trees stand, with their roots in the rapidly moving stream, their great branches reflected in the water, as they would be in a mirror. On page 93 you will find the reproduction of a view of the castle of Vorden (in the possession of Mr. G. van Tienhoven). This picture was painted in 1871 and may be considered one of his finest canvases.

In some of Bilders' pictures you will find that the figures have been drawn

in by Mauve; this we find in "Vespers" (likewise in the possession of Mr. van Tienhoven). In some of his smaller canvases Rochussen has added the figures. Once or twice his son Gerard has been known to paint in a goat or a deer. But as a rule he does it all himself, even as Bosboom painted his figures in his churches. Who can do it as well as the artist himself who has chosen the subject and feels that it is a creation of his own brain into which he has put his heart and soul. The figures introduced by Rochussen are, to my mind, weak. Bilders' beautiful picture, bequeathed by Zimmermen to the Museum and reproduced in these pages, has the cows painted in by himself and beautiful they are with the sun reflected on their hides. Other pictures I can mention, where the figures or cattle are introduced by the hand of the painter himself: "A Laundry at Bleek;" "View of Vlagtwedde" which gained for the artist the gold medal at the Colonial Exhibition.

More impressive, at the Bilders-Exhibition, were his Black and Whites. The charcoal under his light touch seemed as if pliable to his ideas and rich fantasy. These *fusains* (charcoal drawings) were sent in by the Ladies Vleerring, Kneppelhout, van Dyck and by Messrs Banck, Kyser, Reekers, Van Tienhoven, Van Gogh and Buffa. In these *fusains* the colour suggestion is not powerful and we can imagine that we hear the rustling of the leaves, so pathetically realistic they appear to us. In these charcoals we notice, even more than in his paintings, the artistic poetical spirit of the artist. He had his own particular manner of introducing life into his pictures. He would place a heron on the edge of a pool, or a raven on the top branch of a tree, or paint a flight of crows, hovering and cawing around a tower, giving a look of even greater loneliness to the scene. Such a drawing as "Solitude" would do well to be prefaced by these lines of Goethe:

Ueber allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh;
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.

That some people see nature through a poet's spectacles is plainly proved by the story of a vision, that I was told, Bilders had had near the Castle of Vorden. The story runs thus: One evening late, when it was growing dark, Bilders suddenly noticed that all the windows of the old deserted castle were lit up and he could see within. Going nearer he perceived that the place was inhabited and fiilled with knights and noble ladies, who were holding a bacchanalian feast. From the tower owls were screeching. He could see prisoners

being dragged from the dungeon below and put to torture, while the usurpers cried: "Thus we were treated in the olden times." At one window stood a young girl, a beautiful virgin, who seemed to implore him, by her gestures, to come and rescue her from her tormentors. Suddenly the vision vanished and all was dark again. Probably a distant cock had crowed, heralding the approach of day. The spirit-world is not proof against the voice of cock a doodle doo. Bilders would never, I am told, acknowledge that it was only a dream. It was probably the self-critic within him clothed in the garb of romance. The poetical side of Bilders can metamorphose a restless night into a beautiful visionary dream.

When the Dutch colony heard in Paris the various anecdotes about Corot,

A rustic Bridge, over the stream at Vorden. From a sketch.

at the time if the Corot-Exhibition, I feel sure that they will have been reminded of our own painter Bilders. Those two men had many traits of character in common, both were of a kindly disposition, both were full of animation and animal spirits and both might have been heard singing while wielding the brush. A fine day, or a glorious sun-set would make our artist's heart to overflow with joy and he would wish to stand treat to every creature he met; he has been known, on such occasions, to treat the village children to a substantial tea. There is a pretty story attached to his large canvas at the National Museum, (The Enserick meadows at Vorden): he and a few of his pupils had made up their minds to spend three months, one summer, painting in these Enserick meadows at Vorden. In the centre of one of these

meadows stood a great clump of old oaks—now gone—the artists took up their position intending to start work when they perceived, that amongst the peaceful cows, there was a bull who eyed them angrily for daring to disturb his harem. Not desiring a nearer acquaintance with His Royal Highness Bilders went to the farmer, who owned the land, to enquire what the cost would be to keep the bull within its stable during three months. "Thirty guilders" (£2 10.0) answered the greedy farmer without hesitating. To make quite sure of the contract the farmer demanded half the sum to be paid down at once, the rest to be paid at the end of the time. When the three months were up Bilders, when paying the second half of the thirty guilders, asked to look at the offending creature. The bull was in splendid condition and, as the saying goes, was as fat as a pig. Upon questioning the farmer he found out that the animal was ready for the market and was going to Zutphen the following day. Bilders then discovered that the bull had been destined to confinement *and* the butcher before he (Bilders) had appeared on the scene, so that the greedy farmer had pocketed his thirty guilders, without any additional expense on his own account. The story remained, for a long, the spicy tale of the neighbourhood.

Bilders' big fantastic historical canvas: Netherland's Wild Prehistoric State" was painted during the time that he lived in Amsterdam. It is a curious composition; it represents a combination of ancient woods and marshy lands, split oaks and fallen trees, many of them giants of the forest, a luxurious vegetation and a variety of wild water fowl. Bilders was one of the projectors of the plan for the founding of a Historical Gallery, in the rooms of *Arti*. His co-operators were Herman ten Kate, Rochussen, Springer and Lingeman. There has been lately some trouble in that camp, the unnecessary squandering of money has been much commented upon. It appears that Bilders' painting, just alluded to, is the only one left hanging of the first lot, for the present committee have been weeding out to a great extent. According to some people, the picture was kept because it was a decorative subject and "the canvas fitted in its place so well." Others have it that Fate had a finger in the pie and that "Netherland's wild prehistoric state" was symbolical of the wild and unrestful state of *Arti* in 1895.

Bilders was a well known man in Amsterdam, moving in the best circles and often seen in society. It goes without saying that he was one of the leaders in the art circles. He was a great friend of the art patron Willink van Collen, who has founded the home for the encouraging of young artists. Mr. Collen's wife was the niece of Mrs. Bilders. She, Sylvius, has given us a stirring account, in the sketch she wrote about her aunt, of that love match which took place so late in the life of the artist. Miss Bosse was at *first* his pupil, *then* his comrade, *then* his friend and *last but not least* she became his wife. This marriage took place in 1880, when the lover had nearly completed his three score years and ten .... It was said of them that they went "*in gleichem Schritt und Tritt.*"

After a residence of twenty years in Amsterdam the artist felt himself drawn again towards Oosterbeek. But oh how changed did he find the place! Given up to the jerry builder! Yet some parts had been left to nature's care. Wolfhezen was still the Wolfhezen of old and the Veluwe was still in its glorious beauty. Heelsum and Doorwerth ever picturesque. From 1880 to 1883 the newly married couple took little sketching trips. They visited Drenthe and Groningen; at Gieten much work was done as will have been seen at the Exhibition of Bilders' works: "Landscape at Gieten" (37) "A Lane near Gieten" (30); there were some twenty canvases of those northern Provinces. Wedde, Vlagtwedde and Westerwold, those wild northern districts, were seen by Bilders alas! too late in life. The finest thing he did in Drenthe was a *fusain* representing a tumulus at Gieten. This picture belongs to his widow. In Drenthe he saw the spirit of Hobbema, in Westerwold that of Ruysdael. He was a sincere admirer of these great artists. He never would enter, so I have been told, the National Museum because he heard that his great predecessors suffered in consequence of their works not harmonizing with the architecture of the building.

The last sketching trip that Bilders undertook was to Heelsum, near Oosterbeek, but I think that only his wife profited by the beautiful scenery, for the artist himself was then beyond work.

The lung complaint, which attacked him in 1883 when he was seventy-two years old, he never could get rid of and from that time regular work ceased. But he never lost interest in art matters and his artistic wife kept him in touch with the art world. 1)

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1) Here I think a few words should be said about Mrs. Bilders herself, whose work is esteemed as much as that of her husband. She is called "the painter of beech and birch, of heath and solitude." Much of her time was spent at Vorden before she married, depicting the stretches of heathland and making a complete study of every kind of tree and shrub, although I think the beech is her favorite. It was at Vorden that she met her husband, who at first was her guide on the territory of art, and afterwards her guide through life. The eagerness she showed to succeed was intense, and when encouraged, by the man she loved, she worked with a will that was beautiful to behold. When Bilders and Miss van Bosse were married they went to live at Oosterbeek, the Barbizon of Holland, where Bilders had already done much painting and where he eventually died at a ripe old age.

Mrs. Bilders' pictures are well known and command high prices. Especially beautiful is a painting called: "The Forester's cottage" in which we see a wide path, with tall beeches on either side, leading up to the woodman's little home; in the road are deep ruts, made by the wheels of heavy carts. Another canvas which has attracted my attention goes under the name of: "The old Beech at Oosterbeek." But more beautiful than all is the painting representing the old oaks at Wolfhezen, commonly called the "*Wodanseiken*" (Wolfhezen is not far from Oosterbeek). There is rather an amusing story attached to these old oaks. They are not much more than a group of gnarled stumps, standing in a natural stream. Lovers of nature, picnic parties and artists, flock there in summer time, to sit under the shadow of these historical trees, for the story goes that they date back to the days of the ancient Druids, who were supposed to have performed their singular rites and cruel sacrifices under the shade of their branches. The reader of folk lore sees, in his imagination, the long bearded priests, in the time of the Wodan Feest, gathering in, with golden sickles, the mystical mistletoe branches, which were considered holy if growing on the oak. Bilders was looked upon as the father of the art fraternity of Oosterbeek, and every young artist when he arrived in Oosterbeek, with the intention of remaining to study, was supposed to be baptized by Bilders, the high priest, in the ravine under the old *Wodanseiken*. For this ceremony a wheel barrow was placed in the water, upon which stood Bilders and his victim. These baptismal rites were observed with the greatest solemnity, causing much fun and amusement. *(Trans.)*.

Bilders did not suffer much and his mind remained clear till the end and his heart always young. Sometimes his careful wife had to turn the conversation in other channels for Bilders would excite himself when talking of


The Castle of Doornwerth. From a painting.

his youth and of by-gone days. Oh these happy days at Rozenhage, (this was the name of their villa at Oosterbeek), the pleasant confidential talk of the past. Sometimes the old man's imagination would wander to the days

when he went wild fowl shooting or fishing; or the memory of his soldiering days would be uppermost in his mind and he would fancy that he heard the sound of the drum. Then again he would be painting and dreaming delightful dreams of honour and glory, and living over the joy of the sale of his first picture. Then he would be listening to Jenny Lind or going wild with excitement over Rachel, and her wonderful talent. Or he would live over again, in thought, his visit to Italy and his first sight of the old masters. But his careful and loving wife knew that he should not excite himself in this way, for it always brought on a fit of coughing and generally ended in a sleepless night.

He died on the 29th of October 1890 at the great age of seventy nine and was laid to rest in the quiet picturesque churchyard at Oosterbeek. By his own wish it was a very simple funeral, yet there were crowds that followed, for he was honoured, not only as the poet-painter, but as a man of noble deeds and kindly disposition.

To quote the words of his sorrowing widow: "a poetical nature; a good memory; patient and persevering; great working powers; an animated spirit and a kind heart, to which I may add a handsome face. These qualities made him a man of no ordinary type."

It was a great honour to his memory when Dr. Hugenholz referred to him thus from the pulpit: "a painter; a poet; a man who felt for others, taking a great interest in all mankind, and a deep thinker."

This sketch should properly speaking have, as a final paragraph, a discussion over the reason why the artist continued for so many years to be so successful in his own small country and where so much of his work has found a home, and we should also inquire into the artistic power which emanated from his personality, but I have already overstepped my borders and am encroaching upon my neighbour's pages. But I must add that Bilders had a horror of any thing that partook of the nature of a *réclame*, and that he was a very just man. Politics were hateful to him and Diplomacy odious. This may have been the secret why he was loved by young and old, by rich and poor and is remembered, with the greatest esteem, by all those who ever came in contact with him during his long and honorable life.

The noble oak, the mighty beech,
  The solemn fir, the graceful ash;
He knew them all, and painted each,
  For love of nature, not for cash.

The heathland with the heath so blue,
  Those mystic stretches in the North;
For years he was to them so true,
  He loved their beauty, knew their worth.

These were the subjects painted most,
When in poetic vein and mood:
An ancient castle with a ghost,
Or ruins hiding in a wood.

He painted river, stream and lake,
And o'er his work he never sighed;
But dearer was his Oosterbeek, 1)
Where long he lived and where he died.

1) Pronounced bake.

# WILLY MARTENS

BY

P. A. HAAXMAN JR.

Queen Wilhelmina at Soestdyk. From a portrait in the possession of H. M. the Queen.

# WILLY MARTENS.

You have merely to mention the name of Willy Martens and immediately the person you are addressing knows who you mean. He belongs to those artists who may be called celebrated, and he is one of the shining lights of the *Pulchri Studio*, that Studio so well known, far and wide, for its works.

But here is quite another question: "Do you know the man?" If you do, you will agree that these words: *ex ungue leonem*, are applicable to him. His outward appearance does not immediately suggest to you the artist.

By his tall figure and broad shoulders, by his martial look and perhaps rather severe expression, and by his gait, you would naturally put him down

"In the Boudoir." A painting in the possession of Mr. J. G. P. at the Hague.

as a soldier. Put him into a cavalry uniform, and imagine a dozen officers of his build and general appearance, and you would almost think that Napoleon's army had come back to life again. I do not know whether Martens belongs to a military family, but I feel sure that some ancestor occupied a high military position. Upon me he makes the impression of a Field-Marshal, in the days of the empire. He certainly outstrips, in the matter of physique, all his art colleagues at the Hague.

These are the traits that might lead you to think that our artist is a soldier, and yet he has no connection whatever with the army. The painter Rochussen was often mistaken for a statesman, by his outward appearance; his was a singularly *chevaleresque* type. But both men are and were the sons of merchants. Marten's father was a merchant in Java, when Willy was born, on the 1st of December 1856, at Samarang. But his Eastern education was not of much account, nor could it have made much impression on his life, for he was brought to Holland when he was but three months old. His parents came over to the old country and settled down in Amsterdam.

A drawing for the portrait of Miss J. B. in Paris.

Judging by his present appearance, and by the manner in which he looks you through and through, I naturally conclude that, as a boy and youth, he belonged neither to the gloomy nor to the sedate. I am also convinced that he grew up to be a man at a very early age. The father's wish was that he should go into business, (the usual fatherly precaution), and at first the son seemed agreeable to the plan. To this end he was placed at the big Commercial School. The lad was of a quick comprehension, showed ability in the matter of languages, and was soon at the top of his class. But the father's happy illusions were short lived. The love of art showed itself early in his son's character, but not wishing to distress his parents he kept the matter to himself, knowing how bent his father was upon his following in his footsteps. But mischief will out. He allowed his friends to see some of his drawings and after receiving a good deal of praise from them, he determined to make his father acquainted with his new idea. So he took the bull by the horns, expecting a regular family scene; but to his surprise the matter was received quietly. The father saw that the son was determined and he wisely gave in, but upon the condition that Willy should run through the whole course of his studies

at the Commercial School even to the last examination. That night the lad, I am told, slept better than he had done for ages and dreamt the beautiful visionary dream of an enthusiastic artist.

The contract was kept by both parties. Willy went through all his exams brilliantly, after which his father said: "Now go your own way." The signpost pointed to the Academy in Amsterdam; he went there and profited by the able instructions of Allebé and Wynveld. His good sound schooling, and his knowledge of foreign languages, were ever after a help to him and he never regretted following his father's advice. At the Amsterdam Academy he worked with Tholen, Dake, Voerman and with Haverman; these men were Allebé's best pupils and Martens joined them, soon adding to that number. They all found their way and the bent of their talent under the roof of that Academy; Martens' road lay by way of Paris whither he went, with the consent of his father, in 1881. He was strongly advised to go in for a course of study at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts;* Hébert and Cabanel being at the head of the painting classes at that time. The *atelier* of Cabanel was so much in vogue, just then, that Martens could not get in, which he regretted, as his compatriot, De Josselin de Jong, —who had gone to Paris after a course at the Antwerp Academy—was there at the time. It was customary for celebrated artists to have an *atelier* for pupils,not for profit but for glory. Bonnat, Cormon, Dagnan Bouveret had these *ateliers*, and they were called "*Atelier libre.*" No money was asked for instruction, but the arrangement was that the expense of studio and model should be divided monthly amongst the students themselves.

A study in chalks. (Elspeet).

Martens put his name down for the first vacancy in Bonnat's *atelier;* Bonnat was already *then* a great man, one who only looked in upon the students of his *Atelier* once a week, generally Saturday morning, when he passed his opinion upon their work with the severest criticism. He seldom said more than three words to each, but that was enough. Frits Jansen was

the cock of the walk at the *Atelier-Bonnat*, so relates Martens. When Martens left Bonnat he went to Cormon's studio for a year, after which he tried to set up a studio for himself. This was easier said than done; Paris is a big place and the art world covers much ground, and yet it was difficult for him


A study. (Elspeet).

to find a suitable corner to call his own and to strike out independently and stand on his own feet. After eleven years in Paris he discovered, even as Jacob Maris and Artz had done, that for a real Dutch artist Paris will always remain a foreign land. It is excellent for technique, but a Dutch artist must

feel Dutch ground under his feet, he must breathe Dutch air, imbibe her rich colouring and tone and live in the very midst of all those peculiarities, which have been for ages and ages the foster-mother of Dutch art.

From my conversation with Martens, and after having seen his later work, I could notice the influence which his sojourn in Paris had had upon him. He brought away only that which was good and could be useful to him: pleasant cultivated manners; a distinguished air, which however does not exclude friendliness; fluency and correct pronunciation of the French language and a thorough knowledge of foreign art. In colouration he is completely and entirely Dutch, this he appears to have learnt since his return to his own country about eight years ago. But when he paints a portrait his French education rises to the top and his style is perfect Parisian. We see it in the elegant pose of his sitter, in the graceful outline of the figure, in the harmony between light and shade, all these qualities go to make Martens a specialist in portrait painting. I can quote a very charming picture which will prove my statement. It represents a beautiful young woman in evening dress, sitting near a table: the graceful pose is striking. The dress is white satin, of the purest tone, and contrasting well with the soft fleshy tints of the neck and arms, a dark mantle is thrown over the chair and the back ground harmonizes with the whole. All the detail is done in masterly style, and yet it does not attract the notice too much, for the sweet face, with its finely cut features and the carnation on the cheeks, to say nothing of the kind look in the pretty eyes, dominates the canvas. This portrait I consider a harmonizing sympathy in tender tones.

A study in chalks.

It was painted in Paris at the time when he was living in a little country house at Nanterre, in the neighbourhood of St. Germain and Marley. The years that he had behind his back had been years of hard work and struggle. After many fruitless efforts he at last sold a picture to Albert Goupil, whose business house has always played such a big rôle in bringing Dutch art to the fore and placing it throughout the entire civilized world.

"I can still remember" said Martens "what it meant to me at the time, that first little ray of hope! That first picture sold! My model was a nice little girl from a neighbouring cottage, dressed completely in white—even to her hat—which made a coquettish contrast to the blue of the background. I put some flowers in her lap and called her a flower girl.

Encouraged by this very modest success I continued for a time to paint in this same style," "Yes, I remember," I said, interrupting him, "I remember a picture you did in those days, a delightful little *genre* painting in that very

style. I can see it now, as it hung in the triennial Exhibition at the Hague, in one of the back rooms. The exquisite colouring drew the attention of every one at once, rose colour was the chief key of the harmony of this pretty little *Parisienne* and her boudoir. I think it was a fancy picture. It certainly was perfect in every respect."

"Yes, I must say, I had a lot of satisfaction out of that picture. It was bought by Mr. Patyn who was, at that time, President of the Exhibition Committee. He bought it a few days after the opening of the Exhibition."

Between the picture bought by Mr. Goupil and that bought by Mr. Patyn lay a world of hard work and determined striving. He, Martens, had always had a great desire to do large decorative panels, the taste for which was brought into vogue by Puvis de Chavannes, Besnard and one or two other prominent men. These large canvases attracted Martens. In the Louvre he had made some excellent copies after Italian masters. In his studio hangs a life sized figure after Botticelli. His inclination for these large works was augmented after a trip to Italy. During one of his flights to Holland (while he was living in France) he was commissioned, by Mr. van Glyn of Dortrecht, to artistically decorate the ceiling and walls of his dining room, a large undertaking which he accomplished with much credit to himself. He was also bitten by the Panorama mania, although not during the time when these panoramas were first introduced. The Detailles and the Philippoteaux made much money when these shows were first started, but when Martens came on the scene the novelty had somewhat worn off. By request of a Dutch company, who were exploiting a Panorama at Copenhagen, he went there to restore it. It represented the burial of Pompeii, painted by Castellani, of which one half had been left unfinished and the other half carelessly done. Martens cleverly managed this restoration, although the work was strange to him. A few years later he received another order from an Amsterdam firm to paint an entire new Panorama for Copenhagen. This big work he commenced in Holland, finishing it in Copenhagen. His fellow-artist was Fred. Olderwelt. The subject of this Panorama was the last day of the commune in Paris. Martens had to make many extensive studies for this gigantic work. He spent some time in Paris for this purpose and worked from the top of the *Buttes de Chaumont.* Here he discovered a tavern keeper, who knew all about the commune and gave him valuable assistance, in the matter of the events of that last exciting day, and many important items in fact. Indeed some of the sketches were made entirely from this man's graphic description.

A study in chalks.

It was a very arduous piece of work, and after all was but a passing success.

The following year, 1887, he won his first laurels, at the Salon. The Jury awarded him *Mention Honorable*, for a portrait of Madame Colonne, wife of the well known Concert-Director and herself a singer of some importance who, at one time, had many pupils. This was more than a mere encouragement to the young painter, for although the Hollanders, in some respects, surpass all other nations in their art, yet portrait painting has been brought to the greatest perfection in France, a fact which the Dutch themselves will not dispute. If a portrait, painted by a Dutchman, attracted general attention at an Exhibition in Paris you may be sure that it was good.

Success now began to cast her sunny beams upon Martens and strange to say, at the same time, a feeling of homesickness came over him and a great desire to return to live in his own country. During the eleven years that he resided in Paris he took frequent little runs to Holland. Upon one of these occasions he met the lady who afterwards became his wife and whose portrait was successfully hung at the great International Exhibition in Paris in 1889, in the Dutch section of the building of *Les Beaux Arts*, as well as a portrait of a Mr. Wunderly, a compatriot of his. From that time dates his official relation with Dutch art. In 1888 he was chosen as delegate to superintend the hanging of the Dutch pictures at the said Exhibition and to identify himself with the interests of his co-artists, who were exhibiting their works. The committee placed full confidence in him and it was soon seen that that confidence was not misplaced, for it is a well known fact that the Dutch art section was a complete success and for this we have, in a great measure, to thank Martens. He was one of the judges and Artz was Vice-President and the Dutch painters received quite their share of decorations. That this open acknowledgment of praise, for the good qualities of our painters, was sincere may perhaps be doubted, but public opinion was too strong; yet on the whole I think they admire Dutch art more than the art of other nations; Meissonier spoke quite bluntly to Martens, on the subject, he said that he considered the figures, painted by our artists, were badly built and quoted, as an example, that he had nearly overlooked a really superior picture by Albert Neuhuys. In the midst of these rather unsympathetic elements Martens was just the right man to espouse the cause of his own countrymen and to plead their cause, with warmth, in his good French. Martens and Artz were both well suited to the task.

A study in chalks.

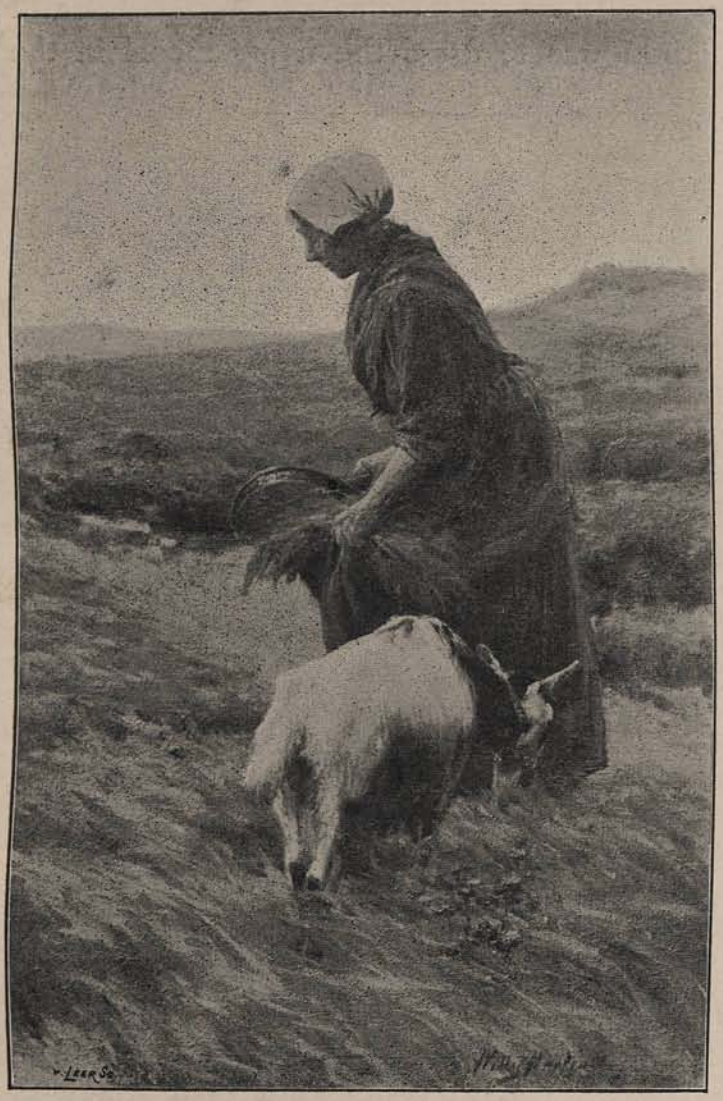
The French Government rewarded Martens with the Legion of Honour. He

*"Portrait of H. M. the Queen-Mother"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of H. M. the Queen.

was still in Paris at the time of the dispute between the Bouguereau-ists and Meissonier-ists which ended in the two parties splitting into two distinct groups: the one remained at the *Champs Elysées*, and the other, calling itself *Société Nationale*, held its Exhibitions on the *Champs de Mars*. Martens, with other of his compatriots, joined with the latter, showing their sympathy with the Meissonier-ists, or, as some would have it, secessionists. After this exciting time, in the Parisian art world, Martens left Paris for good and established himself at the Hague.



"The Widow." Painting in the possession of Mr. C. in Venice.

His work was well known of course at the Hague before he came to settle down there. The rose tinted picture of Mr. Patyn's pretty daughter and the little white flower girl, from Nanterre, had been the means of establishing a reputation for him. But Martens soon discovered that did he wish to do any real good he must start from the beginning again, and unlearn some of the things he had learnt, away from his own soil. French and Dutch atmospheres were very different. Indeed the same object can look totally different in the two countries. The soft atmospheric tints of the low lying country make every thing look richer, and there seems more harmony of colour in the flat moist land and in the people of her soil. In the autumn of the first year of Martens' return to Holland he went to Elspeet and Nunspeet, where he took to depicting sunny gardens and cosy corners of that picturesque country, where children play and where the farmer's wife toils from early morn. His tasteful manner of composition came to the fore and stood him in good stead. But do not imagine that these domestic and rural scenes were so easily arranged and put on the canvas, and that these playing children and working women were always grouped, with facility, in exactly the same positions from day to day. No, there was an immense deal of patience required, and no small amount of talent and taste, to place these country folks

in suitable attitudes, and a great deal of tact was required to make them understand that they were models for his brush, and that they must submit to the will of the artist.

Figure painters, of the present day, set to work in quite a different fashion from what their predecessors did, some fifty years ago. In those days I know there were, in the Hague, many models who earned their living by going from studio to studio. And if there was no living model on hand there was always a mannikin or a leather doll, from which the figures were drawn for the romantic interiors. The prevailing taste then was ladies in satin gowns and knights in grand costumes. The method was to dress the living model in the

"Playmates." Painting in the possession of the Firm of Boussod Valadon & Co. at the Hague.

satin garment on the first day and accurately draw the folds of the drapery; on the following day the mannikin was dressed up in the same dress and the folds adjusted in similar fashion and left thus till the picture was completed.

If an artist possessed any pretty piece of satin or velvet he would lend it to a *confrère*, and so it came about that often the same style of drapery was seen in many pictures. A woman called Kee Keizer was a well known model at the Hague in the time of Huib van Hove. She sat a great deal, not entirely on account of her good figure and pretty face, but because she understood the "trade" so well. She was generally attired in a satin gown, belonging to a well known artist, which accompanied her from studio to studio.

If you want to see Kee you can admire her at the *Pulchri Studio*, in her borrowed plumes, on a big canvas by Huib van Hove.

It is perhaps to be regretted that the art of that day has been banished, in as much as it left nothing to be desired, as regards correctness, and the mistake of the present day is the departure of the professional model (at least in a great measure) from the studio. But the really clever open-air painter has banished much that is untrue and has greatly advanced real art.

Martens was telling me that he had never painted a portrait under more favorable circumstances than the one he made of the Queen, in the gardens

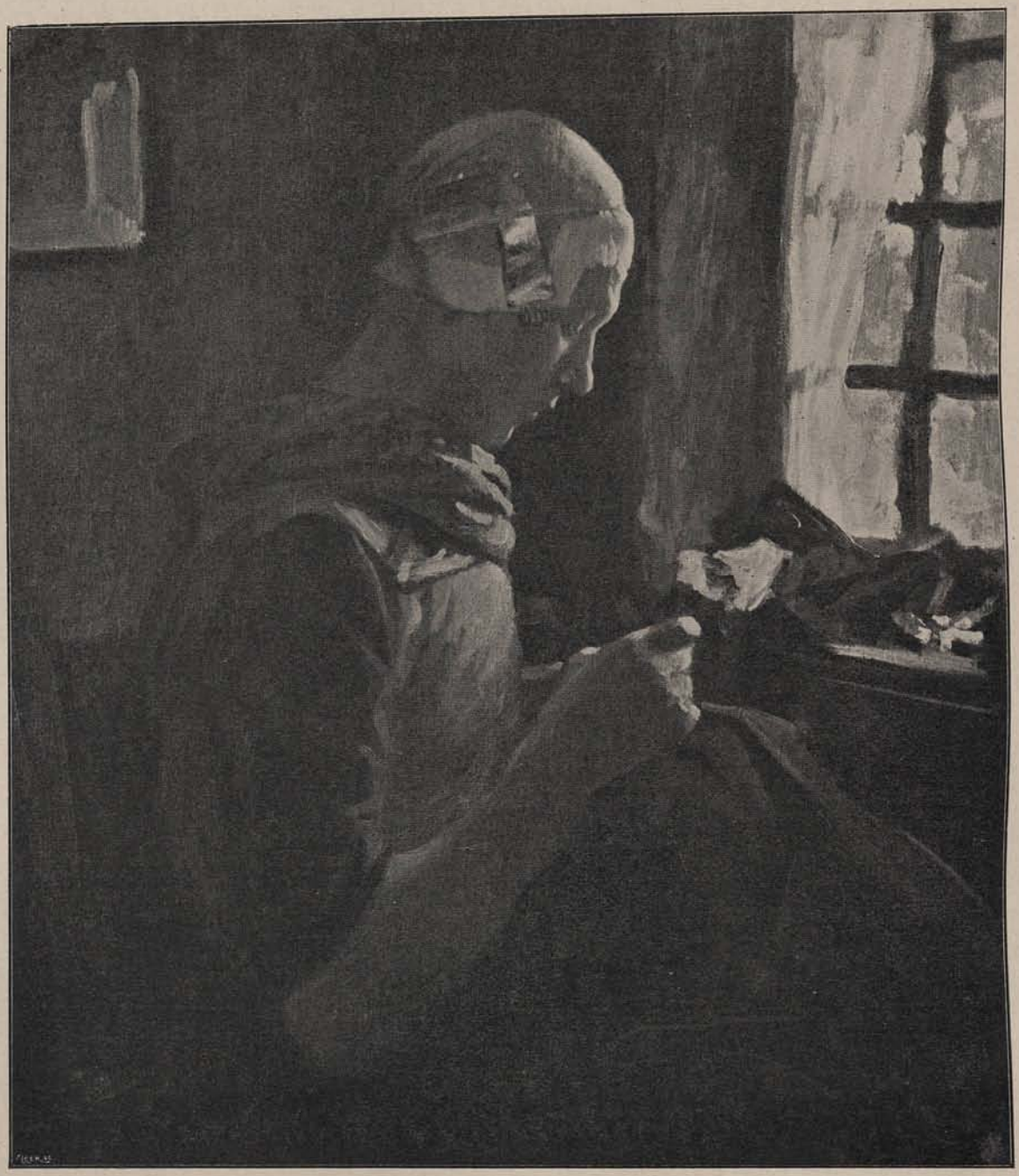
"Potato-Gatherers."

of Soestdyk, in mid-summer. Of course the job was more difficult than painting a portrait within the walls of his studio, because of the difficulty of regulating the light upon the face. Every thing combined to facilitate the work: fine weather, a lovely spot, a background of trees, and in the foreground the slight girlish, yet elegant figure, of Her Majesty, in an easy and extremely natural pose.

This picture (reproduced in these pages) in so well known to every one in Holland that I need not stop to describe it, but only add this much that many, who saw the reproduction, were struck by the charm of the picture, taking it to be a fancy subject and only, when examining the features, did they discover it was their Queen.

This portrait of our young Queen and the portrait of Martens' wife, in the white satin dress, are perhaps his greatest achievements. In his studio you will find two portraits of his wife, the one just alluded to and the other a

full length life-sized one, painted a few years later and exhibited in 1895 in Berlin, at the Exhibition of paintings in that city, for which he gained the gold medal. This picture was first exhibited at the *Pulchri Studio* and was very favorably criticized.



An interior at Nunspeet.

Upon a former visit to his studio I recollect seeing two life-sized portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Ruys de Beerenbrouck of Maastricht; a portrait of Madame de Steurs; a large full length portrait of our late King (a portrait ordered by the Queen Regent and destined for the Palace *Het Loo*) and a portrait of

Queen Wilhelmina, in gala dress, which was painted by order of the Government and sent to Batavia to be hung in Government House. This portrait was exhibited in the *Pulchri Studio* before starting on its long journey and received much well deserved praise. The execution was very fine, the drawing good and the pose graceful; the simple and distinguished look of the youthful Sovereign, and the manner in which the robes of state lay on the white marble steps, was much commented upon and won all honour and praise for the artist. A little bit of chic invariably peeps out from every one of his portraits.

This chic is however absent from his subjects of country folks; his farmer of Nunspeet and his wife and children, are just the very opposite to chic; they are rustic people, depicted by him with great simplicity and in the most natural of poses, a great contrast to his portraits of the upper classes; and yet the wife of the farmer is not without grace too, although her face is burnt by exposure to the rays of the sun, and her hands are sinewy and coarse by reason of her incessant toil.

A study in chalks. (Elspeet).

If you study carefully some of Martens' Nunspeet and Elspeet pictures, you will see that his women folk are posed with almost the same elegance as his boudoir beauties. Look at the dreamy maiden on page 109 (probably the beauty of Elspeet) there is something decidedly graceful in her attitude. Then look at the widow, (113) who is cutting grass for her goat, her position is easy and comely. But Martens can make his hard worked country women assume attitudes of necessity, which can hardly be called graceful: his potato gatherers, on page 115, are not dainty women, who could pose in a boudoir or look well in fashionable garments, but they are true to nature; these women know not the meaning of the word luxury. They are worthy to be classed with Millet's Gleaners. The sketches of little children, on pages 110—112, are quite delicious, and we almost expect to see them crawl out of the page. In great contrast to these country people is the elegant lady in her boudoir (106), who is sipping coffee from a delicate china cup, while she reads the news of the day; and charming too is the sketchy drawing, on page 107, for a full sized portrait of a Parisian Miss, whose attitude is one not often seen in picture exhibitions, the placing of the hand on the hip being generally looked upon as a washerwoman's trick, but

in this case Martens has given the position a touch of chic and graceful elegance.

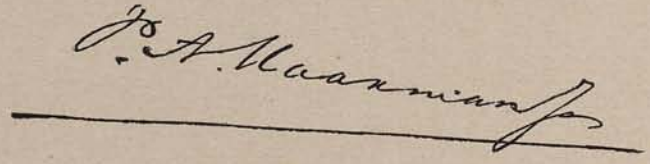
I must just return for a moment to Martens' official connection with Dutch art and the interpretation of it. During five years he was the secretary of the Society known as *Pulchri Studio* and with his friend Mesdag worked industriously

"Sewing a fine Seam." (Nunspeet).

and indefatigably in its cause, and the members of that society have much to thank him for. The holding of Exhibitions of special artists, in *Pulchri*, was entirely his idea, and he managed the matter so well that they proved a complete success. He was the great motive power too, during those five

years of secretaryship, in organizing and arranging the representing of Dutch art at all foreign art centres and when, in 1894, the big International Exhibition was held in Antwerp, he was made, by our Government, Royal Commissioner. That he, in this case, worked as industriously as in former cases and took to heart, in the most serious manner, the interest of his own countrymen, was seen by his receiving, at the close of the Exhibition, the order of the "*Netherlandsche Leeuw*" (The Lion of the Netherlands).

Notwithstanding the many good qualities of the Dutch school it is not overburdened with taste: this however Martens possesses to a high degree, thanks to his own character and to his long sojourn in the French capital. His water-colours, as well as his portraits, give evidence and bear out what I have said. May he retain this taste and may he be spared to us for many years to do honour and glory to our Dutch Art.



# MRS. S. MESDAG—VAN HOUTEN

BY

ANNA C. CROISET VAN DER KOP.


Still-life. (Fruit). Woodcut. From a water-colour.

# MRS. S. MESDAG–VAN HOUTEN.


"The Gods sell the best things for Sweat and Labour." When Joost van den Vondel wrote these words, in the month of June 1650, and made this confession of faith, he had already had the opportunity of proving their truth by experience.

"Work by the Sweat of the Brow!" Many may shun it, but not the higher intellects, to whom the power of will is given to make a start for themselves, to stand firm and to undertake, with determination, the struggle against ignorance and prejudice, degenerated by habit and by long established custom.

"To learning there is no end," these were the wise words spoken daily by Robert Schumann to his pupils, and these words may serve as motto for the clever woman, who is never idle, and who works all day long, seeking ever, on all sides, for matter wherewith to build up her intellect and develop her talent. This woman is Mrs. Mesdag—van Houten.

Of Vondel it may be said that he began to learn foreign languages at the age of twenty five. Mrs. Mesdag, born in Groningen on the 23d of December 1834, did not take pencil and brush in hand till 1870. And this was no mere passing whim, but brought about by an intense desire to follow in her husband's footsteps, coupled with a determination to succeed.

Married young (on the 23d of April 1856) it may be said that the first thirty years of her life were spent after the manner of so many women. She did not know what a talent lay dormant within her. Her friends and acquaintances called her "Singular" "Uncommon" "Not as others are." From her youth up her characteristic was a strong inclination for deep thinking and serious reflecting. A nonconformist and a believer she found much to interest her in Busken Huet's "Letters on the Bible", and much help and guidance from coming in contact with the able theologian Straatman, the clever Groningen preacher. Tractable to the general opinion of others she was not, unless perfectly convinced of the truth; she felt that one stone dislodged from the arch, the whole building would collapse; nor did she believe in the simple rule of give and take, and with inexorable principles she sometimes sacrificed such as might have proved of temporary value.

If these were Mrs. Mesdag's religious convictions and views of life they certainly were her ideas on the subject of all that concerned her husband. Not only did she respect his talent but she staked her whole faith on it. She was ready to enter the camp of difficulties with him, to undertake every arduous duty, to stand firmly by his side and to overcome, for him and with him, every obstacle that might impede his progress. 1) This enthusiasm for her husband was the awakening of her own dormant talent. Kind fate took her to Oosterbeek and afterwards to Brussels, where she associated with many celebrated artists, and it was during her sojourn in these two places, that the art within her, which had been groping for years in the dark, found an embodiment for its imagination, and an outlet for its fervour.

For the sake of amusement she may have occasionally made a sketch or

1) Mesdag took up painting late in life, he and his wife started upon their artistic career about the same time, each encouraging the other. Mesdag's great talent was not long in asserting itself, but the talent of Mrs. Mesdag required hard study to bring to its present state of perfection.

drawing, attracted by some object that was irresistible, but technical art was a stranger to her. Here lay her difficulty, her stumbling block; could this ever

be overcome? Her fingers itched to take up pencil and brush, and yet she knew that she could not even draw a correct line.

Keenly did she feel this obstacle to her ambition, but she consoled herself by saying: "To get to the top of the tower you must climb step by step, if you try to get up by other or quicker means you may fall and break your neck, and thus never reach the top at all." These thoughts braced her up and she did not allow herself to be disheartened by the feeling that she was still on the first step, still at the bottom of the ladder. To make a beginning she started a course of drawing lessons, (although past thirty years of age), with a friend of her husband's, a certain d'Armand Gerkens who lived at the Hague.

She studied carefully and accurately every object, so scrupulously in fact that it pleaded eloquently for the determination which lay at the bottom of it all.

We cannot call it a beginning but a regaining of lost time. The mechanical part of this beginning was to her a great effort, to many it comes with facility, to her it was almost a struggle. However strong the inward motive was, with which she grasped her "tools", the more pressing was the anxiety and fear that she would never be able to interpret worthily those things which daily took an ideal form before her eyes.

With exceptional energy and with a determination she started upon the great purpose of her life: study, hard work, and ultimate success. Each object was carefully and separately portrayed and then collectively arranged, making pleasing studies of still-life: flowers, fruit, every thing in its turn, and now and then a model. It is particularly remarkable how every thing, either animate or inanimate, was entirely true to nature.

In 1871 she began with oils. A few studies of Scheveningen were the first to call for her notice. Then every thing was looked upon as necessary for close examination. Each object was carefully and separately drawn. Trees claimed her special attention, every branch was minutely studied: the oak, the beech, the chesnut, the ash, the birch, every bush and every herb was attentively copied and reproduced over and over again. Then these branches or twigs were tastefully arranged in old Delft jars or in brass vessels, making pleasing pictures of still-life. Then she started a more difficult task, that of animal life. She began with her own Newfoundland dog. Nero was put upon canvas with a firmness of touch and correctness of outline which was most praiseworthy, and indicated no ordinary talent. She made many studies of this pet canine friend. The one I have seen is merely the black head of this fine creature, against a light background; extremely characteristic and executed in a masterly manner. 1)

Already in 1871 Mrs. Mesdag began to paint out of doors. She studied

1) In the Mesdag Museum.

nature carefully and seriously. Much time was spent in the Scheveningen Boschjes (The small woods of Scheveningen) where an *atelier* was erected for her and where she did much work. 1) At that time Mrs. Mesdag did a great deal of out-of-door work with her friend the talented Henrietta Lindo. The influence of these women upon each other was mutual, and all homage must be paid to both. Both acknowledge that they learnt much from the other; Mrs. Mesdag declares that she derived enormous benefit from working with her friend the gifted Miss Lindo.

It is certainly a characteristic trait, in the intellectual person, that he not only suffers willingly the proximity of other talent, but values it at its proper worth, and seems even pleased to have young strength and new ideas living along side of him for a time. Vondel was seventy nine years old when he went to Antonides van der Goes and begged him for a couple of lines out of his tragedy, for his own drama; this was indeed an encouragement for a young man of twenty five. William Bilderdijk was well in the fifties when he cultivated the genius of the seventeen year old Da Costa; Rembrandt gathered quite a

1) This *atelier* was removed later to one of the highest points of the downs, near the villa Duinauwe.

crowd of young artists around him without fearing that his nose would be put out of joint. And therefore, as I started by saying, the characteristic trait of clever people is that they can see cleverness in those around them, and that they try to benefit by the knowledge of others, even though those others be younger; it elevates them, as the beauty of nature elevates the thoughtful man. And so it was with Mrs. Mesdag, she likewise gathered the talented youth about her, who have much to be thankful for, and yet she herself ackowledges that associating with fresher minds and young original thoughts she gets many new ideas to ponder over, and by such means she strengthens her own intellect. And not only can this be said about the realms of art. Vondel appreciated and valued "the knowledge of varied science" and so Mrs. Mesdag extends her knowledge, not confining herself to one branch, but seeking for information from all sides, thus strengthening the particular work to which she is devoting herself. She considers nothing beneath her notice; she believes in every "master of his art," she tries to comprehend the art of music; she is *à la hauteur* of most modern languages, and a word of praise, from her lips, is an encouragement even to a poet.

In the summer of 1872 Mesdag and his wife spent several weeks in Friesland and in Drenthe. The beautiful heaths of the latter province afforded an excellent opportunity for much hard work and close study. The sheep in their pens; the farm houses, with their many picturesque accessories; the country folk in their quaint costumes; each and every thing was carefully studied and then drawn or painted, not as objects to stand alone, but to serve as detail in future pictures.

The poetry of the Drenthe heathlands buoyed up Mrs. Mesdag in a marvellous way, making an indelible impression upon her; these immense heaths, away from civilization, one might almost say. She painted every thing in a complete harmony, the man and his dwelling, the animal in his lair, the flat far-reaching land and the strange atmospheric effects of light and shade. She felt the charm of it all, she felt inspired by this sad isolated land, she knew it to be the realization of her ideal. It was poetry in line and colour, it was a song without words. Carefully she studied the soft undulating lines of the soil, and every peculiarity of the simple minded people. All this close observation can be noticed in her later works and her careful study of light and shade, of bright or dull skies, against the rich colour of the soil, shows the poetic nature-loving soul of the persevering woman. When back in her own studio, and away from the dreamy heaths and moors, all these sketches were made into pictures, and undoubtedly some of them may be considered amongst her best.

For two or three years Drenthe remained for her, in the summer months, the point of attraction, where her impressions were renewed and refreshed. In later years it was the Veluwe, with its endless heaths and commons, which captivated our artist: Putten, Bennekom, Beekhuyzen, etc., here she studied the wonders of nature as closely as she had done in the Province of Drenthe.

"In the Woods." Reproduced from a water-colour by Mrs. Mesdag.

Who does not know her waving fields of rye; her yellow haystacks, against azure skies; her harvest fields, with the graceful bowing sheaves; the cottages

with deeply thatched roofs, slanting almost to the ground, with a small chimney craning out from some point, the old stained walls, the tiny door, from which runs a neatly kept path of yellow sand. All these subjects have been produced and reproduced by her able and poetical brush. Then again we see one of the primitive dwellers of the soil, standing out in distinct relief against a dull or rainy sky, through which streaks of silver grey are trying to penetrate. Sometimes she depicts the twilight, that mysterious moment when the dew falls and the land is enveloped in a soft grey veil, making the outlines indistinct like the face of a bride behind her bridal veil. Then again it is the moon which attracts her poetic fancy, casting her phantom light over the dark world. A painting in this style was exhibited in Berlin. On this canvas we see the moon, just as she has broken through a grey cloud, spreading her silvery sheen over the sleepy land; in the centre we are given a sheep fold, at the door of which a flock of sheep are jostling and pushing each other, all eager to enter their place of rest. The wavelike movement of these animals, is particularly graceful, and cleverly done. A little shepherdess is guiding them, as anxious to get them in as they are themselves to enter, for this means the end of her day's work. Her worn out blue petticoat is lighted up by a moonbeam; in her hand she appears to have a hoe. It is a most harmonious picture, every line is in accord with its neighbour. Its harmony and poetry might suggest these lines:

"Was von Menschen nicht gewusst,
Oder nicht bedacht,
Durch das Labyrinth der Brust,
Wandelt in der Nacht."

But in a totally different style is the big canvas which now hangs in the Mesdag Panorama. This is all brightness and sun-shine. Here we see two sunny cottages or strictly speaking huts, surrounded by corn sheaves, gracefully bending and contrasting well with the tone of the yellowish atmosphere, the whole picture brought into a warm glow by the rays of the setting sun; it is a mighty colour-symphony.

But as a general rule Mrs. Mesdag prefers painting her beloved heathlands. She delights in the great expanse of heath or moor, with a small sandy serpentine path or a wider one, with deep ruts—caused by the wheels of the heavy carts—where the rain collects and reflects the light of the sun. Sometimes

*"Still-life"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of the artist.

we see a couple of trees silhouetted against a light patch of background. A sketch after this style was exhibited in 1889 at the Mesdag-Exhibition, which consisted entirely of the works of both Mr. and Mrs. Mesdag. It was however first exhibited in the Panorama in Amsterdam and afterwards in the rooms of *Pulchri Studio* at the Hague.

These heathlands have always inspired our artist, for small canvases as well as for large ones. A well known canvas by Mrs. Mesdag is a representation of the stream at Beekhuyzen, seen by the light of the setting sun; this is a large picture. The rays of the sinking orb throw a golden light over the expanse of heath, giving the whole picture a browny golden tint and making the sandy roads look almost yellow, as they wind about into the distance. To the left, in the background, we see dark bushes; the rays of the sun are most visible in the centre, throwing a bright hue over the boundless stretch of land and losing themselves in the distant horizon to the right. The whole picture is a powerful conception, glowing not only with the warmth of the sun but with the poetical enthusiasm of the painter.

Our artist is always at her best when depicting anything that has made a deep impression upon her. Having, one day, to wait at the station of Ede, she was suddenly inspired by the lovely view obtained from that point; this impression took such hold of her that she could not throw it off. She returned and made a rough sketch of the extensive view, which was eventually the motive for a charming picture. The warm brown heath is scattered all over with patches of purple. In the distance rise stately fir trees, the dark crowns of which appear almost black against a bright spot in the sky. All the elements seem in league together to bring about a harmony of tone, which is very impressive. We seem forced to understand what the artist has wished to say, and in gazing at the picture we feel the power and greatness of her brush.

These pictures: "The Heath at Ede" and "Huts at Sunset" were exhibited at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1889 and won for the artist the bronze medal. Later on they were exhibited at the Hague in the "Panorama" where a room was especially set aside for the works of Mrs. Mesdag.

After a long study of heathlands our artist took to the study of still-life, in oils and in water-colours. The latter are always exhibited at the yearly show at the Academy of Drawing, and always meet with well deserved success. In her still-life we notice two great properties: an original interpretation and a decided knowledge of colour arrangement. Water-colour lends itself well to pleasant impressions and to tonality of colouration. Although it has not the power of oils yet it can all the better depict the bloom on a bunch of grapes, or reflection through glass, or the warm sun-glow on plum or peach. It can throw a golden sheen on a ripe pear, or on a rosy-cheeked apple and on the salmon colour of a cut melon. Verhulst desired his compositions to be played "light and free" and these words we may apply to the able brush of Mrs. Mesdag when depicting the golden fruit of our gardens. Her fruit is

always juicy and ripe, and so pleasant to the eye that it makes our mouths water. But also, with success, has our artist portrayed the yellow lemon and the luscious melon, indeed she may be called the painter, *par excellence*, of these particular fruits.

The Exhibition of these pictures in the *Pulchri* rooms, has, you may say, thrown a new light upon these subjects, which was extended when the Panorama was opened. These exhibitions proved her skill in portraying metals, such as brass, red copper and bronze; into them she puts a warm glow which she knows so well how to do. That she has touched a new cord in still-life is felt rather than spoken. To her, still-life, although not the first step on the road to art, can nevertheless attain the highest point and can represent the highest art-ideal. In the Mesdag Museum there is a still-life by Millet: a brown earthenware pot, a turnip, a common bread knife, a white basin, tin forks and spoons, all articles which leave us cold, yet in their arrangement and by the powerful manner in which they are painted, delight and charm us in spite of ourselves. It reminds me of what Huet says, about the common street tunes, which were arranged by the musical composers, of the middle ages, into church music. Thus things, unattractive in themselves, can be made things of beauty by the power of a great artist.

In Millet's picture the objects are drawn with an evident partiality, this is however not the case with Mrs. Mesdag. The actual thing is not her only thought, she seeks in still-life as well as in her other subjects, the poem, the song, the mysterious beauty. Every thing must work together harmoniously: line, colour, tone, there must not be a jarring element. Does the golden tint of an onion attract her she will take the same trouble and put into her work as much love as she would were the onion a rose or a chrysanthemum. Is she struck by the purity of a white tulip, in a dark vase, or by the golden glow of a sunflower, in a big copper or brass vessel, she makes the seemingly conflicting elements dissolve into a unity which ends in the creation of a harmonious picture. And this is all the more difficult since the public, outside the art world, cares little for these subjects, or at least pretends not to care. It may be said that original temperaments help to raise the intellectual faculties of the masses, lifting them up to a higher level; perhaps little valued at the time, but paving the way for a future generation.

Numerous are the works of still-life brought into being by Mrs. Mesdag, at various periods of her career. If you look through her work you will be struck by the difference between early and late productions; yet at all times the soft warm colouration meets the eye. Here for instance we see dark red

apples, against a dark red background; there we see a white silk drapery, in beautiful harmony with a brown earthenware jar, filled with yellow immortelles; then again we are attracted by a bronze vase, with golden knobs, around which ornamental salamanders are entwined, depicted with spirit and taste, and, although called still-life, full of vivacity; on smaller panels we are met by the tasteful arrangement and modelling of Rozenburg-faience, and by the well known "Colebranders" 1) holding yellow roses or bright coloured tulips and anemonies. It may all be called a unity of mysterious beauty. Particularly we notice a dark blue faience vase (into which a couple of peacock's feathers have been artistically thrown) against a warm background of old gold leather. Then again we are astounded by seeing a very large blue Japanese vase, *cloisonné*, placed against the golden embroidery of a white silk curtain. This picture may be called the stepping stone to her larger compositions of still-life, upon which much of her time has been spent of late. At the present moment there stands a large canvas on her easel; the subject is a colossal copper vase with a cover, against a blue background; in the right hand corner we see a gold coloured plush cushion with green border. The light falls upon the vase from the left, producing sparkling spots on the copper and then passes on to a big silver button, upon a white drapery, in the foreground to the right. The impression of space is increased by an old Japanese upright iron pot on the left, which contrasts marvellously with the red brown glow of the vase and with the blue of the background. The impression of this composition is really overpowering; the expressive lines, the restful harmony are testimonies of greatness and the sight makes us rejoice.

Mrs. Mesdag takes sometimes a corner of nature and makes it into a subject for her favorite still-life; the trunk or the branch of a tree, seen against a clear sky or perhaps reflected in a pool of water; or else the roots seen above ground; but in whatever style, the picture always shows that the hand of the painter is guided by a thorough knowledge of her subject. Mrs. Mesdag

1) A sort of earthenware pot, made for holding burning peat and used for cooking and heating purposes.

began early with the study of trees, she took many sketches of them in the Scheveningen woods and in the grounds of Plantrust In the summer of 1885 she went to Delden in Overysel, where the ancient oak and noble beech spoke volumes to her and where the yellow clay soil, interspersed with iron ore, made a lasting impression. And not less was she attracted by the great beech trees of Beekhuyzen, the roots of which are sometimes undermined by water and appear above ground, in a strange contorted growth. Sketches were made of all these varied impressions and carried back to her studio and there in time formed into pictures, great and small. Mrs. Mesdag is never wasteful of a moment; the winter evenings she occupies by drawing her summer


subjects, either in chalks or in black and white, reserving the hours of day light for her oils and water-colours. Accuracy is the chief characteristic of her drawings, always striving to simplify the lines and to lay the full stress on the leading motive of the picture.

By long and by careful study Mrs. Mesdag has learnt the peculiarities of almost every tree: the graceful slim birch, the dark solemn fir, the mighty oak; she is familiar with the formation of their branches, their bloom, their leaves, their roots. Sometimes she portrays but the trunk of one of these giants of the forest, which she silhouettes against a clear sky, sometimes the roots engage her attention, those roots that extend in all directions, gripping the soil and frequently showing above the ground, looking like great brawny

sinewy arms; or she takes, as a study, the gnarled stump, which looks like a ghost when seen against the darkening sky of early evening.

I really believe that our artist is pleased when she sees something of a phantom nature amongst her dear trees, it keeps her imagination on the stretch, and she has no rest till she is able to relieve her mind by producing the effect upon canvas. It is therefore not surprising that she has a predilection for moonlight landscapes, in either oils or water-colours.

Not only does she delight in the study of the individual tree, but the woods inspire her. She desires to show how every thing in nature is bound together by love and concord. She wishes to give the proper impression of that which we understand as woods, to draw away the eye from separate portions and to fix our attention upon the unity of the whole; to create a poem, in the which we dream ourselves away. Sometimes these poetical impressions come of themselves, sometimes they require an effort to produce, there is a struggle to find the exact yet simple formula and to put it on the canvas in a poetical manner. Many starts are made and remade, many canvases thought out, ere the right road is found. She is but seldom satisfied with her own work. Indiscriminate praise is painful to her and jars against her better feeling. Criticism she seeks and endeavours to profit by, even when it is unfairly given.

She got an insight into the art of the French School, of 1830, from her close study of landscape painting, (the gold medal was gained in Amsterdam in 1884 for a landscape of Plantrust) it threw a light upon the works of those men whose paintings she had at first not understood. When she and her husband went to Paris, in 1867, to visit the great International Exhibition, they passed by those master-pieces of the *then* misjudged and *now* world renowned artists, giving their attention rather to the works of those men whose pictures were termed "detailed." But when in 1870 they went again to France, it was entirely a different thing. The works of Corot and Millet made a great impression upon them and especially were they charmed with Millet's "Woman at the Churn." This was after Mrs. Mesdag's close study of the Drenthe heathlands where the works of the Frenchmen must have already echoed in her heart. And the more she saw of these French pictures the more beautiful she found them, and the better was she able to understand nature. This admiration was the founding of the Mesdag Museum. Husband and wife desired these treasures to be always near them and so it came about that a few of these pictures were secured, making the nucleus of the Mesdag Museum, a collection so singular and uncommon. It was while living in Brussels (where they at first worked with Mesdag's brother Taco, but afterwards had a studio of their own) that they began to collect works of art. A sketch by Corot (an evening landscape); "Hauling in the Boat" by Alma Tadema; "Cows chewing the Cud" by Verwee; landscapes by Roelofs, by Bilders and a very large canvas by Boulanger, these were the first treasures which afterwards grew into such a valuable collection.

Two large rooms *en suite* were reserved for these beautiful works of art in the Mesdag's house, on the Laan van Meerdervoort, but it was not long before these rooms proved too small and a wing was then built, projecting into the garden; this was done in 1887. The Museum has a separate entrance, which however, until now, has never been used. It is reached from two sides, through the studios of Mesdag and that of his wife. Mrs. Mesdag's studio is on the ground floor and her husband's is above. These studios contain many art books, especially to be noticed the biographies of the French painters of the Romantic School. From Mrs. Mesdag's studio you pass along a corridor (where you will see some unfinished works and studies by our artist) into the

Sheep being driven into a barn, for the night.

large centre hall, the walls of which are hung with *gobelins* and the floor covered with a costly Smyrna carpet. In this hall are many fine pieces of old Japanese bronze, and some beautiful china vases, but in fact these *objets d'art* are scattered throughout the whole house.

In the vestibule a flight of steps leads to the first floor, where, through a side passage, you reach three large rooms hung with paintings. On the walls of this passage you will see water-colours by Blommers, Mauve, Weissenbruch, Bosboom and by Mr. and Mrs. Mesdag themselves; also drawings by Millet, Daubigny, William Maris and by Bauer; etchings by Daubigny and by Miss van Houten. There is a small room arranged principally for old bronzes and in one corner stands a cabinet filled with Japanese porcelain (Satsuma)

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and old blue Rozenburg-faience. In the large rooms hang the French, Italian and Dutch Masters. We see Mancini, represented by some of his clever original paintings; Montecelli by his brilliant colouration; Israëls is seen by his familiar poor interior, in this particular case the subject is an old Scheveningen fisherman sitting, in an attitude of despair, beside the lifeless body of his wife; Matthys Maris is represented by his symphony in white, a young girl in bridal attire; and there are two children's heads by the same hand. There are paintings by Blommers, by Henkes, by Jacob and William Maris and by De Paal and many more, all hanging near and between the master-pieces of the celebrated artists of the French School. Corots you will find in great numbers, done at various times of his career. Some of the walls are almost entirely covered by the works of Daubigny, many of these canvases familiar to the memory of those who saw the Daubigny-Exhibition in the *Pulchri Studio* in 1890; and Millet is likewise well represented, not only in the Museum, but throughout the whole house, in all the dwelling rooms. "*La Femme du Pecheur*" is amongst them. There is also a big painting of dogs by Decamps. And we find Rousseau there too, the genial but misunderstood Rousseau, with his little poetical songs of nature, produced with so great a conception. We are greeted by his "*Déscente des Vaches du Jura*," a large canvas of which the sketch is also in the Museum. And not only this one of Rousseau but there is likewise his "*Massacre des Innocents*" a picture he made after the felling of some of the old trees in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Jules Dupré, Courbet, Vollon, Delacroix, Diaz, Troyon speak to us from the walls of this picture gallery, each work deserving an inspection to itself.

I think Mrs. Mesdag places Millet and Daubigny at the top of the tree; Daubigny whom she admires, not only as artist, but as man; whose pictures, representing but "a corner" of nature, give the spectator the impression of a complete whole. Millet, whose power lay in the soberness which seems to characterize most of his work, who desired to interpret art in the simplest

way and to render the deep impression, with the same force, with which nature had endowed him. That Millet who preferred to say nothing than say it badly.

In the Museum you will not only find landscapes and still-life by Mrs. Mesdag but studies for portraits. To bring the art of portrait painting to perfection it is necessary to represent the character of the sitter as well as the features. This difficulty was solved by Mrs. Mesdag; this we see in two portraits of men, in profile, which hang in the Museum, and although in dangerous proximity to the masterly portraits of Delacroix and Courbet, painted by themselves, they do not clash, and as studies they can stand the test of comparison with the finished pictures.

Mrs. Mesdag is sometimes inspired to improvise, then she lays the paint on broad and powerfully and in a few hours has produced a decorative panel. This we can see in her "The Brook at Beekhuyzen" which hangs in one of the upper rooms. She excels in giving, at random, a sudden freshness of impression, causing the spectator a sort of unexpected surprise, and this we may say is a trait of Mesdag too. But as a rule Mrs. Mesdag works long and carefully at each and every picture, heeding neither time nor labour, until she is satisfied. Painting to her is a joy, she works because she cannot help herself. She feels that she has much to say and that her thoughts must be put into form. She desires to be understood, and her artistic conscience forbids her merely to produce work to please the eye of the multitude. Popular she will never be, but she has touched a chord in art which not only sounds but vibrates.

# ALEXANDER HUGO BAKKER KORFF

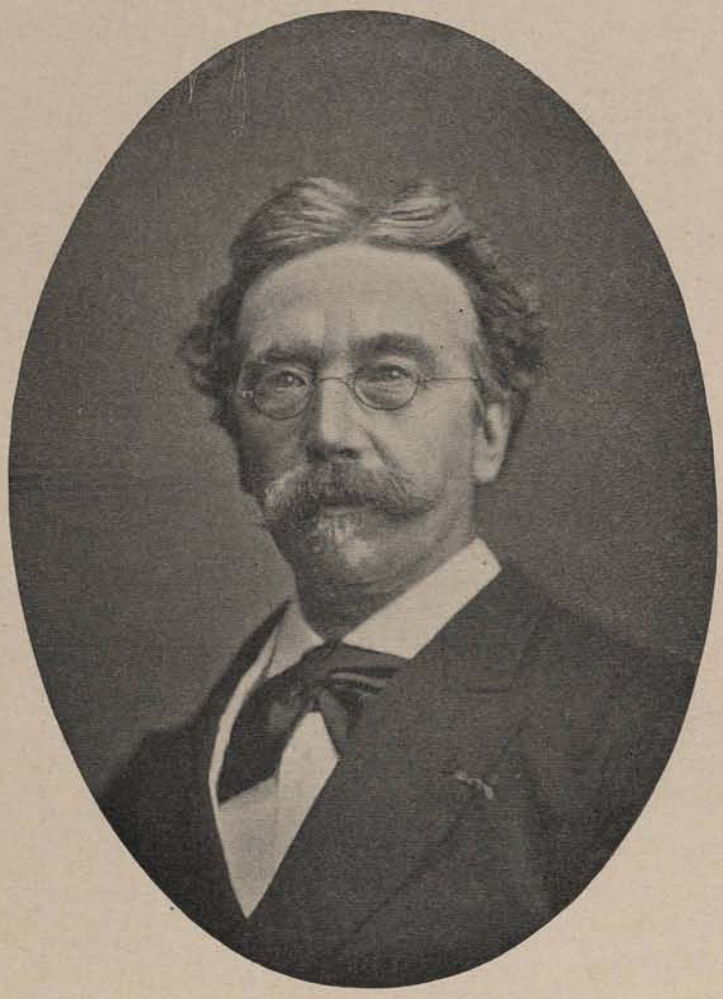
BY

JOHAN GRAM.

"The Romance." From a painting in the possession of Baron van Langenau.

# ALEXANDER HUGO BAKKER KORFF.

*31 August 1824—29th January 1882.*



I feel sure that many people will remember what a peculiar sight the large room in the Railway Inn "*Zomerzorg*" (Leyden) presented on the 20th, 21st and 22nd days of March 1882. The *mise en scène* suggested a room in a Museum, or the collection of an antiquary; inartistic people would say that it was the contents of a second-hand shop: pieces of old furniture, brass and copper articles, cut glass, earthenware and china ornaments all mixed up with a great variety of silk, velvet and embroidered garments and the general paraphernalia of a lady's wardrobe; old musical instruments, armour, and an endless number of pictures and engravings. All this medley, spread out in the big white-washed dining room of the old inn, was enough to make any art collector's mouth water, and to turn the head of most females and perhaps somewhat shock the mind of a prim, strait-laced old maid.

If the visitor examines this variety show it will not take him long to discover that these are the household gods of an artist, which are soon to fall under the auctioneer's hammer, for there are a great many easels and numberless unfinished canvases, drawings, sketches and the usual odds and ends that are associated, in a layman's mind, with the life of an artist. Let me put the reader at once *au courant* of the facts, by stating that the contents of this public room had been brought there direct from the studio of Alexander Hugo Bakker Korff, whose death we mourned on the 29th of January of that same year; each article to be put up to auction and sold to the highest bidder. Yes, all these costly materials, these heavy damask petticoats and gowns, lace mantillas and fluffy capes and large poke bonnets, which had been used to adorn Bakker Korff's celebrated dames, lay spread out to public gaze, showing up many creases and threadbare patches and much wear and tear. *Rocaille* furniture and endless knick-knacks, which the artist had employed so successfully, and with so much taste and judgment, in depicting the intimate and daily life of his tenderly nurtured old maids, all these exposed to view; nothing seemed wanting to complete the surroundings of the maiden lady of a century ago. But alas! these things, in themselves so artistic, lack charm and poetry when seen by the light of a cold day in early spring in a white-washed unromantic eating room of a second rate hotel. Their enchantment was gone; they were as race horses in their stables; as actors behind the scenes, away from the brilliancy of the footlights and the applause of the public.

All this variety of antiquities, these ancient gowns and coquettish *étagères*, quaint furniture and valuable *bibelots*, had been brought hither from Bakker Korff's studio, in Haarlem Street (Leyden) from the *Turfdragersgildenhuis* (Peat-carriers Corporation) under whose roof he lived and died. It was amongst all these surroundings that he had carried on his art; they had helped to stir his imagination and excite his artistic mood, and with a couple of old maiden sisters, who willingly decked themselves out in the mantillas and poke bonnets and sat as models for his eighteenth century ladies—which are now to all art lovers a source of joy—he lived happy and contented. The words of Thomas à Kempis occur to me: "happy in a nook, happy with a book." Bakker Korff was happy with his studio paraphernalia and being of a somewhat retiring disposition, he cared not for society, nor to be surrounded by a crowd of pleasure loving acquaintances; a few sincere friends was all he needed.

Vosmaer writes: "The peculiar character that distinguishes the work of Bakker Korff is his genuinely refined feeling, the serious, yet highly humourous interpretation, which, with due care, he allows not to degenerate into excesses."

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After having spent a short time with Kruseman, Bakker Korff became a pupil of the historical painter J. E. C. van der Berg at the Drawing Academy

at the Hague. I was there at the same time with him. Every Monday, at 2 o'clock, we had to bring our composition for criticism, the fruit of our own fancy, to be judged and commented upon, in the presence of all the pupils. Bakker Korff was one of the older pupils, if not the eldest, and how well I remember the excitement over his productions, and how much we younger fellows admired the beauty of his outline and the ingenuity of his ideas;

"Reading the Bible."

already *then* he fell into the way of depicting little fables after the style of Retch and Flaxman; sometimes the compositions were merely a few clever lines or pen and ink scratches, but telling and full of humour. In the collection of De Vos and Fodor, and in that of Baron Steengracht, you will find many of these clever drawings.

The "boss", as we always called our master, urged us to take up classical subjects and to this end Bakker Korff selected Biblical stories; but the inter-

est of the public, in these canvases, was feeble, even after he had spent some time at the Academy in Antwerp. This so discouraged our artist that he began to contemplate bidding farewell to art, and changing his brush for the hoe and his palette for the plough, in plain language become a farmer. And indeed this threatened calamity *did* occur, for Korff took to potato growing at Oegstgeest, where his people lived. This decision was partly owing to his extreme near-sightedness, which he feared would prevent his ever becoming anything of an artist.

The painter of "The Siege of Saragossa" a potato grower!!! But such a thing could not last, the world prophecied, and the world was right, for the

"The Invalid." From a drawing.

potato-craze lasted but two years, when Korff returned to his beloved art, and established himself in peaceful quiet Leyden. There he may be said to have *discovered* himself and he took up the thread of the old story. He now began to paint small pictures, with the idea that his feeble eye-sight would have a smaller space to cover. Perhaps it was his daily intercourse with his stately maiden sisters, that caused him to select the life of the elderly unmarried dame from the world's theatre. Korff's friends declare that his sisters were cut out for the rôle that they played on their brother's stage. They were women of a singularly refined type, with polished manners, characters that reminded one of women of the Lamartine—Chateaubriand period, and thoroughly suited to the part of tender-hearted, confiding, would-be young old maids, of

a former century, who were the leading stars and heroines on Bakker Korff's charming panels.

It was in 1856 that he exhibited his first picture, in his new style; the public approved and the die was cast. This picture represented a sick lady overwhelmed by the careful attention of a number of well meaning kind friends; the subject, as well as the painting, was greatly praised by the critics of the day, and it decided him to stick to this *genre* with the result that he has reaped a bountiful harvest. From that moment he remained faithful to the old maid of a past century and his highly finished little pictures commonly go under the name of "*Bakkerkorfjes*" (Little Bakker Korffs). They are popular, not

"*La Prise de Saragossa.*" Painting in the possession of Mr. A. Boreel, at the Hague.

only in Holland, but in other countries and they fetch high prices. The life and peculiarities of his maiden ladies of advanced age are so forcibly presented to us by his clever brush, that we seem to see in them our own great aunts.

Bakker Korff shows a fine satirical humouristic vein in depicting the fondling, flirting, coquettish old maid; he shows us his knowledge of her intimate life, her habits and ways. With his fine supple brush he not only gives us the dame, but her surroundings, and these productions are worthy to be classed with a Meissonier. He takes the greatest care with every trifling detail, there is nothing overlooked or carelessly handled, and nothing left out that is needed to tell the pathetic or amusing tale, and yet with all this careful study of

every particular, nothing attracts the eye to the detriment of the main point, nothing overrules or predominates.

In all Bakker Korff's paintings we find a well thought out plan, he does not simply please the eye of the spectator, but he moves his heart, and excites his imagination. When the reproduction of his "Sempstress" appeared in 1863, in the Art Chronicle, T. van Westhreene wrote the following: "The picture is so true to life, that we are inclined to make a little story out of it for ourselves. The old grandmother or great grandmother, whose silhouette hangs on the wall, comes to life again and tells us of family troubles and financial failures and of the necessity of the younger members of the family putting their shoulder to the wheel. Then our eye catches the landscape hanging above the silhouette and we think of lovers' dreams and of happy souvenirs, and we feel deeply for the woman who sits before us sewing, who has no doubt seen better days. To such meditations the art of this clever humourist will lead us, that we are forced to read between the lines."

Now all this might lead to a dispute as to how far the story may add to the worth and to the charm of the picture. In the present day many scorn the little fable or anecdote which the artist brings before our notice. They maintain that that should be left to the pen, that it belongs to the territory of literature and not to that of art. To such thinkers perhaps a dish of oysters, or a cut lemon are worth more than "The Romance" and the "Bible Reading" by Bakker Korff. I too can be enthusiastic over a brilliant harmony of still-life in luxurious colouring, or can see the beauties of a potato-eating labourer or a knitting farmer's daughter, but when an artist has the gift and power to depict, and place before my eyes, an incident from life's comedy, of greater interest, and if that artist is able to render the subject with such incomparable elegance, and fineness of touch, then my delight increases tenfold.

If we reject all pictures, where the artist has endeavoured to bring to our notice any little story, in the life of man, what numberless canvases would need to be condemned. Think of all the master pieces, painted at various periods and in different centuries, some with simplicity and others elaborately, all with more or less feeling and humour, presenting to us some incident in sacred or profane history or occurrence in our daily life, and indexed by their subject! Michel Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt and their equals, would be boycotted by this sentence.

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When Bakker Korff took to worshipping at the shrine of old maiden ladies, prosperity smiled upon him. Purchasers followed in rapid succession, and in 1862 he was honoured by receiving the gold medal for a picture exhibited at the yearly Exhibition in Amsterdam.

His colleagues in Amsterdam celebrated this event with festivities and one of the guests wrote the following amusing lines, which Vosmær considered good enough to insert in his biographical notes:

"Say have you forgotten Kruseman's attic so hot,
Where many we sat and very oppressed we oft got;
Till 'mongst us you came a Hero and Master of art,
Sad was your spirit, depressingly low was your heart;
Potatoes you'd dug and followed the harrow and plough,
Palette and brush once seized, all gloom was swept from your brow."

But not only was Bakker Korff honoured in this manner by his fellow artists in Amsterdam, but the *Turfdragers* of Leyden (Peat-carriers) presented him with an illuminated address and a few verses written by themselves, as they

"The Birthday." Painting in the possession of Mr. A. Boreel, at the Hague.

were very proud of their tenant for, as I have already stated, he had his studio under the same roof as their Guild. Hence these words in prose and in rhyme:

"Thoughts when beholding the gold medal presented to his Honour, the highborn Alexander Hugo Bakker Korff, for an art-piece, which his Honour condescended to exhibit at the Exhibition in Amsterdam."

"O what a gift, that brush so swift
Much credit is deserving;
For with one leap, that road so steep
Thou'st climb'd with step unerring.

For as a rule, all honour's cool,
Till men are dead or dying;
But at this rate, thy art so great,
Praise at thy feet is lying.

Posterity, that art would see,
Will cover thee with glory;
For Korff shall ride, at Rembrandt's side,
This is no idle story.

As soon as Korff made up his mind what style he would adopt he found an endless amount of subjects. There are still many patrician houses, in the

"Reading the Newspaper."

old city of Leyden, that date back to a former century, and in these our artist found plenty of scope for the backgrounds and surroundings of his elderly dames, of the same period. Stately salons and coquettish boudoirs galore, in which he placed his old maid of the 18th or early 19th centuries.

Bakker Korffs doting, sentimental, unmarried woman, belongs undoubtedly to the romantic period of Lamartine and Feith. It was to embellish his romance-loving "maidens" that he was continually on the look out for bits of

quaint furniture and knick-knacks of a former century. When his craze for *bibelots* became known, he not infrequently received additions to his steadily growing collection, and many an old-world bit of apparel was sent to him for the *garderobe* of his heroines.

But Korff's old maids are not always sentimental; he has studied so thoroughly the whims and ways of the elderly maiden that he is acquainted with her every peculiarity; her fondness for pussy, her affection for an old dog or for an ill-tempered parrot; her excitement over a romantic love-story or her delight in a spicy bit of gossip. He also takes flights with her into more serious regions, he shows us the good religious old maid reading her Bible, or listening to the word of God.

"Morning Occupations."
Painting in the possession of Dr. A. W. Kroon Jr, Leyden.

In this vein we see his "Reading the Bible. Song of Solomon Chapter II Verse I." This picture was painted in 1880 and bought for the Museum of Modern Art at the Hague, and may be considered one of his finest productions. In the middle of a luxuriously furnished room, containing a handsome marble mantlepiece, a good deal of old carved oak and a crystal chandelier, all in 18th century style, we see three stately dames sitting at the breakfast table, surrounded by all such luxuries as would be appreciated by those loving, tender hearted maiden ladies. The morning light is soft, yet some of the numerous knick-knacks are touched by a bright light, but without disturbing the harmony of the general tone of the picture. The centre figure is reading from the Bible, the other two listening attentively. The chapter selected is the 2nd from the Song of Solomon, and as the passionate words of love are uttered:

"I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the Valleys" she seems to be thinking to herself that once she was a rose and a lily, and the old maid to the right mutters the same with a sigh; the third, perhaps a trifle younger, leans back in her chair with a certain grace, and coquettishly looking at the many trifling useless knick-knacks at her side, is saying to herself, (which we conclude not only by the look on her face but by the way she taps on the table with her small fingers, which have still a trace of youth in their slender tips:) "I still could make conquests had I but the chance."

This trio of elderly women is depicted with spirit and with a refined humouristic feeling. We can tell that they are not women who have known the joys and sorrows of wedded life, we see it in their faces and in the wealth of superfluous odds and ends by which they are surrounded. And how masterly and *con amore* is the subject handled, how tenderly are their maiden feelings considered by the sympathetic artist, and although the details predominate they do not in the least detract from the main point, namely the old ladies themselves.

To show you what an enthusiastic collector of antiquities Korff was, and how much importance he placed in the arrangement of the detail of his pictures, I will relate a little incident which was told me by a friend.

One day he went to see Korff at his studio and was received very cordially. On the easel, before which he stood, was placed a small panel, on which he appeared to be busy. The picture was nearly completed, and contrary to usual custom no drapery was thrown over the work upon the entrance of a visitor.

After the usual greetings my friend stood before the easel and went into *an extase* over the picture in progress of painting. He praised the tone and the colouring, the exquisite touch and the harmony of the whole. But his enthusiasm and praise went unnoticed and unappreciated.

After more praise, in the same key, the astonished visitor, who saw that his words were having no effect on his artistic friend, exclaimed in a questioning and surprised tone: "Don't you like it yourself? Are you not satisfied?"

"Oh yes, certainly" was the rather vague reply "I am of course flattered by your remarks, but it annoys me that *just* the most interesting point in the picture you have overlooked; why, don't you see that beautiful unique old Dresden soup tureen, look at it, I have only just bought it. I have painted this picture entirely on its account, the figure is of secondary consideration, I have only put her there as a background to my tureen; look at it well, what a treasure, what a discovery and you never even so much as remarked it."

And the excited antiquity collector uttered a panegyric over this ancient piece of china.

The soup maiden I have never seen again, but the soup tureen I have met repeatedly and always in the place of honour, the prima donna and star of the company.

Bakker Korff amused himself occasionally in his studio, which was a perfect

*"Bible reading. The Song of Solomon. Chap. II verse I"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the Municipal Museum at the Hague.

variety museum, in painting lilliputian panels of still-life, charming little pictures, the subjects taken from amongst his own collection of knick-knacks, beautifully drawn, perfect little pieces of realism, the famous soup tureen generally playing the title rôle. One of these *chef d'oeuvres* is in the possession of Dr. Van der Sleuys in Leyden. Mr. J. A. F. Coebergh, also of Leyden, is the happy possessor of three of these beautiful panels. The celebrated Dresden soup tureen sings the solo parts, while the surrounding objects and *bibelots* are the obbligato accompaniment. In the third we miss the *pièce de résistance* but we get instead a mirror, in which the detail of the picture is reflected: consisting

"The Aunts preparing to leave home." Painting in the possession of Mr. A. Boreel at the Hague.

principally of cutglass and ornamental china, standing on a gold legged table, beneath the mirror. It is most cleverly done and artistically thought out. A little picture where every thing seems to be in gala dress.

Bakker Korff showed his appreciation of the old houses, where he was allowed to visit, in order to use the rooms as backgrounds for his pictures, by many attentions to the families; he was of a shy disposition and hated all outward show and publicity, but in quiet social gatherings, amongst friends, he was happy and full of attention. For one member of a family he engraved, on an antique wine glass, a dedication, surmounted by an angel and surrounded

by a wreath of flowers and an arabesque design. For the birthday of another he painted the menu for the birthday festival, which was more like a beautiful water-colour of still-life and worthy to be called a work of art; it was a wonderful combination of fish and game, vegetables and sweets, ornamented with flowers and arabesque designs, all these niceties humourously and amusingly grouped together.

Owing to Bakker Korff's deftness of brush, the number of his productions is very great. Leyden is a good place for study and work, the quiet old University town offers but few distractions and the studiously inclined can work with but few interruptions, and Korff's disinclination for society, in a general sense, left him much time to follow his dearly loved profession. But in the families where he *did* visit he was a most welcome guest, for notwithstanding his shyness, and somewhat formal manner, he was a splendid help in entertaining, for he was a clever reciter and could sing comic songs, showing that an artist has more strings to his bow than one.

One of the best known of his detailed pictures is "The Romance", painted in 1869, and reproduced in these pages. This beautiful painting is the property of Baron van Langenau. On this canvas we see three old maids, presumedly sisters. They are represented to us in a salon of the Rococo period. Two of these ladies are sitting at a table, upon which we see a coffee pot and cups and saucers which suggest the idea of breakfast. The third, who seems to be a few years younger, is sitting at the piano, with her back to her "little sisters", warbling a sentimental romantic song. The singer herself is completely lost in the words of love she is singing, and the listeners are silently moved by the melting cords and thinking of past days. The expression on the faces of all three is cleverly portrayed and the *mise en scène* is complete, nothing is omitted to bring the little tale home to us, we can almost hear the words that are being sung by the youngest and most skittish of the three. An ancestor looks down upon them with a smile upon his face. This picture is really one of Korff's best.

Our artist has painted another picture, not unlike the one I have described. This one is entitled "*La Prise de Saragossa*" and is in the possession of Mr. A. Boreel at the Hague, who bought it, on the 7th of March 1899, when it was sold at Mrs. van Vloten's sale (page 147).

When gazing at this canvas we come under the influence of Korff's *précieuses ridicules*" of 1830, as we did in "The Romance." What a delight it is to examine into all the detail; it is indeed a feast for the gods. See how the lady at the piano is throwing her whole soul into the song she is singing, and this we know merely by looking at her back. The old maid, standing by the instrument, has a delicious smirk on her face, as if thoroughly enjoying the romantic words, her cap and streamers are so suggestive of vanity and would-be youth. See the expression on all the faces of the listeners; Bakker Korff can be said to know human nature and womankind in particular. This

picture represents our artist in the strength of his power and in the zenith of his talent. There is another picture that I must just stop to mention: "The Birthday" (page 149), also belonging to Mr. Boreel. The visitor's expression is charming, so typical of the desire to show herself very much interested in the birthday of her friend, the gesture and the look plainly express a desire to be warm and sincere in her congratulations, and yet we

"Under the Palm-tree." Painting in the National Museum in Amsterdam.

see for ourselves that it is put on for the occasion. The "little birthday girl" tries to look simple minded and juvenile, with her birthday gifts tossed about at her feet. On the table stand bottles and wine-glasses for the visitors to drink to the health of the Queen of the day.

Dr. A. W. Kroon Junior, of Leyden, is the lucky possessor of two little gems. The one represents an old sempstress, who is making or mending a damask gown, the ground of which is white with a flowered pattern. She is

absorbed in her work, which seems to require careful handling. It is so realistic that the figure might be cut out of real life (page 158). The other is called Morning Occupations (151). Here we see a lady of the upper class, dressed in a white muslin morning gown, reading her morning paper and smiling over something spicy. On the table, before her, we see her Bible and prayer book, ready for devotional reading, but the news-paper comes first; the elderly "Miss" is curious to know what has transpired since the previous day. It is a little tale from Hildebrand's "Camera Obscura" put upon canvas by Bakker Korff. The glimmering satin of the chair and the white gown give the picture a charming daintiness and freshness.

Sometimes Bakker Korff wanders from his happy smiling old maids to the sorrowing widow, and we get a bit of life's tragedy. A picture, after this style, is also owned by Dr. Kroon. Here we see a widow receiving the condolence visits of her friends, who seem completely under the influence of her grief. A picture, with the widow as chief theme, is in the collection of Mr. A. W. Sythoff, also of Leyden, and four sketches, all full of merit, in each of which we get the weeping widow, surrounded by the unmarried ladies of her social circle, weeping with her.

In a more amusing vein is the picture of the old aunts, packing up to go on a trip (153). One is kneeling on the floor, stuffing as much as possible into a bandbox; the one to the right has her basket packed, which she holds on her knee, leaning back as if exhausted. The third aunt has a bottle in each hand, probably some home made produce which she is taking to a niece or nephew, and is wondering how to pack them up. On her face is the inquiring look of: "Can you find room for these also?" Korff's pictures are always so complete that an interesting little story can be made out of each one.

There is another picture, reproduced in the pages of this book, which takes us into the home of a less patrician family (150). Indisputably the four women, at the breakfast table, are old maids of the type we meet in Hildebrand's book. All eager to hear the news of the day, the listeners hanging upon the words of the reader, all longing to hear some tit-bit of gossip or romantic tale. It is really a pity that Bakker Korff did not illustrate the "Camera Obscura", he was cut out for the work and the book, already so full of humour and wit, would have gained much by such an able brush to portray the irony and mirth of the writer.

In describing so many of the works by our artist I must not forget to speak about "*Le Compliment d'Azor*" (157) (exhibited in Goupil's Photographic Gallery). Here again we have a birthday queen, rather younger this time, receiving her friends and their presents. Suddenly they are surprised by the entrance of the little pet dog of the family, who brings in a roll of paper, (probably some birthday verses) which is attached to his fat neck by a smart ribbon. The old servant, who has arranged this little compliment to her mistress, is standing behind the screen watching the effect of Azor's performance.

All three ladies go into *extase* over the cleverness of the "little darling." We have but one detrimental remark to make and that is that the arms of the old servant are too long, and that she, on the whole, is too much of a caricature.

Of course Korff has handled some of these subjects more than once. A couple of enthusiastic old dames, sitting near and gazing in admiration at some growing plant (generally a palm or a fuchsia) is a favorite theme, with variations and modifications. The National Museum possesses a fine specimen of this kind called "Under the Palm-tree" (155) which he painted in 1881 and

*"Le Compliment d'Azor."*

may be considered, along with "Reading the Bible" (145) (Museum at the Hague) as the quintessence of his power.

Amongst his numerous drawings and pen and ink sketches these two old maids, under the palm-tree, appear and reappear, this alone will show the ingenuity of our artist in being able to play the same tune with so many variations. Although the circle of our philsopher's thoughts may seem small, yet his old maids suggested to him constantly new tales, and fresh ideas.

And so he continued working steadily, rising step by step till alas! death knocked at his door.

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In a corner of the *Lakenhal* in Leyden, where the chimney piece and wall paper remind one of Bakker Korff's old ladies, a touching Memorium has been set up, as a mark of esteem, to the memory of our lamented artist. In the centre of this nook stands Bakker Korff's easel, upon which we see a couple of unfinished panels. One is a variation of the Bible reading lady (145) and the other is a sketch of a picture that was to have been called "In a Melancholy Mood." Next to this easel we see his paintbox and palette and a small stool which served him so faithfully for many years. Against the easel stands his portrait, painted by Miss Tonnet, from a large and well known photograph; this portrait is crowned with a laurel wreath. Behind the easel, resting against the wall, we notice a large unfinished sketch called "*La Fête au Chateau*" in which the female guests predominate, in fact the only visible males are the bowing host and the serving lackeys. What a splendid opportunity for Korff's able brush, had he lived to bring this canvas to completion. In another part of the Museum there is a portfolio with his drawings, many of them dating back to his youth, when he was but a meek and pliable follower of Professor van den Berg's classical instructions. Amongst these drawings you will find the subject of Christ preaching the Gospel to the multitude, and a good many Roman and Greek historical subjects.

"The Sempstress."
Painting in the possession of Dr. A. W. Kroon Jr., Leyden.

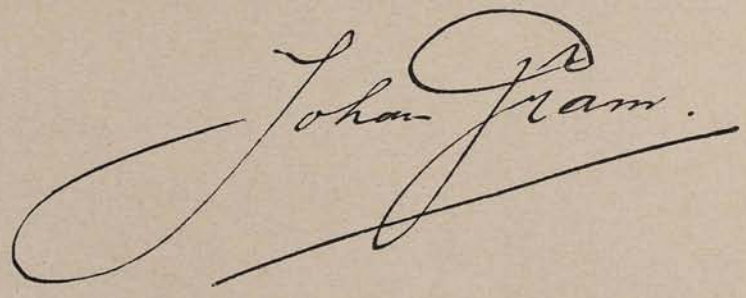
In that portfolio too you will discover a lithograph by F. H. Wiessenbruch, after one of Korff's pictures. It represents an innkeeper, drawing a cork from a bottle. It is a perfect little Meissonier, not only on account of its clever lines but through the handling of the subject. The peculiarity that strikes us, in this lithograph, is the fact of its representing only a man and that there are

no petticoats visible, as we look upon Bakker Korff as exclusively the painter of the *comedie humaine* of the women folk, and more especially of those women who have passed their lives unwedded.

Is there another artist that we can mention, who has dedicated his art so exclusively to the old maid of a hundred years ago, and who has so carefully studied her peculiarities?

Bakker Korff is quite able to hold his own along side of the new movement in art, which is so entirely different to his particular *genre*. Many ways lead to Rome! Bakker Korff may say with the poet: "My glass is small but—I drink out of my *own* glass."

With his own well considered taste and by his clever individuality he has attained great popularity. When by chance we meet a couple of old maids, who still hold to the fashions of fifty years ago, we involuntarily exclaim: "Perfect little Bakker Korffs."



# GEORGE POGGENBEEK

BY

PH. ZILCKEN.

"The Market Place." From a study.

# GEORGE POGGENBEEK.

In my opinion—and this opinion is, I believe, shared by many others—our Dutch School (of painters) has reached, in the 19th Century, its highest mark. Israels, the brothers Maris, Mauve, Bosboom and a few others, stand at the top of the tree and will remain there; after these follow a number of clever, sensible, and interesting men, all noteworthy, but who do not show quite such a strong individuality and originality as the above mentioned.

After the soulless and inartistic interpretations on the territory of plastic arts, which characterized the years before 1860—after the decline of our great school—these powerful painters have brought a healthy change into art, and may be said to have created a renaissance in the latter part of the 19th Century.

Now that most of them have given us the full measure of their talent, we are able to gauge the influence that they have had on our younger men, and this influence we find, is not, in a direct sense, as great as might be expected.

Has Israels done what the French call "*faire école?*" No! He never had distinct followers or pupils. Yet painters, such as Artz, Neuhuys, Blommers and a few others, have followed his style, but each after his own manner of thinking and with his own idea of mankind and his home life; never thinking of copying or following blindly.

Neither did Mauve or the brothers Maris have imitators: with the exception of a few successors, or strictly speaking copyists, we cannot discover any direct influence upon art emanating from these men. I am speaking of the direct influence such as was obvious in former centuries, when every celebrated painter had a number of pupils who worked in his studio under his personal guidance, and in consequence became imitators of the master's style of painting and mannerism.

The influence however, of this group of powerful painters, has been indirectly great. A new road has been opened out to a younger generation of painters,

Laren. A sketch in chalks.

who though not directly inspired by their method of painting, have fallen under the sway of their manner of seeing nature, which can never produce anything but good, when coming from a great master.

Almost all the cleverest painters, of this younger generation, have much to be thankful for to the brothers Maris, Mauve, Israels and Bosboom. When closely examining the works of these younger men, traces may be found of the genius of the elder ones. As every one must be the child of his father, so every painter must, in some measure, be the pupil of a painter.

Now the great question is this: if the pupil is weak and follows blindly the obvious qualities of his master, without being able to show any individuality of his own, then it is all up with him. He then becomes a weak decadent, perhaps a tricky worker, only able to produce clever plagiarisms; and our exhibitions have showed many sad examples of this kind of work.

Now Poggenbeek, if he learned any thing from these masters, or developed his individuality owing to the influence of their manner of seeing, has been perhaps most attracted by Mauve's penetrating, weighty and earnest love for his subjects, be they cattle or sheep, old barns, pastures or heathlands.

If the brothers Maris excel in rendering the powerful harmony in the first impressions of a landscape with unequalled strength and with a unity of tone, which has hardly been achieved before, Mauve may be said, not only to be able to do the same, to a certain degree, but to feel a deep love for every thing he portrays. With Mauve the tone is preferred above the colour and the loving way he expresses the hidden life in a lifeless thing is very touching. A piece of wood, the trunk of a tree, a clod of dark soil or a heap of light sand, become important by reason of the devotion with which he has studied them, and by the loving care with which they have been rendered.

Laren. A sketch in chalks.

I use the word love deliberately and intentionally, because this quality, so completely modern, has been of the greatest use in influencing and developing the art of to-day.

Modern art, in this respect, stands poles asunder from the old. Formerly other qualities than love claimed the first place in literature and in art.

In saying this I am not thinking of the primitives of all countries, less known, in a general sense, and only latterly acknowledged, but of the entire European art of the 17th Century, and principally, and in the first place, of landscape-painting, which was not treated formerly as a *genre* of its own, and never reached that completeness which it was to attain in our time.

As I have already said, in literature, as well as in art, the first and most important things to be distinguished were form, exterior, languages, style, choice of words.

The breaking away from hard and fast rules and conventional forms, dates

A Wood-Cutter. From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. N. Bastert.

from the end of the 18th Century. The sentiment of Stern and Retif de la Bretonne, shown almost simultaneously in their works,—very different from the sentiment that marked the beginning of the 19th Century, in spite of the heroic wars of the first Empire—reached a sincerity unheard of before the latter half of the 19th Century.

Never has the subject under treatment been so lovingly handled as for instance in the studies of the De Goncourts. Undoubtedly it arose from their being artists at heart and they wrote with true artistic insight; producing in literature what Mauve had produced in art: the rustling of bending reeds on the banks of a river; the rippling surface of water; a clump of trees, massed against a setting sun; light and shade playing over waving grass, etc.

In the beginning of 1800 all art was influenced by the clever but cold and severe David, academic to the highest degree.

Figure-painting, as well as landscapes, was subject to the strictest artificial laws, forbidding every personal development, every individual effort.

Especially in landscape-painting was this conspicuous; only specified compositions were tolerated, with stipulated rules. Classical buildings, ruined temples, etc., alone were suffered. Simple farm houses were considered unæsthetic and were to be avoided, as later Kruseman, our own Kruseman, forbade even Joseph Israels to paint "ugly people" because it might spoil the taste.

Some trees were not stately enough, they lacked nobility and grace; the gnarled apple-tree or the knotty pollard willow, so charming in form and colour, were to be carefully eschewed; and moreover the brilliant colouring of nature itself was too strong; fresh clear tints must give way to warmer tones, obtained by bituminous sauces, which would drown all strength and purity of colouration.

In consequence nothing but theatrical, soulless canvases were produced, more like stage decorations than art, such art as was related to Ruysdael, Hobbema or Vermeer.

But then the influence began to be felt of Constable, Bonington, Croome and the French painters, Corot at the head; they began to paint out-of-doors, fleeing from the froustiness of the studio, finding enjoyment in the open air, with nature near them and around them.

It was a long time ere this change found favour either with artists or with the public.

Corot, who made his first out of door studies in 1825, not only in France but in Italy, and who had already expressed all the fine sensitive feeling and intimate love which characterized his later works, was not appreciated till forty years afterwards. His influence, with those of his contemporaries, the great artists of France, was felt much later in our country; but the road was mapped out and our artists knew which way to turn their steps.

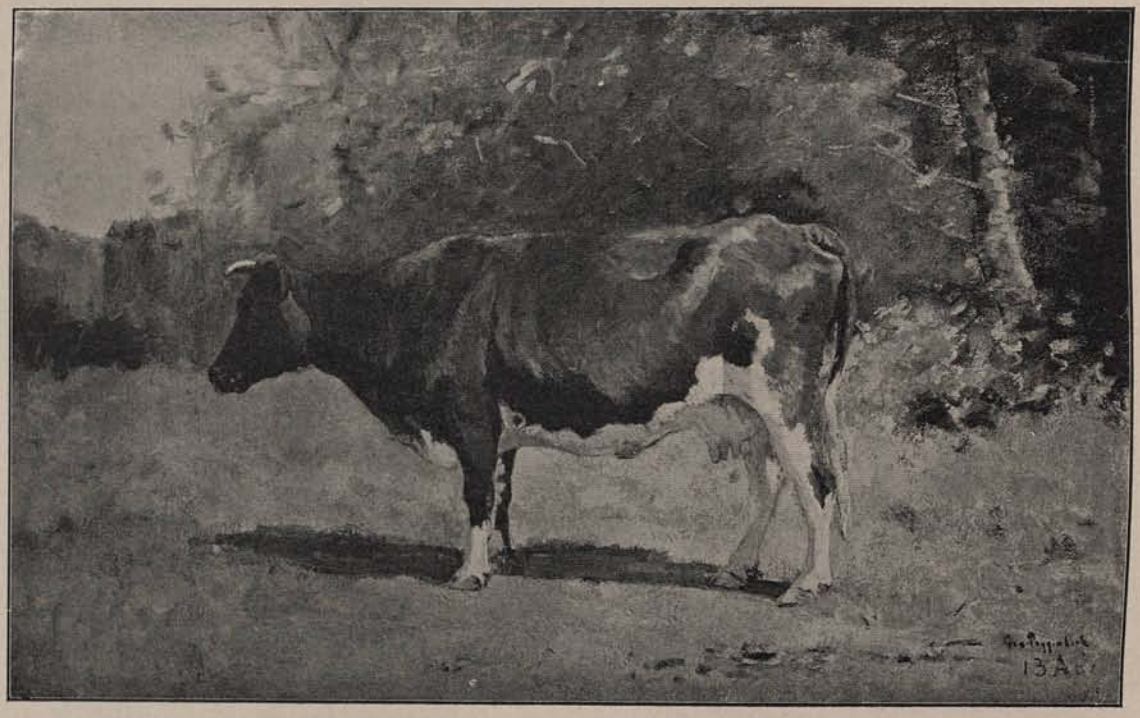
The time had now come when every born artist, every responsible painter, might express himself boldly in his own way, free from all traditions; might

paint what he liked and as he liked, provided always that it was well done; powerful or tender, important or simple, but beautiful, not according to artificial rules, but after his own artistic tendencies and following his own laws.

And so a great number of painters, on different territories of art, developed in our day. The art of landscape-painting was much practised because it appeared, only appeared, to be easier than other subjects. If we examine a catalogue of any art exhibition, of the present day, three quarters perhaps of the exhibited works are landscapes.

But, with the exception of our great artists whose works are established, how many of these landscapes will survive? Time will show!

Certain it is that not many of these painters show any very marked



Study.

individuality of their own, but, as I said in the beginning of this article, they may, under certain influences and with more or less power, try to find their way, and are finding it too, provided they search for it earnestly and do not allow themselves to be led astray into an easily obtained success, by exploring ground that is lying fallow.

Amongst those, who in the present day possess a strong individuality, in the domain of landscape-painting, we must mention amongst others, De Bock, Karsen, Bastert, Poggenbeek, each displaying a strong individual personal effort.

Of these Poggenbeek and Karsen have infused into their work the most pronounced knowledge and love of nature. Karsen producing his North Holland cottages, in the midst of peaceful orchards, handling these subjects tenderly

*"The Castle of Dinan"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of the artist.


Geo Poggenbeek

and carefully, with a most decided and apparent touch of love. Poggenbeek giving us marshy land, taking us along ditches where ducks are disporting themselves, or into the rich low-lying meadows where we see the ubiquitous Dutch cow, either red and white or black and white, chewing the cud in a lazy manner or standing patiently waiting for the milking hour, always rendered in a pale delicate light, expressed with much feeling and with an accurate appreciation of tone.

Poggenbeek's work is remarkable for the loving care and sincere affection with which he treats his subject. No part of his canvas is ever neglected, all

A Pig Sty.

detail portrayed with tender solicitude, and every variation of light and shade noted down and reproduced.

We see in Poggenbeek's work an extremely sympathetic expression of the beauties of the Dutch landscape; the appearance of the peaceful country he renders with a loving touch: the fresh sappiness of the delicate or vivid greens; the pretty little pools or large lakes, which reflect the ever varying skies; the translucent harmonies of the soft greens and blues, so different from the scenery of other countries.

Poggenbeek is particularly fond of his own Dutch meadows with their many ditches; no Indian or Oriental splendour appeals to him as much as some quiet, forgotten corner of the Vecht or Amstel neighbourhood. I was once

Evening. From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. C. A. Oyens.

induced, by Maris, to quote a passage from the writings of Gustave Geoffroy, the distinguished Parisian critic, in which he says, amongst other things, that one of the most difficult efforts to put on canvas is the ever changing light, the light of a moment or of a season; to do this you must be a born artist, with a peculiar intellect and a deep feeling for the things of nature, added to which you must possess the gift to be able to express or interpret what you see.

This, in all fairness, can be said of Poggenbeek, who certainly possesses this gift, for we see in his work that he interprets and expresses what he feels.

"Ponte dell' Ospedale." Venice. From a painting.

His studio in Amsterdam, situated in the Oosterpark, (East Park) is a large and well lighted room, after the style of old Dutch architecture: oak doors and a high wainscotting of the same wood, above which are white-washed walls.

There are not many ornaments to attract the eye. The sober colours of a Persian carpet harmonizing well with the old oak.

On the easels stand pictures and a number of water-colours on the tables, motives brought back from his last journey or perhaps sketches of the neighbouring meadows, with studies of cattle.

It is here, in his studio, that our sympathetic painter spends the greater part of his time, cleverly turning his out-of-door work into finished pictures.

Not long ago I renewed my acquaintance, in this studio, with the sketches of his former exhibited works, sketches for the most part made in foreign lands, amongst which was a pretty view of a small bridge in Venice, a rosy hued panel, full of soft light and glowing colours, rendering very faithfully the tone of the aspect of the city of the Lagoons, seen through the eyes of an unbiassed painter.

Although formerly Poggenbeek painted exclusively—and now by preference—Dutch landscape with cattle, he has not confined himself entirely to this style of subject, to the making of "Poggenbeek pictures" only. In order to avoid

a monotony in his work he has been abroad on three different occasions, (1893—95—97) remaining upon one occasion quite a considerable time in France, bringing back with him some beautiful work and many important impressions.

Sometimes difficulties arise for a painter, who works in a country not his own and where he has not perhaps passed much of his life. In painting in a foreign land, with which he is not thoroughly acquainted, and where his sojourn is but temporary, he is obliged, in a general sense, to confine his work to studies or sketches from nature which later on, when back in his own studio, he finds difficult to develop.

Autumn. From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. S. H. Kever.

When however the painter is of a highly sensitive nature and can, with facility, imbibe an impression, as is the case with Poggenbeek, then he may possibly retain this impression in his memory and bring it back faithfully with striking accuracy, like the impression of some instantaneous machine, because the impression was intense by reason of its novelty. To this sensitiveness and susceptibility we owe the clever attractive French landscapes of Poggenbeek, which give a more accurate and true rendering of the Frenchman's country than many a French artist can produce.

* *
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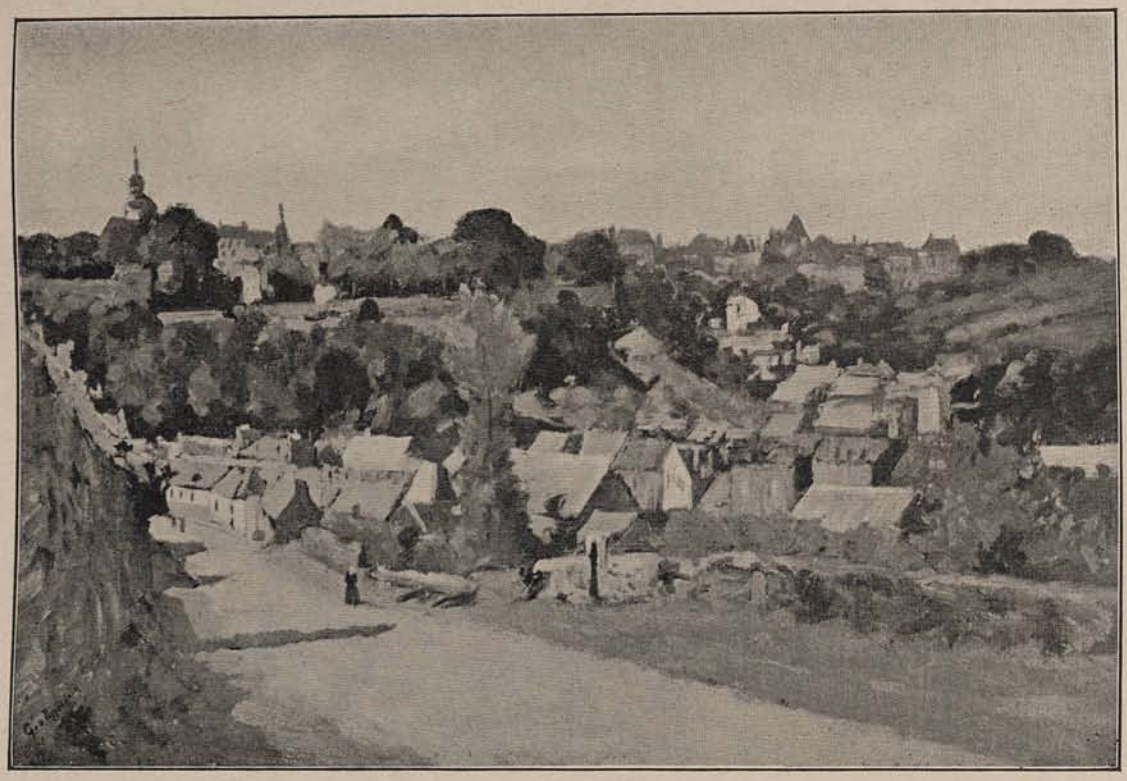
Biographically there is not much to say about Poggenbeek. 1) He was born in Amsterdam on the 28th of July 1852 and spent his youth in an office. It was when he was nineteen years old that he began to devote himself to his dearly beloved hobby.

When he was young he interested himself much in art and visited many exhibitions and saw many pictures of note, always thinking how he could manage to be allowed to learn to draw. His friendship with Klinkhamer contributed much to this desire, but not as much perhaps as his acquaintance with Hanrath—who alas! died so young—which developed into a close friendship. Partly owing to the latter's influence he accompanied him on his sketching tours, under the guidance of J. H. Veldhuyzen, a painter who, as a craftsman,



A view of Dinan (Brittany). From a painting in the possession of Mr. C. D. Reich.

has not been much heard of, but as teacher was well known and had a number of pupils.

They painted together, for more than two years, in the studio of Veldhuyzen, studies and still-life.

After having become acquainted with Heyl and Bastert, Poggenbeek went

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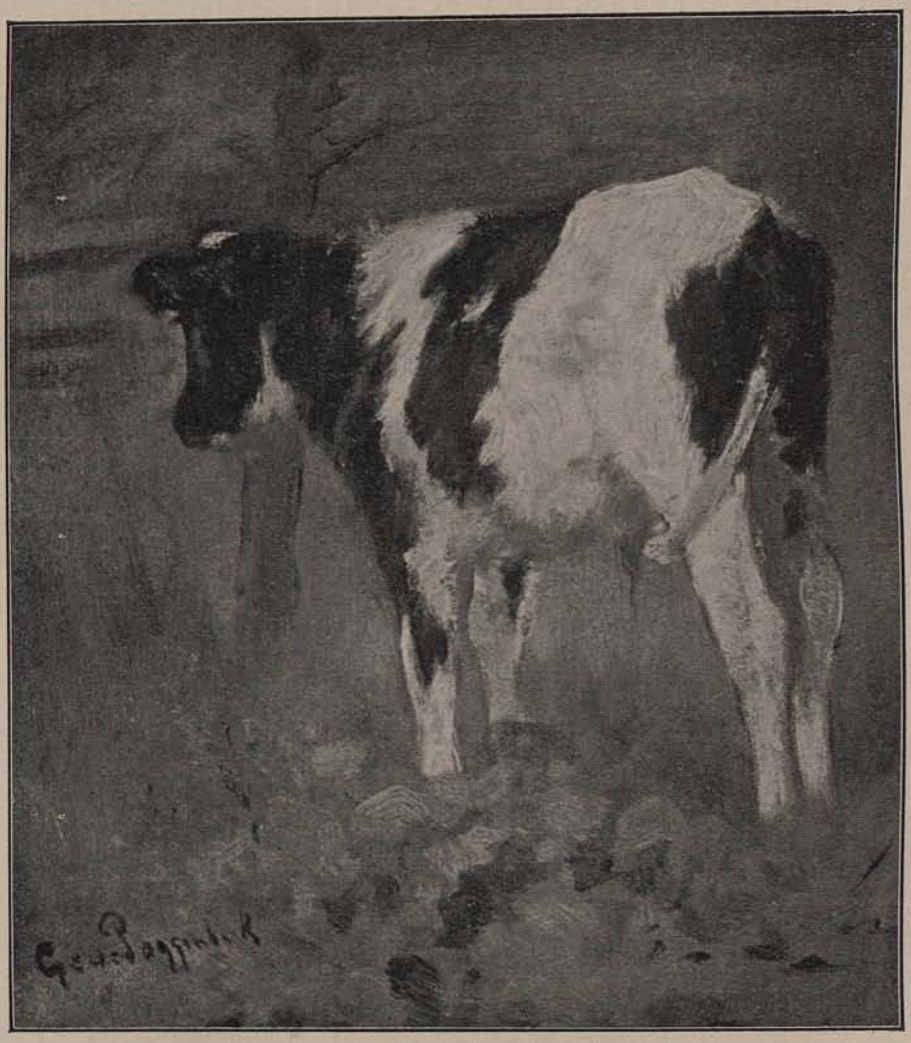
1) The principal men, of the Dutch modern painters, have an established reputation in England. It is however not so easy for others to obtain a footing in the art world. But some are coming to the fore. Amongst these is Poggenbeek, who has lately had an opportunity of showing his work in London. An interesting exhibition, of his oils and water-colours, was to be seen at the Holland Fine Art Gallery, in Grafton Street, in May 1901.

An appreciative public was able to see how true these Dutchmen are to their green meadows, quiet lanes and pearly skies. (Trans.)

into the country, and spent a considerable time in Gelderland and in Drenthe, where he exercised himself chiefly in the art of drawing.

But the scenery of the Province of Utrecht attracted him the most. It was there that he worked with extreme pleasure and satisfaction. During seven years he lived at Breukelen, with his friend Bastert, from which place the two made many agreeable sketching tours together.

Poggenbeek knew Mauve but slightly—although his work had always had



From a study, in the possession of Mr. J. H. van Eeghen.

a great influence over him—until the last years of the great artist's life, when they met at Laren, where Mauve was living with his family, and where Poggenbeek went to paint, one summer, for three months. Their original acquaintance was started at the Hague, but it was not till they met at Laren, where they conversed freely and took walks together, that Poggenbeek felt the powerful sway of the older man.

There is no doubt that Mauve's influence over our artist was of great importance, although he (Poggenbeek) had such inborn characteristics of his own that his interpretations of art were placed in close proximity to those of

"Halles aux Vins," Paris. From a painting.

Mauve, and enabled him to take his place amongst the younger and so-called independent men. When comparing his works with those of others, they assume a charm peculiarly his own.

This must undoubtedly be acknowledged when viewing the pictures done in the Provinces of Holland and Utrecht, as well as his town views of Paris and Amsterdam, and his sketches in Normandy and Brittany.

* * *

Poggenbeek obtained medals in Amsterdam (1883); Paris (1889); Chicago (1893); Berlin (1895).

Paul Zilcken

# J. H. WIJSMULLER

BY

H. M. KRABBÉ.

"Autumn." From a painting.

# J. H. WIJSMULLER.


In the early works of our present day artists of note, there is a universal conformity, a striving after truth and a scrupulous adhering to nature, from which we gather how important it is to study seriously, and to lay a sound foundation whereon to build knowledge and learn to express what is beautiful.

If you examine the former works of our best painters, you will be surprised to see the lifeless barren studies, yet done with so much love. I remember seeing the early efforts of the brothers Maris, of Mauve, Israels and many more, all of which will testify to what I have just been saying.

Although these early works may be less artistic, yet they are the interpretation of an earnest desire to copy the beauties of nature and show a love of truth.

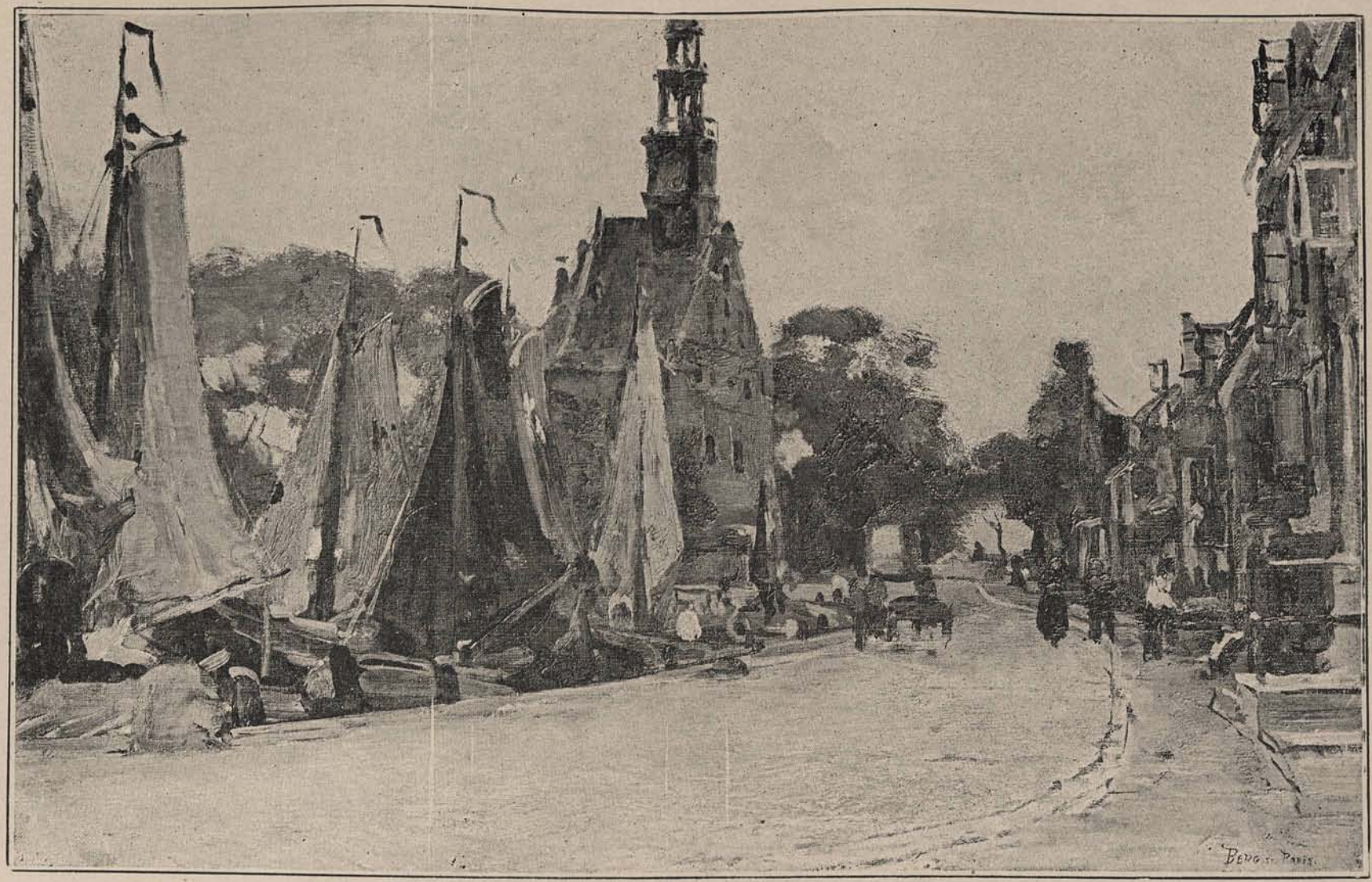
After this hard work and sincere striving after truth and correctness, talent *then* develops itself, according to the measure of genius possessed by the individual himself.

It must be confessed that some went to the wall by too great a desire for this correctness of reproduction, such as counting every leaf on the branch of a tree, or observing every fold in a collar, but with those who could not soar above this, not much has been lost. As the artist developed in his life's object, he understood nature more and more, and this knowledge supported and sustained him, and his work, in consequence, became better and riper.

"Tramps." From a study in oils.

Wijsmuller began to paint when he was about twenty years old; he therefore missed those difficult days through which the Nestors of our finest art had been obliged to pass. When *he* began to work, in 1875, the ice was broken and the way paved in a great measure. The conventional manner of "picture making" was done away with, and the artist was allowed to think for himself. He, Wijsmuller, belongs to the second generation, and forms the link between the old and the young artists of the present day.

As the son of parents who were not rich, his desire to take up art as a profession was seriously opposed, and there was no one ready or willing to



"A view of Hoorn, on the Zuyder Zee." A study in oils.

give him a helping hand. I think we may say that the first years, after his return from school, are not amongst his pleasantest recollections. Many respectable professions were suggested by his anxious father, one being the watch-making trade; all of them however he refused, although generally submissive to his father's wishes. All he cared for was dabbling in paints, and for this purpose he spent every penny of his pocket money.

Wijsmuller and van der Waay were at the same school together, where, as boys, they struck up a sincere friendship, which has lasted ever since. Van der Waay was a great help to our artist in the early days of his career; he and Witkamp—who at that time were studying together at the Academy of Drawing—spent all their spare moments with Wijsmuller, and the three

"Geldersche Kade, Amsterdam." From a study in oils.

became inseparable friends, a fact that no doubt induced the latter to adhere to his fixed intention of going in for art.

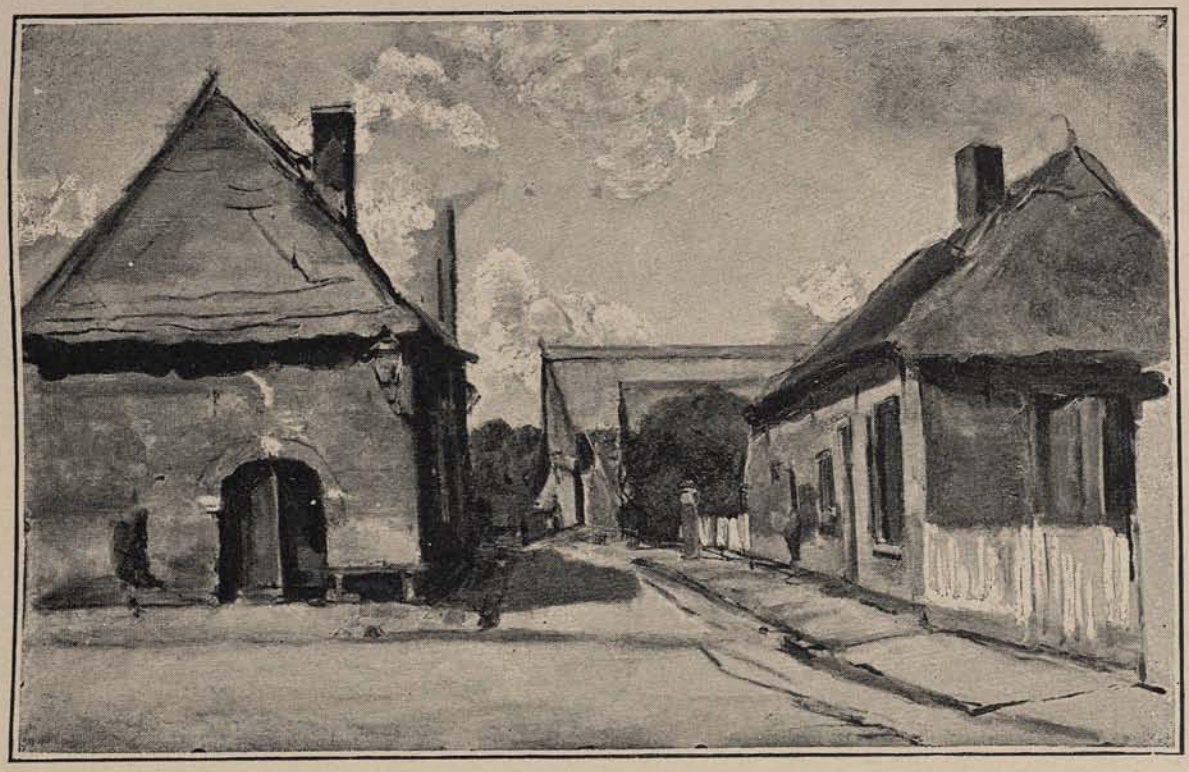
But I think Wijsmuller has to thank Louis Koopman the most, he was the drawing master at the school where he met van der Waay. Koopman, who was himself a very fair portrait painter, took an immense interest in the talented boy, and when he left school he continued that interest and helped to advise him, when all his own little world seemed against him.

And so the first years of Wijsmuller's manhood were rather aimlessly spent, wasting much precious time. He needed the stimulus of working in companionship at the Academy; however many drawbacks there may be in this working together method, it may incontestably be reckoned as a great help and a steadying to a perhaps somewhat unsteady young man. Helplessly he

went from pillar to post, from one occupation to another, taking up various things but interesting himself in nothing but what concerned art, and apparently only happy and contented when going about with his two artist friends.

Witkamp had an *atelier* in his own home, which luxury van der Waay did not as yet possess, and much time was spent there by the trio, from which, in time, the first fruits of all three saw the light of day and were launched into the world.

But to go back to Wijsmuller and his early struggles. The aimless life he was leading became intolerable to him and he could stand it no longer, and so he took the bull by the horns and *painted.* He began with the objects near-



"A Street in Bronkhorst." From a study in oils.

est at hand. The *Singels* (Amsterdam) at that time still in their picturesque state; the *Amstelveensche* Road; the old house called "*De Vraag*" (The Question) on the *Sloter* Road, these objects attracted him most and were his first efforts. Sometimes he would walk about for hours together, laden with his artist's paraphernalia, unable to settle down in any place, imagining always that some further spot would suit him better. These first studies are as strong as iron, as firm as a rock and as accurate as a photograph. But by constant and persistent study and practice he soon developed a talent which brought forth more artistic things, which in time delighted the eyes of the art-lover.

Sometimes this trio of friends hankered after the country, and not having the where-with-all to take a trip, one of them would start out with a freshly painted canvas under his arm, ready to part with it for a very modest sum.

"Landscape at Abcoude." From a study in oils.

*"A Winter's Landscape"*

FROM A PAINTING

In the possession of Mr. J. G. Robbers at Scheveningen.


J.H. Wijsmuller

The spoil would be equally divided and the young artistic souls go away happy, to Haarlem or elsewhere, to revel in trees and sunny meadows, away from the eternal bricks and mortar of a large town.

Although these days were crowded with many difficulties and disappointments, yet they recall to our artist many happy moments and amusing incidents.

When Wijsmuller made up his mind to defy all opposition and study art, with the view of becoming an artist some future day, he knew that instruction was an absolute necessity, so he made up his mind to go in for a course at the Academy of Drawing. After a brilliant entrance examination, he joined the evening classes, and it is surprising how soon he learnt to draw from the model; his studies of the nude, which resulted from those evenings, would

"Near Amsterdam." From a painting.

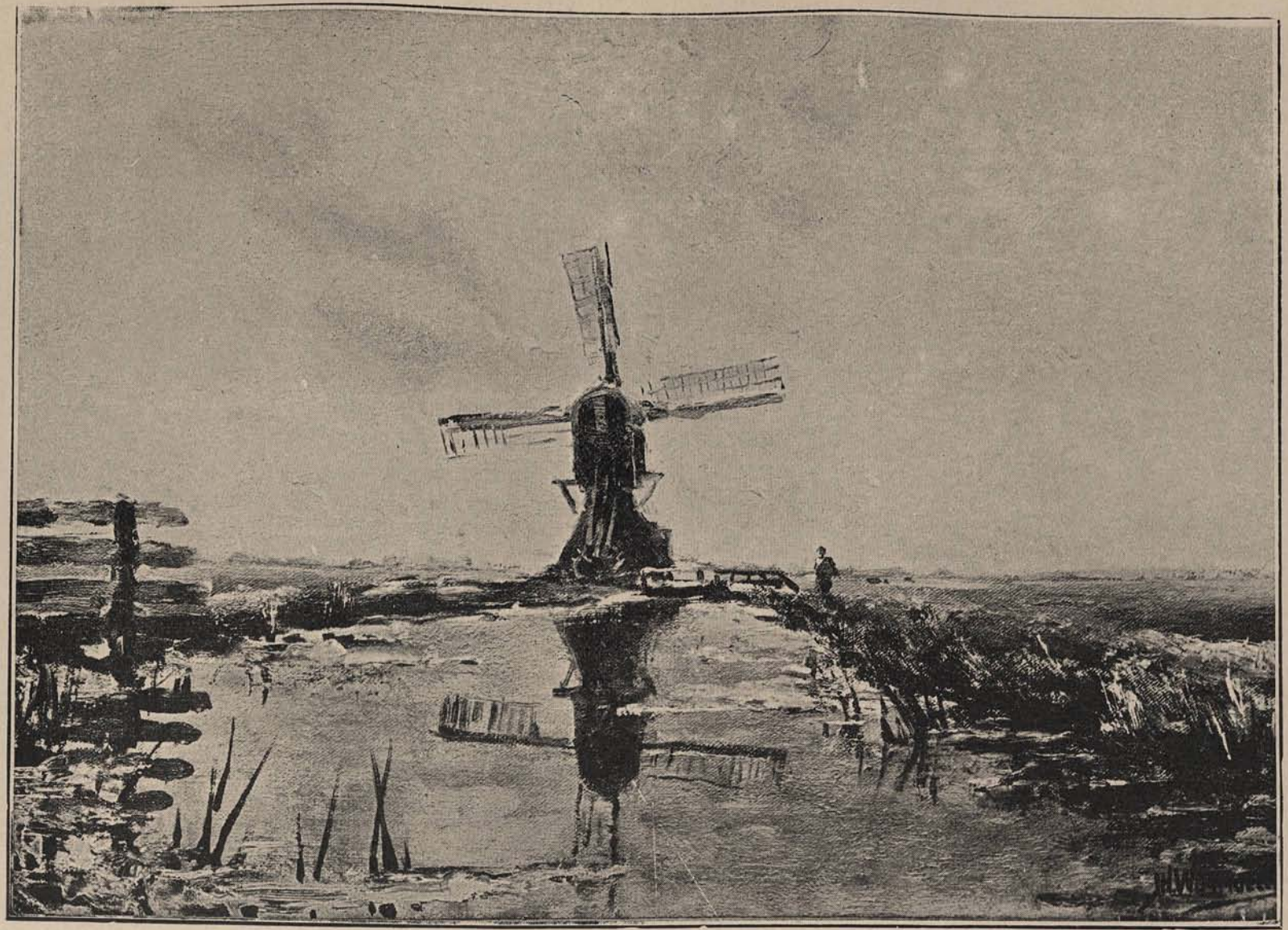
convince any one that had he stuck to this *genre* he might have become as celebrated in the art of figure painting as he has in the rendering of landscapes.

His first good work had its equally good result. A Royal subsidy enabled him to develop his talent and in 1879 we find him at the Hague, where he worked industriously for more than a year. He was made a member of the *Pulchri Studio* and became one of the most useful members.

From the Hague we follow him to Brussels, where, however, he did not remain very long: "for you see an artist can't earn much there!" these were his own words.

About the year 1881 he returned to the Fatherland, where he has lived ever since, faithful to the country of his birth.

"A Winter's Morning." From a painting.



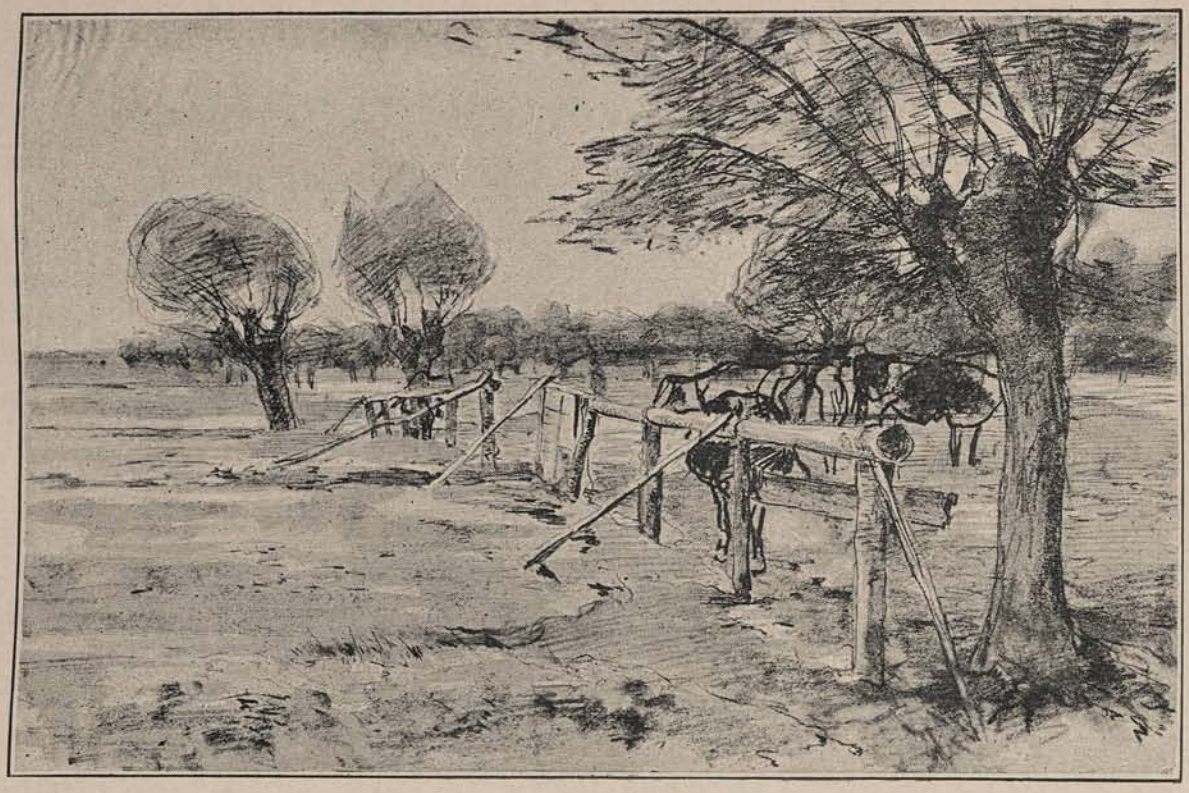
"The Wind-mill." From a painting.

"Edam in Winter." From a painting in the possession of Mr. J. G. Robbers.

Artistic fanatics, and imaginary painters, predict that the time is not far distant, when artists will no longer exhibit their works and there will be no more selling to the highest bidder.

Oh happy days, when the artist needs no longer think of the rent of his studio, when food comes to him *gratis* and when the words Rates and Taxes have absolutely no meaning.

As long as an artist requires daily food and the various needs of life press upon him as sorely as upon most men, and as long as there is no law providing him with an eternal and never ending subsidy, artists will be obliged to exhibit their works and take them to the market, the same as other market-



"The Meadows at Milking Time." From a sketch in chalks.

able wares. And indeed why not? Why should he not exhibit and sell? Because some of the art fraternity look upon their works as creations of their own genius by the Grace of God? Because they cannot suffer any one to come between them and their idol? Because the high pedestal, upon which they have placed themselves, is perhaps tottering . . . . ? In which case I would strongly recommend these men to exhibit their works, which might undeceive them, stifle these hopeless illusions and deprive them of the joy of idolatry.

Wijsmuller was driven, by force of absolute necessity, to exhibit some of his work after only one year's study. He sold his first picture in Groningen, a landscape, which was bought by one of the members of the Mesdag family. The joy of this first ray of hope can scarcely be imagined and more especially

did he rejoice since it was with the greatest difficulty that he had collected the necessary money for canvas and paints, to say nothing of the frame. After that first success in exhibiting in Groningen there never was an exhibition of pictures without his being represented, and so great was his fruitfulness, in the matter of picture producing, that no sale of paintings, no loan collection, was ever without a Wijsmuller.

In talking this matter over with Wijsmuller he said to me "There is nothing so good for an artist as seeing his own work amongst a lot of other men's productions, however painful it may be. I don't hold with those artists who darken their studios, arranging their picture in the most advantageous corner, and then rub their hands together with satisfaction and look upon themselves as great men. When you see a pampered dandelion, in the strong light of an exhibition room, surrounded by the stately beautiful orchids of our richly gifted art-brothers, then and then only you will understand how far above our heads are these clever artists; and if this close companionship may be unpleasantly trying, to an honest painter, it is nevertheless of the greatest value; there is nothing so good as self-criticism. I seldom miss exhibitions, that is to say if I have something ready for exhibiting, which is generally the case; I consider that I improve my style and I thereby run the chance of improving the means of my daily life."

"On the Canal." From a painting.

"Something ready for exhibiting, which is generally the case!" These were indeed true words spoken by Wijsmuller and by no means in a boasting manner. His studio always contains a great number of finished canvases. Pleasing and varied are his compositions, all of them ready and waiting for any approaching exhibition. He has always more than one work on hand at once, which accounts for the well stocked studio.

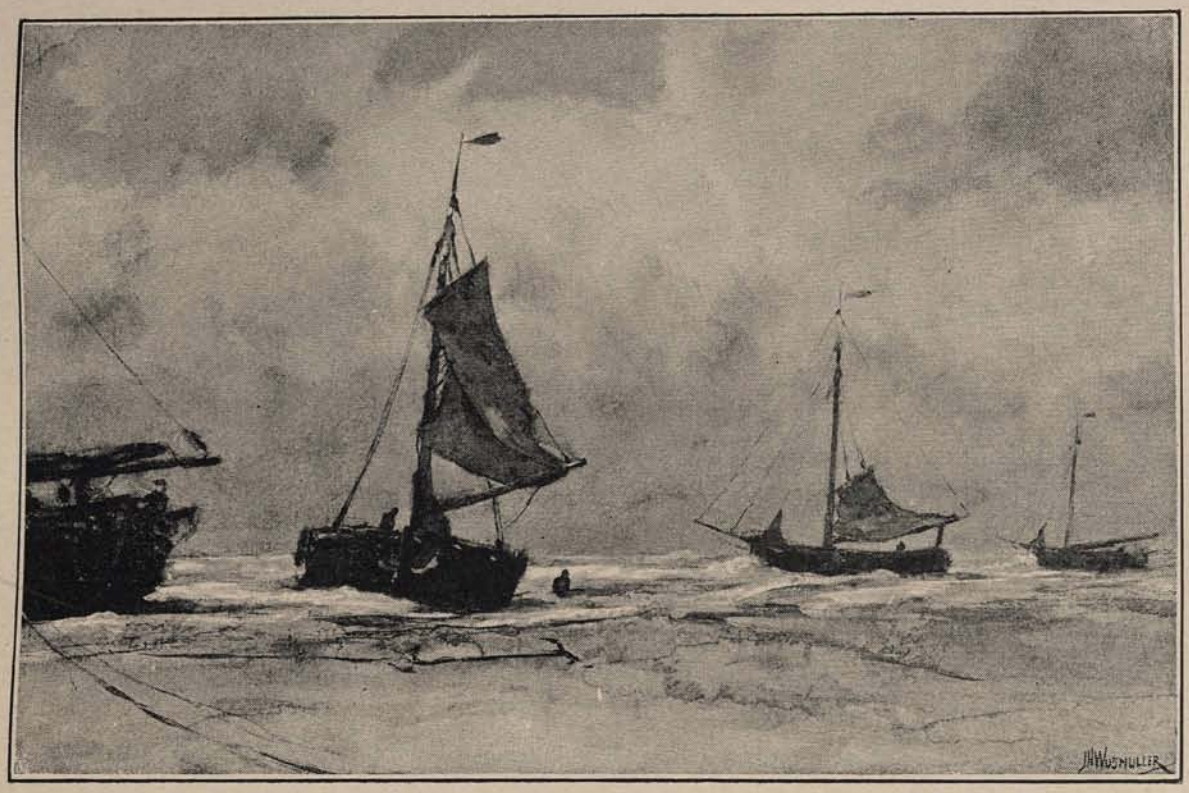
Without exaggeration his studio contains at least five hundred sketches, many of them almost like finished pictures, and these five hundred do not include the chalks and charcoal sketches, nor of course the finished canvases of which I have already spoken.

As a general rule he works from his sketches in chalks. He never copies

a sketch in oils, it would lose its freshness; and yet it is just by these very studies in oils that he has made such giant strides.

His subjects, which were formerly chosen from the quaint old picturesque parts of Amsterdam, are now taken, for the most part, from the villages of Gelderland (where he spends much of his time). Windmills he has painted by the score; the last one can safely be contrasted with a wind-mill by Gabriël.

When he returned from Brussels, he carefully studied landscape-painting, taking his subjects from the country neighbourhood in and around Amsterdam. In a small *atelier*, in Nassau Street, in the "ditch and wind-mill neighbourhood" (all since disappeared) he lived through some anxious difficult years, till in 1883, when his work was crowned with the silver medal, at an Exhibition in



"The Beach at Egmond." From a water-colour.

Amsterdam. From that moment matters improved, he became better known and the public showed interest in his work. He was now able to take a larger and better *atelier;* this he found, to his mind, on the North Market, near those paintable spots the *Prinsen-* and *Brouwers Grachten* (Princes' and Brewers' canals). The typical Dutch market, with its bustle and hum of voices, and the big weather-beaten church, standing in one corner, were attractive points, and the result of these surroundings was the producing of such charming pictures, that the name of Wijsmuller went up with a rush and was soon placed along side of the best of his contemporaries.

Always working hard and industriously, always pushing ahead, studying indefatigably, until he became the man he is now: honoured by his colleagues,

loved by the public and praised in the art-world. A self made man, who is endowed with much talent and a steadily rising reputation.

Every artist has to thank himself if he succeeds, but when a young man is blessed with some of this world's goods, the struggle for such success is much lightened. Sometimes that strife, for the necessities of life, is an enticement

"Midday." From a study in oils.

to work all the harder to gain the desired end, but when the struggle is too hard it may wither and dry up the very marrow of the effort and kill art.

Not every one possesses the perseverance and determination of Wijsmuller, who, averse to the making of saleable daubs, considers such a proceeding beneath him, desiring only to advance and improve.

It is certainly quite true that good work pays best in the end, but on the other hand the result may be overlooked when an easily attained success is within reach, and for the moment we forget our natural genius.

I consider that Wijsmuller's last work is his best; this cannot be said of every artist. The canvas I allude to is a simple incident in the Vondel's Park (Amsterdam): a greenish golden sky, lit up by the last rays of a rapidly sinking sun, above the ornamental waters of the Park; a bank of purple clouds, melting into the blue of the distant horizon, against which the trees, almost bare, are silhouetted. The water is perfectly still, there is not a ripple on its

"Old Amsterdam."

calm surface, it is smiling at the recollection of the sun's good night kiss. The moment is chosen when the earth is preparing to put on her more solemn look, expecting to be soon greeted by the rays of the silvery moon and the twinkling of the stars. Evening is creeping on unperceived, throwing her gauzy veil over the trees and making the horizon indistinct and all outline hazy. It is the peaceful appearance of the close of a fine autumnal day.

There is another favorite picture of mine. "Edam in Winter" (in the possession of Mr. J. G. Robbers of Scheveningen and reproduced in these pages). The road, leading to this quaint little town of the Zuyder Zee, lies between tall trees and very old-fashioned little dwellings. It is mid-winter, and every thing is

covered with a snow mantle. The old church, with its ornamental spire, makes a very suitable middle distance. The houses and trees are reflected in the dull grey water of the canal, that leads to the sea. Although a well chosen subject and beautifully painted, it cannot, to my mind, take its place by the side of the "Evening in the Vondel's Park."

One of Wijsmuller's pictures reminds me forcibly of the landscape by Gabriël in the National Museum. This picture, by Wijsmuller, represents a wind-mill, standing at the head of a piece of water, which flows direct towards the spectator. It is a warm summer's day and the sun, tired of shining so brilliantly has hid itself, for a few moments, behind a cloud, which makes the blue of the sky seem even bluer. This painting is likewise reproduced in these pages. Although not standing above the work of Gabriël it may safely be hung along side and it is worthy of a place in the same Museum, where as yet Wijsmuller is not represented.

A hay barge, with the sweet smelling stuff piled up high, a hot day but with a threatening sky, under which, in the distance, a quaint little town seems to await, with fear and trembling, the coming storm; a bit of turf land, where the men are cutting out the sods of peat under a blazing sun; a *plas* (lake) with bending reeds and willow trees .... in fact so many beautiful things that it is impossible even to begin to mention them.

I was particularly struck with his sketches in oils, and especially by one he did on the sands at Egmond, where he appears to have spent some considerable time: A heavy sky, wherein the blue appears but sparingly, above a wild stormy sea; the foam of the crested waves is distinctly seen, in which the heavy *pinken* (fishing smacks peculiar to the Dutch coast) are being ruthlessly tossed. Their brown sails give quite a touch of colour to the picture and contrast well with the green tone of the sea, and with the blue grey of the sky. Certainly a fine sketch from which, no doubt, some day a fine picture will result.

Undisturbed Wijsmuller sits, when weather permits, on some boat or barge painting views of the picturesque quays of old Amsterdam. One of his most interesting sketches, of this kind, is a peep of the old *Geldersche Kade* (Gelderland Quay) with *Schreiers* Tower in the distance. The arrangement is well thought out and cleverly done.

But his period of Amsterdam town views is over, he has almost entirely abandoned that kind of thing. Yet he made his name through this particular subject; it would however be folly to say that his greatest power lies in this direction. Although he has made a great number of these sketches, and very clever they are too, yet the quality of his later work is greater, and the subjects handled are entirely different. His chalk sketches, which are generally the models for his large pictures, look so easy that one is almost inclined to think that we could do them as well ourselves. It is marvellous that a few outlines, which apparently seem so easy to do, can be sufficient foundation for extensive paintings.

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Wijsmuller is the best hearted fellow out. Reserved perhaps with strangers, but with his friends he is open-hearted and delightful, and amongst artists a *rara avis*. Married a few years since, he has a very pleasant home circle, a suitable reward for all his hard labour and well spent life. May he enjoy many years still of this happiness, and rise steadily in his art.

If at any time you see a slender fair haired man, sitting on a barge, in summer, with a giant paintbox before him, painting on a large canvas some picturesque view of old Amsterdam, or do you happen to see this same smiling man, skating, in winter, with a miniature paintbox slung across his shoulders, be convinced that it is Wijsmuller and greet him for me. You will then discover that all I have said about him is nothing more than the truth.

A. M. Krabbé

# J. VOERMAN

BY

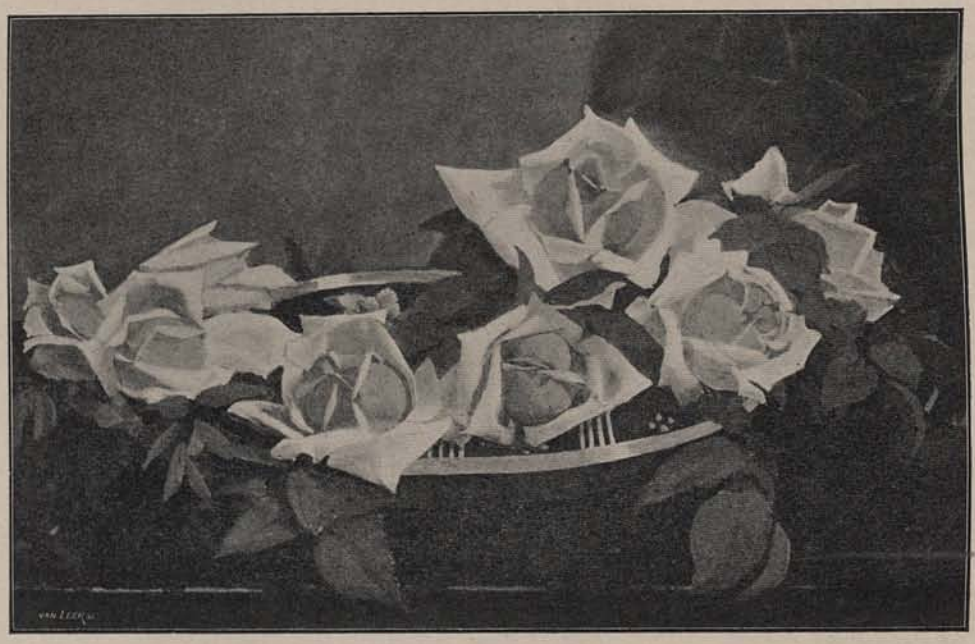
## W. STEENHOFF.


"Milking time." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. v. D. in Amsterdam.

# J. VOERMAN.


To write the biography of a person whose career has not yet reached its highest point, can only be a work half done, even though there be some distinctly important periods worthy of being chronicled. It is therefore not possible to give exhaustively the life of a man who is still young and whose work is increasing in power.

This thought occurred to me when I heard that Voerman was to be one of the representative Dutch artists selected for these volumes, because the success of a career consists not, in my opinion, in the length of time that the artist has belonged to the guild, in connection with the number of years of his life, but is manifested by the visible determination of a character from which further developments may yet be expected. There are many painters, biographically described in these volumes, who have not outdistanced Voerman in the matter of years (I will not mention names) but whose works show every indication and give repeated proof of having reached their highest point and final state of completeness. Of such men a biography may safely be written, if this is considered necessary. A publication from time to time, reproducing



"A Dish of Roses."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. F. G. Tessaro in Amsterdam.

and describing their works will nevertheless always be welcome. But apart from this dubious possibility every thing has been said about them that there is to say, whereas it is impossible to anticipate to what growth and completeness a man's talent may reach of whom much more may yet be expected.

But in these days when the tendency to criticism and the upholding of art principles are more strongly revealed than the sense of production and the motive of creation, every phenomenon of importance comes within reach of observation and criticism, even before the development of knowledge is complete.

There are many who say, in their haste, that there is too much preaching, now a days, of the gospel of art, but to those who are not narrow minded, it may possibly occur that it is chiefly the disclosing of personal and acquired

opinions, on the principles of contemporary art, and not so much the outcome of direct perception. Wherefore we see, in the present day art productions, the spectacle of continued (or discontinued) transfiguration and often with an imperceptibly diminishing articulation.

Therefore when an artist is singled out, and his work discussed, his own personality and the private events of his life are of less importance than the argument as to the line and style of art he has taken up.

In writing about Voerman this principle should be kept well in view; in discussing him it is not necessary to give publicity to his private life, but it should be pointed out in what manner the development of modern Dutch art, and landscape painting in particular, is visible in his works. And such work

"Roses." From a water-colour in the possession of Mrs. A. Reich in Amsterdam.

as his may be of some use in giving a clearer insight into and shedding a light upon our present day art, which is much to be desired.

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When landscape-painting is mentioned we turn instinctively to the Dutch school. We possess unrivalled painters of the past, men so well-known that art, in foreign countries, which made an epoch for itself, fed upon the old Dutch school. An inclination to paint out-of-doors seems born in us, and yet if we glance down the list of our best painters we cannot pretend that landscape painting was a branch to itself.

Without going into the detail of this question and trying to trace the origin of this phenomenon, we have merely to scrutinize the Dutch painters in general which will convince us of the fact.

Thus Rembrandt (the most perspicuitous of Hollanders) was as landscape painter—not perhaps in prolixity, but in force and power of expression—quite as superior as in figure and portrait painting. The many sketches and etchings which he made, in the country, beyond the gates of his native town, as relaxation from more serious work, are as visibly teeming with the same grand qualities as the more arduous work just laid aside.

And then we have our Delft painter Vermeer, the unequalled painter of peaceful interiors, and did he sometimes venture beyond this scope he was equally the master painter of landscape; with its space and freshness. Nor did Peter de Hoogh consider himself limited to interiors with their soft subdued light, but he wandered out into the open and portrayed, with equal sincerity, quaint old-fashioned narrow streets, or alleys and courtyards. And then there is Albert Cuyp, who could express himself with the same fluency and ease in every style, his brush was always ready for every change of sentiment, he too occupies a unique place as landscape-painter.

Thus many names, from our early school, might be mentioned as witness of this peculiarity. But this peculiarity is not totally absent in the present day. Israels has given us many landscapes which are as full of expression as his figure subjects, and equal proof of his marvellous talent; and with no indication that he had to strive against any unusual difficulties in the matter of technique.

And after mentioning Israels there are still many more, of the modern school, who are specialists in their own particular way.

Over against these we must write the names of those who promised great futures, in the matter of figure painting, but yet reached the top of the tree by means of landscape.

We naturally first of all think of Jacob Maris, who may be placed in the seat of honour amongst his contemporaries, even as Rembrandt stood by himself in the 17th century.

The atmospheric condition of our country must certainly be peculiar; no other country is so highly charged with such a variety of melody, such emotional tones of all shades, easily apparent to every human temperament and mood.

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Modern Dutch landscape was long in arriving at perfection. When a new life in art was agitating to be heard in foreign countries, the Hollander continued to seek fame in the old traditions of a glorious past. In following diligently the old examples it was not seen that the so-called serious study of art was a mere soulless industry. It was the sound of voices from abroad

that awoke us from our slumber, and then we saw our mistake, and, as if by magic, the road lay mapped out before us. The first thing we had to do was to stay the movement of our automatic principles, and turn over a new leaf by stepping out of doors and looking, with seeing eyes, at our green meadows and far across to our distant horizon, which hitherto had been depicted in stereotyped colours.

Dutch landscape then revived, and the first sign of this revival was the exclamation of admiration at the unexpected surprise.

The vigour of this new movement in art was increased by the struggle between those who upheld the new principles and the conservative faction who tried to maintain their worn-out traditions. And as a protest against the old style there came the increasing expressions of the new born art. Urged by opposition enthusiasm ran high and according as the younger party increased in strength and in number, the conviction of the older men wavered.

"Iris." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. W. M. Roodenburg in Amsterdam.

Now however the struggle has exhausted itself and the battle field removed to territories which a few years ago were not even known.

The unanimity of five and twenty years ago has vanished and the fought for ideal has branched out in many directions.

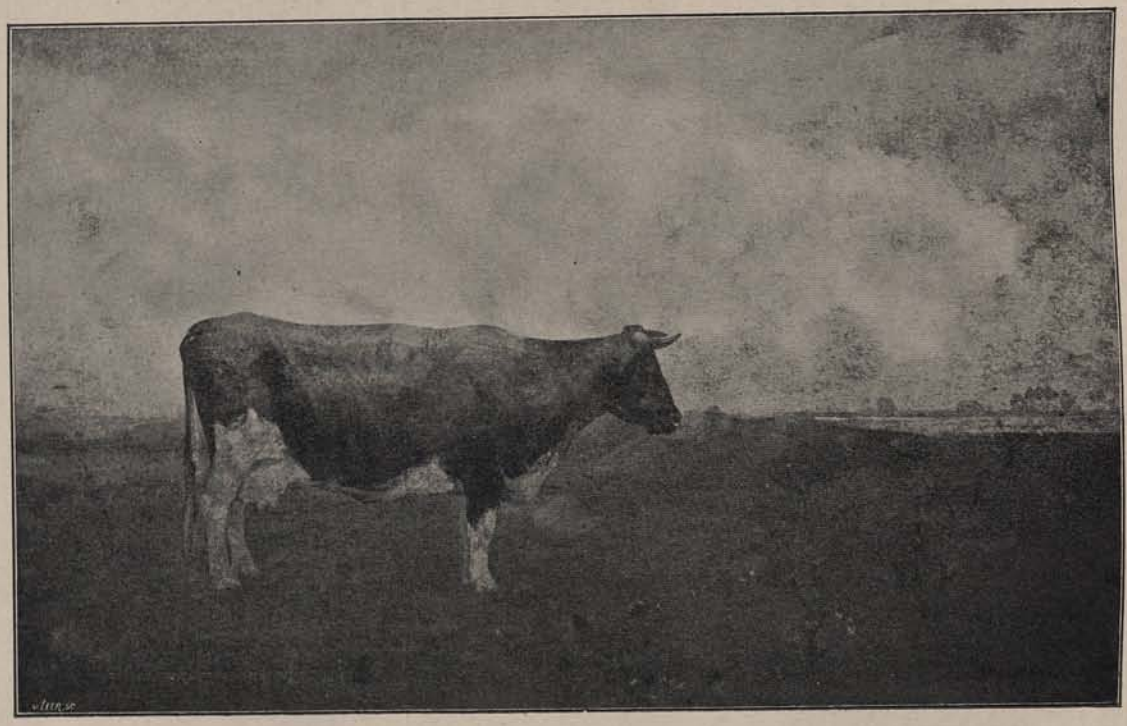
When the first burst of enthusiasm grew fainter, a want was felt for discovering fresh motive powers and a larger scope for wider extended views, as a means of procuring forms of expression in a closer completeness.

It became apparent, to many, that the result was by no means perfect and it was seen that a reduction should be made in the vague phenomena if the point of departure was to be approached. Much had to be cast aside as pernicious and the building not only rebuilt, but placed upon a new and better foundation.

Amongst the younger generation Voerman had certainly the courage of his convictions, and he boldly struck out a new line for himself; and in the logical order of events his work bears witness of a steady improvement.

We need not go back to the days when he made his first bow to the public with the "Jewish Funeral" in order to review his works. There was no sign *then* that the growth of later years had already taken root. It was merely the attempt of an academically brought up youth, who with a certain amount of ambition would, after completing his course of study, place before the public a pretty little pleasing picture.

The material I have at hand is very insufficient for giving a proper survey of the gradations of development in the artistic career of our artist; but this



"The Black Cow." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. T. Cremer at the Hague.

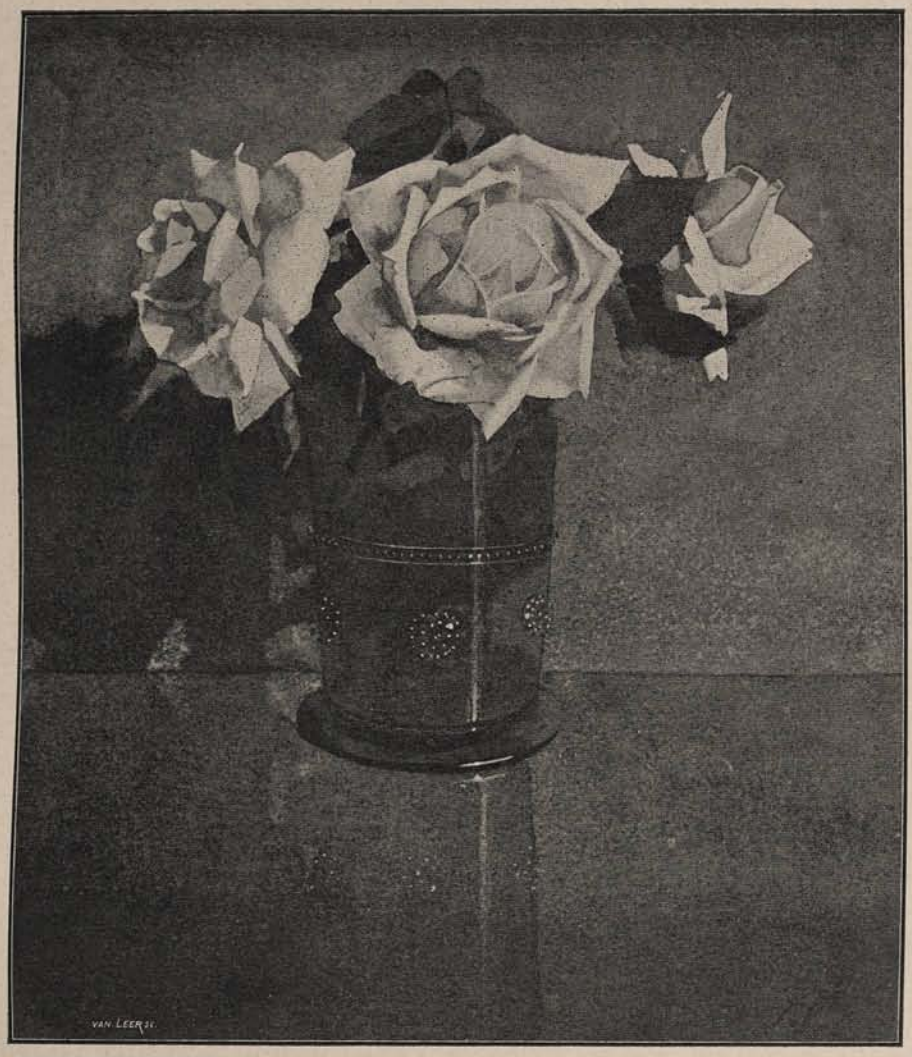
is not the intention of this essay, as I have already remarked. I think it is most probable that the first stage of his career was a short one, for he appears to have changed his tactics very soon for other ground which suited him better and appealed to him more.

He wandered through lanes and meadows and although he may have breathed more freely in these surroundings, yet it was through the eyes of others that he saw the new field of battle, which suited his taste better. I happened to see, quite by chance, a short time ago, a painting of Voerman's done some twelve years ago or more, which, as a specimen of his early work, is not without interest 1).

1) I heard later that this picture gained for Voerman the prize in the Willink van Collen competition.

We may call that period "*the Day before Yesterday*" The subject was the same as those of today: cows, in rich pasture land, against an orange coloured evening sky. There was not yet any visible sign of the earnest seeker of later days. But there was a certain amount of independence shown by the apparent courage with which the subject was handled, indicating that the young painter was a man of distinct artistic talent.

There was an attempt made at a higher key in colour, in light and in shade, in their various proportions, which in spite of certain good qualities was not



"Roses in a glass."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. Th. J. B. Hilterman in Amsterdam.

altogether free of a striving after effect. I seemed to recognize an unquestionable Belgian influence; although his works of later years, that are but vaguely impressed on my memory at this moment, are more in keeping with the Dutch sense of feeling such as we see in the works of William Maris and especially in those of Mauve.

I do not however wish to insist upon this opinion of mine, for as I have

already said I know too little of his work of that particular period, but I merely throw it out as a suggestion.

The epoch, that may be considered as Voerman's starting point, begins with these two water-colours: "The Black Cow" and "Horses at play". Then the change for the better had come about, taking the straight course towards the winning post. That period we may call "*Yesterday*".

* * *

The vitality of impressionism lies principally in the unexpected charm it produces. Painting often expresses the feeling of oft repeated surprise, and nature is an inexhaustible source for this surprise; for owing to the constant and ever changeableness of her aspect, she tempts the sensitive eye with her constantly varied beauty. The tendency therefore of naturalism requires an acute discernment and a strict following after nature, and this can only be obtained by the shortest span between observation and expression. Perception takes place after the organic working of the eye and through the power of the performance of the brain; the interpretation is modified according to the disposition. Thus there arose a sensational art as well, owing to the desire to express unlooked for convictions, and this was but a step removed from the pathetic advances of an obsolete cast-off idealism. These continued changes denote action and movement, but only in their absolute state and in their natural origin and peculiar way. We are not aware of their presence till they are upon us.

Van Deyssel, who years ago insisted upon passion, and always passion, in art, wrote an essay on life called: "Life's Lesson." Some years after he had quite a different code of law. Nevertheless the presence of passion, as a chief factor in a work of art, should never be rejected; the strongest and most important expressions of humanity have been produced by this passion and the highest point is perhaps only to be reached by him who possesses wisdom, and goes through the purifying fire till he becomes a saint.

But we are living in a time of much wavering and surrounded by a multitude of opinions, which bear witness of these phenomena which are continually overtaking each other and spreading out in all directions. We have witnessed the boldest *élans*, the most daring ventures, and the complicated schemes advised by men of discernment and of discriminating genius. But as yet no line has been struck out with the hope of the glory of a lasting renown.

After a time it seemed doubtful, to some, whether the foundation of this new movement in art, which was being received with so much enthusiasm was sound and lasting. Yet the impressionists knew that the impression seized from without should first penetrate to the actual existence of the object itself; undue importance being given to the superficial and above all to the seductive form displayed by this new art, only the outward adorning being considered

"Hattem." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. C. Hoogendijk at the Hague.

of necessity, which can give, at the best, but a momentary pleasure to the senses. Forgetting the blind alley down which so many, with undecided steps and with a want of purpose, are sure to wander, if not warned in time.

* * *

Voerman saw where destiny was leading him and rather than follow blindly through fogs and uncertainty, down this dangerous road, he decided to turn on his steps and start again afresh.

It is better to save the dying embers of a fire from being choked by the

"The haunted House." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. C. Hoogendijk at the Hague.

smouldering ash, than to feed the expiring flames with a quickly consuming litter.

The return along the beaten track was undertaken very cautiously. Every thing carefully examined and all useful material collected such as he knew would be helpful in rebuilding the edifice.

In the epoch which I have already suggested should be called "*Yesterday*" his efforts were not only directed towards the purifying of the spiritual aspect of his art, but also to the refining of the material appearance of his work. A speedy and happy result was the outcome of it all. I remember seeing, at the Exhibition of pictures in *Arti*, two paintings: "The Black Cow" and "Horses at Play" which told their own tale "The Black Cow" was a work

*"Hattem on the Yssel"*

FROM A WATER-COLOUR

In the possession of Mr. F. Kranenburg in Amsterdam.

of imposing and important character; the other very insinuating, with a wonderful tenderness of colouration and with a nobility of outline.

After that he forsook any thing and every thing that might lead to any incorrectness of rendering, or in the least interfere with his own set ideas and sensitiveness of feeling.

The numerous flower pieces that he then took to painting may be looked upon as his apprenticeship in art, and they prove that he reached the desired goal in the end.

Voerman's flowers have not that attractive picturesque look that we see in many of the flower-pieces painted by more or less talented people. They are


"Horses at play." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. C. Hoogendijk at the Hague.

not pretty in their outward and material appearance, viewed as a daring scheme colour, but they are of a frail bloom with a smoothness and correctness of form and growth. And it is also obvious that they are intended as motive for subjects of still-life; mostly placed separately, with their real value enhanced by a plain background, contributing to a charming decorative floral design.

The flowers are not represented in their splendour, with the intention of causing a momentary delight to the eyes, but with the view of disclosing their more profound qualities, and these are revealed to us by progressive graduations, thus aiding us to penetrate and perceive the beauty of the whole; a philosophic indication that flowers can be figuratively characterized and made emblematic.

But Voerman loves, best of all, landscape painting which he nourishes with the same desire to discover the material beauty as with the portraying of flowers. After long and serious contemplation he expresses, with consideration, the idea, not only of tracing, but of weighing the true system by which an object, viewed by the spectator, may be accurately caught and understood.

In the monthly publication "*Nieuwe Gids*" (The New Guide) which appeared in January 1898, I attempted to write a characteristic sketch of Voerman's landscapes: I wrote as follows:

"In the present-day art, the meadows are seen as if covered with a rich green carpet, with delicately drawn flowers as attributes of their wealth and

"The Ysel at Hattem." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. F. G. Tessaro in Amsterdam.

glory. The colour, in the foreground, varies from dark green to a tawny yellow, according to the influence of the boundless sky above, and ever changing atmospheric effect, but always in a broad tone allowing no echoing sound to disturb the key in which the work is tuned; and in these green fields the animals graze, quietly moving in straight lines, with their heads lowered; now and again the line is broken by some more independently inclined animal, but soon taken up again; or they lie in groups, peacefully chewing the cud, or dosing, or perhaps watching the fleeting clouds overhead, those mysterious clouds....

Beyond is perhaps the little town of Hattem, sometimes in the near distance, and we are able to make out the varied architecture of houses and the whimsically shaped roofs; sometimes Hattem lies in the dim distance, showing but a faint indistinct silhouette against the far-away horizon, but always with the dominating church tower. And what of the sky? pale and dark clouds collected together or floating in space; some reflecting the sun's warm rays, others contrasting with the deep blue of the firmament; or perhaps one single cloud, in an endless expanse of soft one-toned atmosphere. Then again we have rugged whirling clouds, betokening a storm, showing that the temperament of this painter is more contemplative than passionate. Sometimes we see white clouds, strange bodies, seemingly of alabaster, showing a power of imagination and a wealth of conception. . . ."

* * *

Such art, so different to what we have been accustomed in the last years, such a departure from the usual thing, can only be understood gradually.

Not by comparison but by distinction are we perhaps able to understand its meaning.

Voerman does not pursue accidental phenomena in place of the real article. He searches for suitable scenes from daily life and above all his style is settled, and formulated. His painting is building up, uniting and placing in order, not specifying; and if we are called upon to indicate his particular style, we may say, with truth, that he is the painter of broad meadows at their most peaceful moments, with the patient cattle grazing so contentedly, living there all throughout the summer months, never wearying, never impatient, but in a happy state of repose. The harmony of these pictures is like the harmony of a song, sounding pleasantly in the air, the emblem of an uninterrupted peace beneath the silent unapproachable clouds.

Such scenes are not gazed upon without interest by the eye that seeks for motives of colour and light effects, it is innate in those who are perfectly intimate with the pecularities of this life in all its variety, following attentively the regular movement of the cattle, the sound of their heavy tread, deadened by the luxurious growth of grass, and even familiar with the regular breathing of the animals, as they quietly chew the cud in silent complacency.

Voerman's cows are not seen realistically nor are they drawn according to popular ideas; they are studied with the greatest care, even to the minutest detail, not only of form but of character and movement.

A striving after improvement is distinctly traceable and a decided sense of refining, such as we see in Potter's art, and in the works of the ancient Greeks, who tried to improve upon the human form divine.

Voerman's power lies in the love he bears for his subjects, which tendency

"Horses in a meadow." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. F. G. Tessaro in Amsterdam.

improves and refines his taste and increases his knowledge, till we may say that the form of the subject reaches a state of perfection.

These landscapes are like happy landmarks, in which the stronger nature of a sensitive artist seeks to express himself in correct form, and to equalize discreetly every thing subordinate, and it may be remarked with no tendency to outward show or ornamentation, which, in the art of to-day, has assumed so much importance. In some of his works, take for instance the picture of the two horses of which I have already been speaking, this tendency for equalization is very pronounced, it is a melody, an evenness of colour and theme, and a carefully determined outline of form.

Now and then however we get a work which is not so strictly carried out in its composition, but is a freer expression of the emotional delicacy of the mind. In such cases the colour is not laid on in such carefully thought out scales, but seems to flow free and frank, in a multitude of instantaneous touches. To illustrate this we may mention a subject that Voerman took up from time to time with variations: a shady path, running between hedges and leading up to a cottage, a figure sitting in the door way, lit up by a warm glow of light. The last variation, on this subject, was very superior and painted with an exquisite care of detail, the blue apron of the girl, in the door way, was executed with the utmost care and charm of touch. It is the simply told tale of an equally simple incident in daily life, and yet it reads like a fairy story, where the good are rewarded by an everlasting peace.

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This is the period of Voerman's art of "*To-day*". His work has won for him many trophies along the road that he has travelled, but the victorious standard has still to be raised!

There is still a want of completeness in his work, the material side is not yet fully realized and satisfied.

Voerman is not yet entire master of the technique which is so peculiarily his own. His work occasionally shows a refining of his own making which must eventually lead to the desired end.

But from an artist, who has directed his attention to a good beginning and laid a sound foundation and whose convictions can so forcibly animate his determined endeavours, we may await, with all confidence, the crowning of his work and the satisfactory completing of another stage, the stage of "*To-morrow*".

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To wind up with the usual demands, when writing the biography of a celebrity, I give the following particulars of the life of John Voerman:

Born at Kampen, on the 25th of January 1857, he was closely connected

"On the banks of the Ysel." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. H. K. Westendorp in Amsterdam.

with farm life throughout his youth, in fact we may call him a "thorough out-of-door man". In 1877 he went to Amsterdam to go in for a course of study at the Royal Academy, where he remained three years and then on to Antwerp, where he worked under the Academician Verlat. Then back to Amsterdam, once more at the Academy for a twelve month. Then last, but not least, he came to Hattem to try the strength of his own wings, and there he set up a studio of his own.

In 1890 he established himself in Hattem, where he still resides.

W. Steenhoff

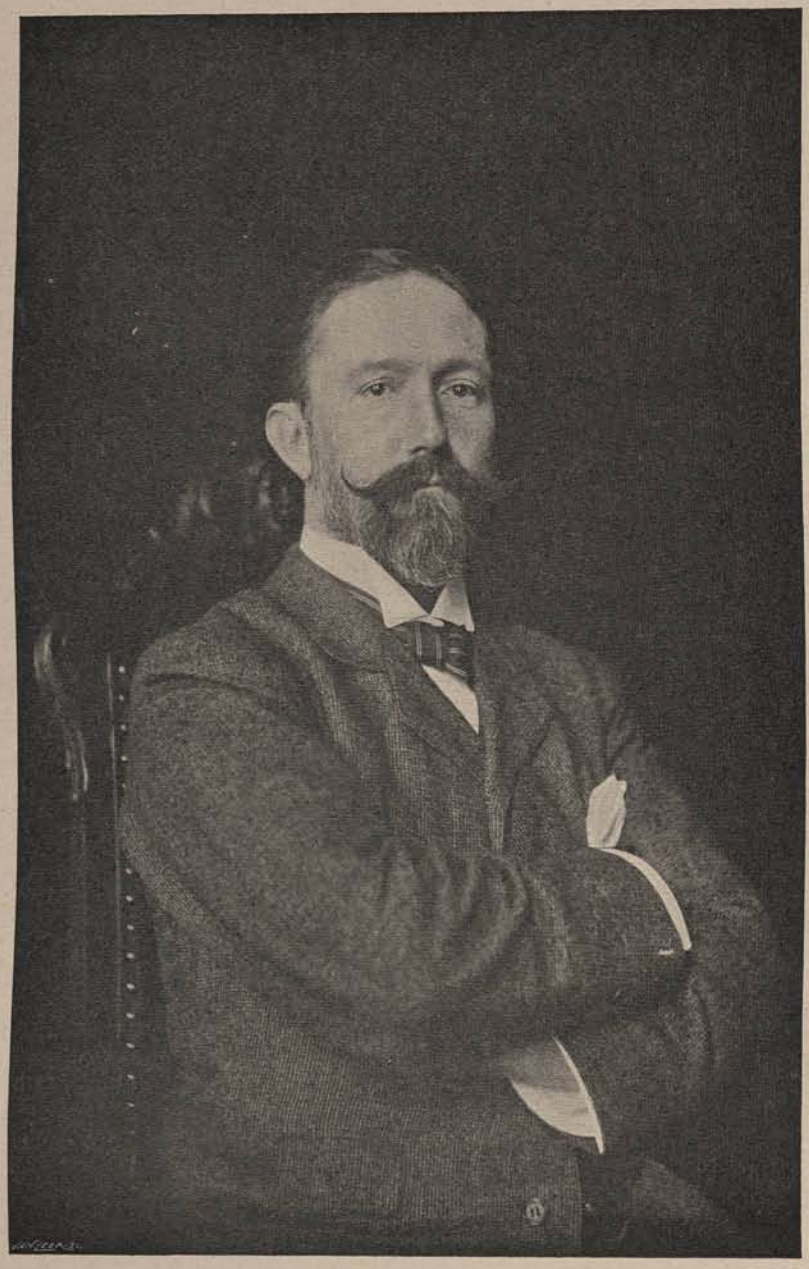
# TONY OFFERMANS

BY

P. DU RIEU FZN.


"Going Home." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. Biesing at the Hague.

# TONY OFFERMANS.



"And the Sultan commanded that Aladdin should be brought before his throne!" 1)

A train of richly garbed knights, in splendid Eastern costumes, stood prepared to carry out this command.

In the meanwhile the strains of a melodious Eastern March greeted the

1) Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp.

ear, full of swing and cadence. At first soft, as if coming from a distance, then swelling louder and louder until the hall rang with the spirited music, appealing to the guests, gathered there by invitation of the great painter Mesdag; the clever and artistic world of the Hague being well represented.

And the curtain fell midst thunders of applause!

A well-known figure in society, a certain Monsieur Nicolai, pushed his way with difficulty to the corner where the piano stood, and from whence came the last accords of the buoyant March.

"Mr. Offermans, although I consider myself *à la hauteur* of most musical compositions, I confess that I do not know the name or the composer of that grand March, which you have just been playing."

Tony slapped the old gentleman good-naturedly on his back, saying, with a broad grin on his face: "Good Heavens! my dear Sir, that March has no name! I composed it as I was playing it!"

Nicolai stood aghast, looking words of amazement; and so may every one look who has the pleasure of seeing Tony Offermans at the piano. Without the least effort he improvizes a multitude of pleasing variations and clever melodious combinations.

Whenever Tony is present, at any social gathering, you may be certain of a successful evening. His talent for recitation and for song, his marvellous musical abilities, his power for entertaining, will gather a crowd around him, and bring down the house with excitement and enthusiasm.

A little *fanfare* first! But I must not lose sight of the object and intention of this sketch. The idea is to present to you a painter, but so gifted with many and varied talents, that he scarcely knew which to follow. Art however rose to the top and refused to be suppressed! Now if I am to say any thing about Tony Offermans, in the few pages allotted to me, it must be the outcome of my sympathy for and appreciation of his works, which I hope my readers will share with me.

Tony Offermans was born at the Hague. I do not know very much about his childhood and youth, and when I asked him to give me an outline of his young days he answered me, in his usual amusing way: "leave that out, old fellow, stick only to *To-day*, you know the old saying: "In *To-day* lies the past and in the *Now* that which shall be!" So if you only stick to *To-day* your readers will know all about the past *and* the future. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." So I must content myself by telling the little I know. He went through a course at the Academy at the Hague, and worked with Blommers for a few years. He worships at the shrine of Jacob Maris and honours the name of Israëls. Their tone, their colour, their subjects, he knows how to appreciate, and can gauge the extent of their marvellous talent.

A few years ago when Tony was living at Riddershof, in the Zeestraat, at the Hague, he and I, with a few others, had been to an art exhibition and were sitting in his studio after our return, discussing the pictures we had seen and giving our various opinions upon the works we had been viewing. The result of all this exchange of thought, on the subject of art, was that the question arose as to how to judge a picture. From all sides came different definitions and examples. Words were rapidly exchanged, all of us speaking more or less at the same time and our varied opinions, at the end, lying in a ruined heap, hopelessly mixed.

Early the following morning Tony appeared at my house with the express intention of talking matters over with me *à propos* of the question of the previous day. "The question of yesterday appears to me so important," he began, "that I have written what I consider a correct and distinct reply."

The following is what he said, more or less, to me. "The criticism of a work of art is entirely governed by the expression by which the essential is uttered. If, for example, the motive of a picture is not apparent on the surface, the picture has either no right to exist or the motive is not sufficiently accentuated. Therefore if the picture does not immediately answer to this question: "Why am I painted?" then you may be sure that the picture leaves us cold and indifferent. But if, on the other hand, the picture elevates us and forces us to examine more closely, study its detail and try to understand the object entertained by its creator, *then*, and *then* only, can we feel a love and sympathy for the work."

Now I am well aware that it is as difficult for those who are very sensitive to impressions to draw a line, as it is for those who miss the object of the picture altogether. Criticism can only be valued at the rate of the development of the judge.

And how great must this development be? This is a question difficult to answer.

It is a question of feeling, and the individual feeling can only find an echo in those whose sensibility and emotions vibrate in the same key.

There are some chords which are in direct harmony with each other; there are others again which are in direct opposition, although each may bring forth the sweetest melody if heard alone. Therefore only those can judge a work

"The Violin Maker."
From a painting in the possession of Mr. D. F. Scheurleer, at the Hague.

of art who are in sympathy with the artist; this sympathy can be tempered by personal taste and by a mutual preference for the object judged.

* *
*

The art of Tony Offermans is not dominated by an extreme broadness of composition, nor by rich and powerful colour scheme. His subjects—with the

exception of a few, such as "The Leidsche Cattle Market"—are generally limited to a narrow sphere. He penetrates into the inner life and social circle of the labourer with his tools, or the mechanic at his trade; he studies with loving care the intimate life of the working man and reproduces these common place, but interesting subjects, with a refined knowledge and in a sympathetic manner. He is happy in his choice of subject. The hard working side of human nature is presented to us with a charm that touches us to the quick. Numerous are the works of Offermans which will bear out what I have said.

One picture, which so particularly attracted me, I must stop to mention: "The Violin Maker," in the possession of Mr. D. F. Scheurleer, at the Hague, (222). The old Violin Maker is engrossed in his work, and with loving care putting the last touches to his precious violin. The light from the window is reproduced in the most characteristic manner, falling upon the face and lighting up the various things on the table; the outline of the head is splendid and the expression capital and so true to nature; the whole subject cleverly portrayed and the technique perfect. 1) The figure is placed in the centre of the canvas and very well posed. The table, with the light falling upon it, the arm-chair, upon which the old man rests one arm, in order to steady the hand which holds the violin, are harmoniously and pleasingly introduced and the tone of colouring is moreover satisfying to the eye. These same qualities we also see in "The Village Post-Master," a picture which is owned by Dr. A. Korteweg, at the Hague. In this picture the expression on the face is equally good, we notice the close attention to work in the absorbed look on the man's face and the light, which comes in at the window, is well rendered. The head, wearing the little skull cap, is beautifully outlined against the bare white-washed wall of the little office.

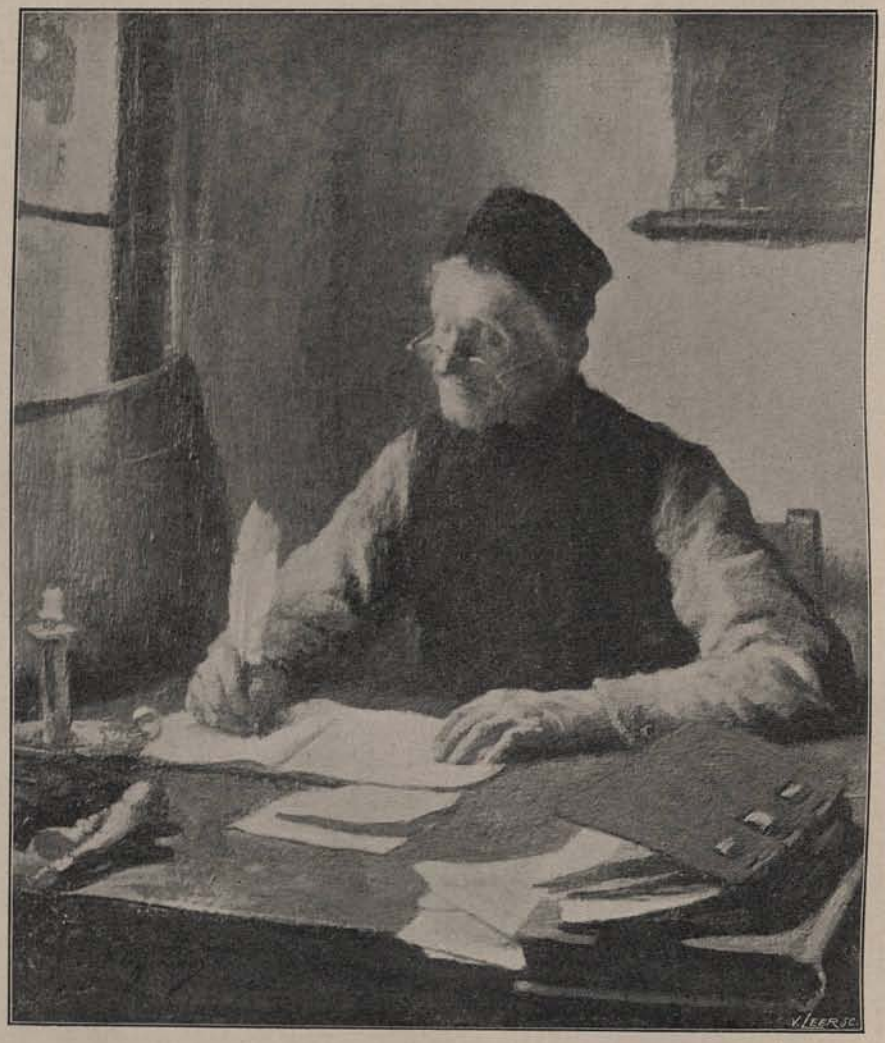
Tony Offermans feels the need of working in the open air; he knows that it is necessary for him and for his art.

I have often heard him exclaim: "I am getting too dark and dingy, I must get out into the open I must see light in its natural state; I must get away from the artificial light of my studio. I want nature in every sense of the

1) As a general rule the head is the most characteristic point in Offerman's figure-painting. He could become a very good portrait-painter if he liked. I know some of his portraits, amongst which are those of the family Scheurleer.

word, I must see my models in the full light of day against trees, or contrasting with the soil, or outlined against the blue of the sky. Then perhaps I will be able to find what I seek for in vain within the walls of my studio: namely truth in colour, and the obtaining and retaining of colour in tone."

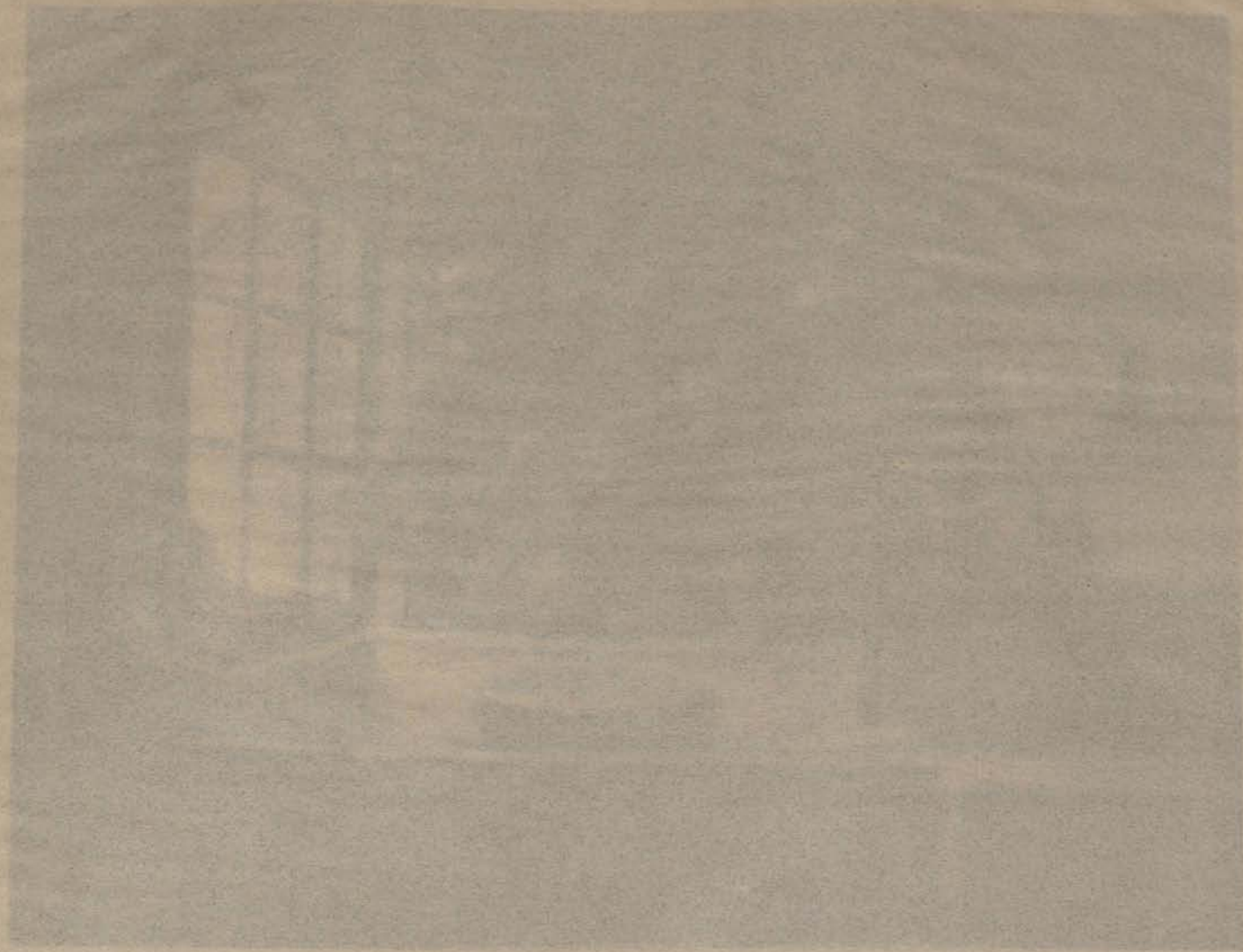
I believe that he felt cramped too in the life of a large town; he wanted the freedom of the country; although he is of a very sociable disposition.



"The Village Post-Master."
From a painting in the possession of Dr. A. A. Korteweg at the Hague.

But winter always finds him back, at the Hague, in the town of his birth, satisfied then to work for a while indoors.

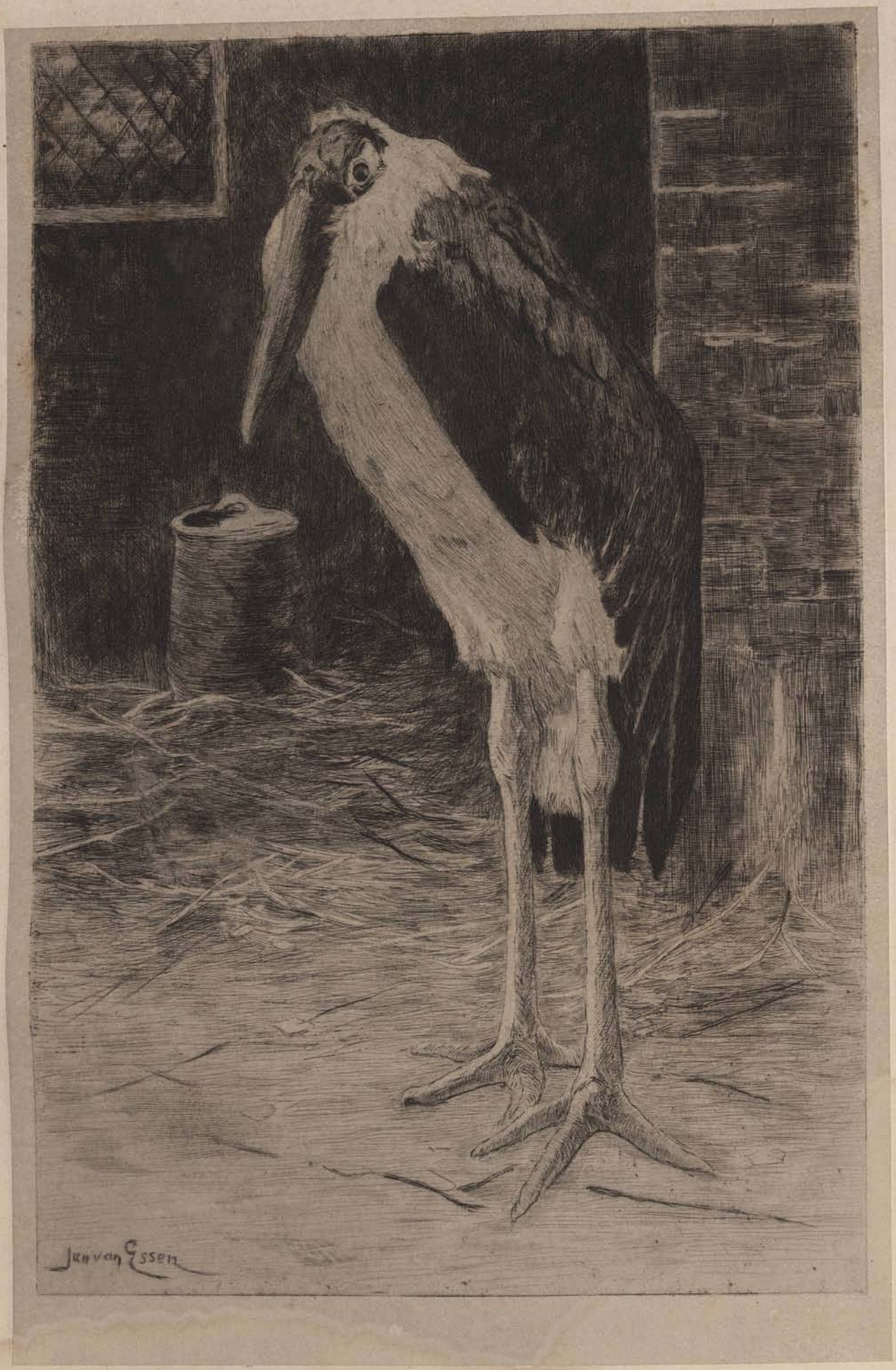
He deserted the Alexander Square (at the Hague) after the loss of his wife, who was one of the daughters of the House of Koolemans Beynen, with whom, he had passed a year of great happiness. After this sad event he went to live at Laren, where many of his finest pictures were painted, amongst others: "The Village Post-Master," (of which I have already spoken) and "At the Spinning Wheel" and many more.



*"In the Potteries"*

FROM A WATER-COLOUR

In the possession of the Firm of Boussod Valadon & Co. at the Hague.


Jan van Essen

Later he went to the old Wettering, where he made many studies of the poor interiors of the working classes: their dwellings, their workshops, their home lives, all attracted his artistic eye. "The Workshop of the Sabot maker"

"At the Spinning Wheel." From a painting in the possession of Mr. J. Nieuwenhuysen, at the Hague.

(in the possession of Dr. Unia Steyn Parvé) is a good example of his style. This particular subject Tony has painted more than once, sometimes with one figure, sometimes with two, but always with the same effect of light striking through door and window.

Our artist was a great favorite at Laren and every soul in the place knew him, and sought his pleasant companionship. This popularity I once had the opportunity of testing. One fine day in summer I went to Laren with him, to spend an afternoon in that lovely country. We drove there from Bussem with a fine pair of well-bred horses, pulling up in style at the village inn. Scarcely was it noised abroad that Offermans was again in their midst when all Laren was at hand, young and old, all wanting to greet their friend. When it was time for us to start on our return journey, there was no getting Tony away; every body crowded around him and at last I had to sing out: "Look here Tony, if you don't get in at once we will drive away without you, and leave you behind." We started at last midst the cheers of the crowd that followed the carriage, as if we were the owners of the land, surrounded by our tenants and retainers, like some Lord of the Manor who returns to or quits his native soil.

After painting for some little time at the old Wetering, Tony returned to the Hague, always however going into the country during the summer months, until the charm of country life took such hold upon him that he went and settled in Gelderland, between Velp and Steeg, those environs appealing to him more than any other. He took a villa and christened it *Sophie*, after his mother, the celebrated songstress (Mrs. Offermans van Hove) who still, from time to time, delights her intimate friends with the sound of her sweet voice always accompanied on the piano by her musical son Tony.

Not long ago I visited my friend Offermans, at the Villa Sophie; he saw me approaching the house, along the garden path, whereupon he flew to the door, throwing it wide open, and then proceeded to the piano, playing a *fanfare* by way of greeting, which is, I believe, his usual mode of greeting his particular friends. Then he ushered me into the studio with great pomp, and we shook hands cordially.

"Well, and how are you, old fellow," cried I. "Yes here I am at last! What ages since we met! And how charmingly you are *installé'd* here! And what a studio!! You *are* in luck's way! How happy you must be!!"

"Yes, it is nice out here! Such repose, such peace. I don't believe I shall ever be able to live in a town again. I couldn't stand the rush and hurry, the come and go, and the everlasting noise. You are constantly seeing people you don't want to see; people you don't care a pin for; houses and shops that you never can or will enter; always having to walk through the same streets and look at the same things until you hate them all and think every thing ugly!"

"That is true! I quite appreciate what you say! But still for all that the *Voorhout* and the *Vyverberg* are beautiful!"

"But why are they beautiful? Only because there is something pretty to look at. I always stop when I pass along there, to admire the trees and the

water. It is nature, yet that isn't enough to counterbalance all the rest of the hateful bricks and mortar.

A town should be looked upon as a sort of *Grand Magazin du Louvre*. You go there if you want a pair of boots, or an overcoat, *or* paints. You go too if you have to attend a meeting of the Council of the Commune, when the question to be decided is one of art! 1)

Or you have to look upon an inartistic crowd jostling and elbowing each other in an equally inartistic manner. No, give me the country, if such a thing is feasible. Such an arrangement is not convenient to every one however

"The Sabot Maker."
From a drawing in the possession of Dr. W. F. Steyn Parvé at the Hague.

much they may sigh for green fields. The privilege can only be enjoyed by the rich man and by the poor artist.

It is a good thing that the poor painter has some little advantage above his brethren, his life is not as a rule all beer and skittles."

"But don't you think," I humbly interrupted, "don't you think that by always living in the country you get at last too much accustomed to the beauties of nature? You thus lose your susceptibility for impressions, instead of keeping them sharpened by living in a big centre and visiting occasionally the lovely meadows and now and then inhaling the fresh country air?"

"There is no saying!" was his quick reply. "Didn't Millet live in the

1) This is an old custom peculiar to the Hague, which exists still today.

country, didn't all those great artists live at Barbizon? Didn't Mauve live near his meadows and his dear sheep? Doesn't de Bock live under the shade of his dearly loved trees? It is all a matter of disposition, of taste, of natural inclination. Every man must know what is best for himself. For myself I know that it is necessary for me to live out of doors; I must have breathing room, I must be free from care, I must have peace and above all I must live with the beauty of nature near me always. To my mind there is *always* something new to see in the country, something which stirs within me the emotional side of my disposition.

Here in Gelderland, where nature is so lovely, I feel happy and at home. Look at those rich meadows over there, you may wander over them for hours, as if seeing a Walpurgis night; their beauty is overpowering, their mystery is marvellous, in fact there are no words which can express their charm.

Then look the other way and you will see the woods, those most beautiful shady woods! I sometimes enjoy high revelry there, I have seen the old witch, on her broom, flying up to sweep the cobwebs from off the sky, and not only one witch, but a whole company of old women, screaching at the top of their voices, forming a sort of flying orchestra. A thousand kettle-drums and trombones and sharp clashing cymbals.

"The Village Carpenter."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. Yvo Opstelten at the Hague.

And do you see that sheepfold to the left and next to it a tall solitary tree, keeping watch? You won't perhaps believe but that is Satan's palace, built of dark massive stone and in the dusk of evening it looks like the castle of

some great ogre, and the solitary tree is the great tower and it dances to the music of the witches. Perhaps you cannot understand all this, but to me it is true and beautiful!

My woods too I have seen *en fête*, with laughter and merriment; not peopled by the followers of Satan! No, *then* the pretty fairies and tiny elves appear and hold high festival, and the music is sweet and melodious. The soft mist rises and covers the river as with a veil, yet in the distance the sun is shining over Doesberg. But wait! the mist is clearing, and the river is seen to dance in the rays of the smiling sun, to the strains of the enchanted music. This is beauty to charm the eye! This is music to bewitch the ear!

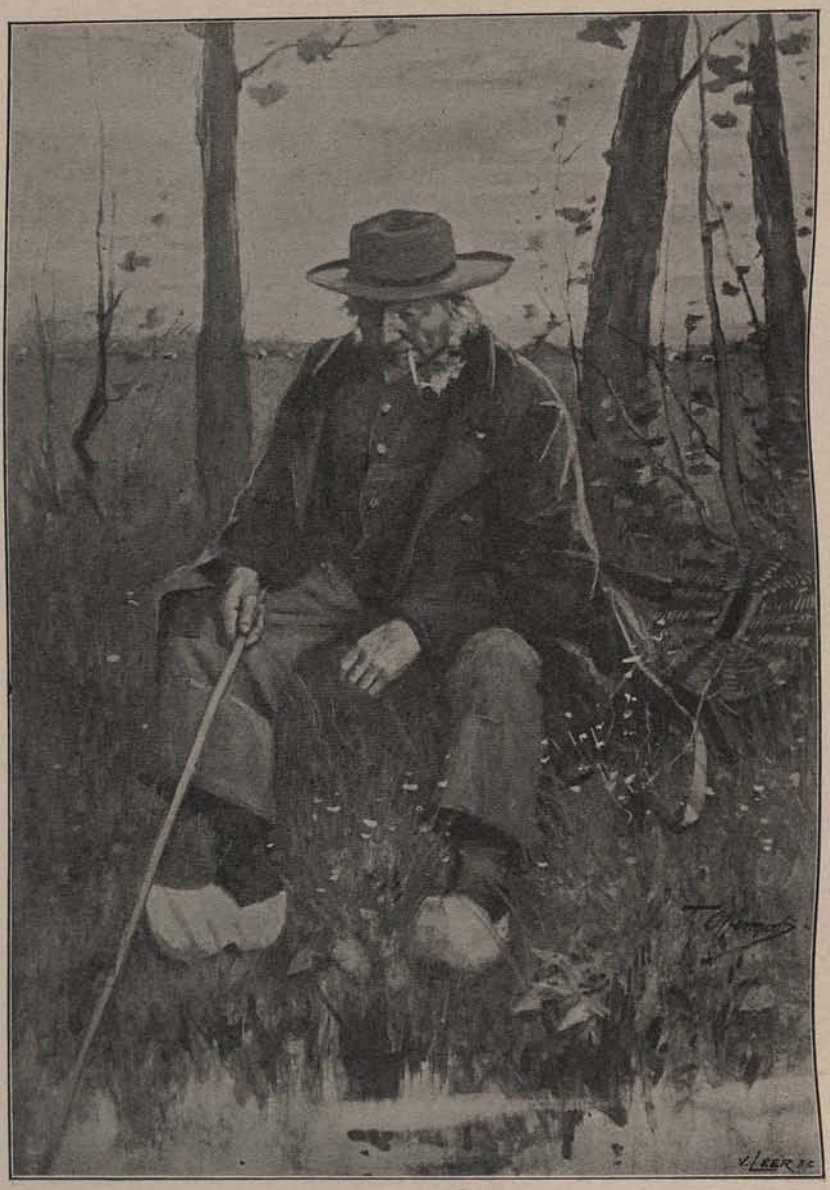
"Feeding the Chickens."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. L. G. Brouwer at the Hague.

The clouds chase each other. Sometimes I fancy that the lagging ones are overtaking those of greater swiftness; the river sparkles at the amusing sight, as if it would like to clap its hands and the little ripples, on its surface, seem as if longing to join in the race. The stately poplar trees bow their approval of this atmospheric performance. It is all like a child's fairy story! Every thing grave and serious is excluded; it is a general holiday, no work may be done, and no frown may be seen or even a wrinkle on a brow. Sunshine and laughter is the order of the day.

Then penetrate with me into the deeper part of the forest. How silent, how peaceful, one almost seems to feel the profound silence. Notice the carpet under your feet, you are treading on the richest of stuffs; your footfall

is as non-existent. Look up at the tall pines, inhale their perfume! Then admire the noble oaks. What is that sweet sound I hear? It is the voice of many birds, they are singing praises to their Maker. There is no such thing as evil in this world of mine, there is no hatred, no jealousy, no evil-speaking lying and slandering. There is no money, no politics, no wars. Nothing, yea nothing but love and joy.

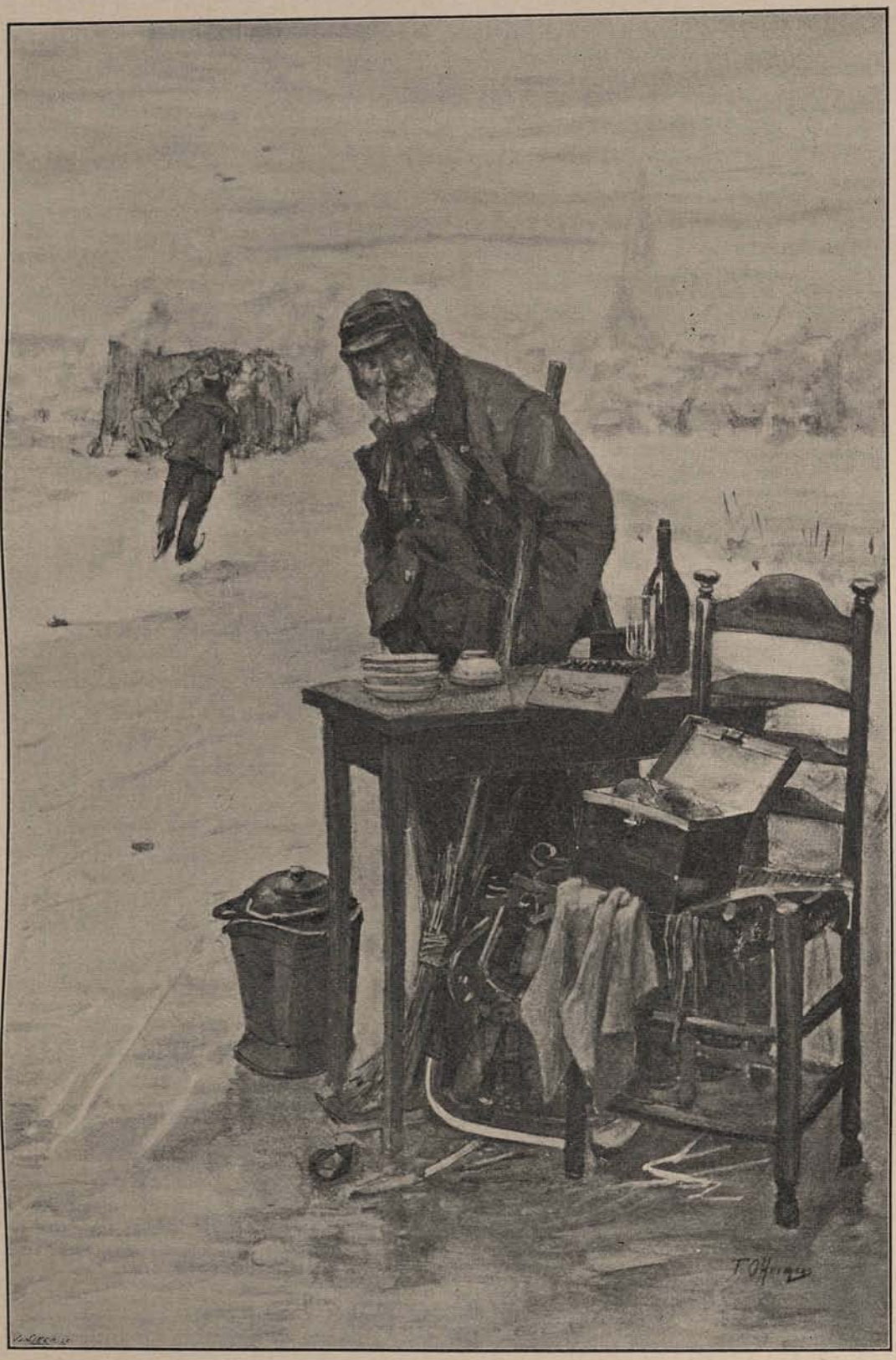
I meet little children, little children with torn clothes and with bare feet and unkempt hair, but all this I do not see! they are pretty little dears to me, my eye is not capable of seeing any thing ugly or poor or mean! I call out, in a cheerful voice: "Hullo little ones! What lovely flowers you have gathered!" The world holds for me naught but what is lovely and good, every creature is virtuous and fair, every thing is created by the hand of an all loving God! That which may be called ugly in this world of ours, is hid from my eyes, by some mysterious curtain.



"Fishing."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. Yvo Opstelten at the Hague.

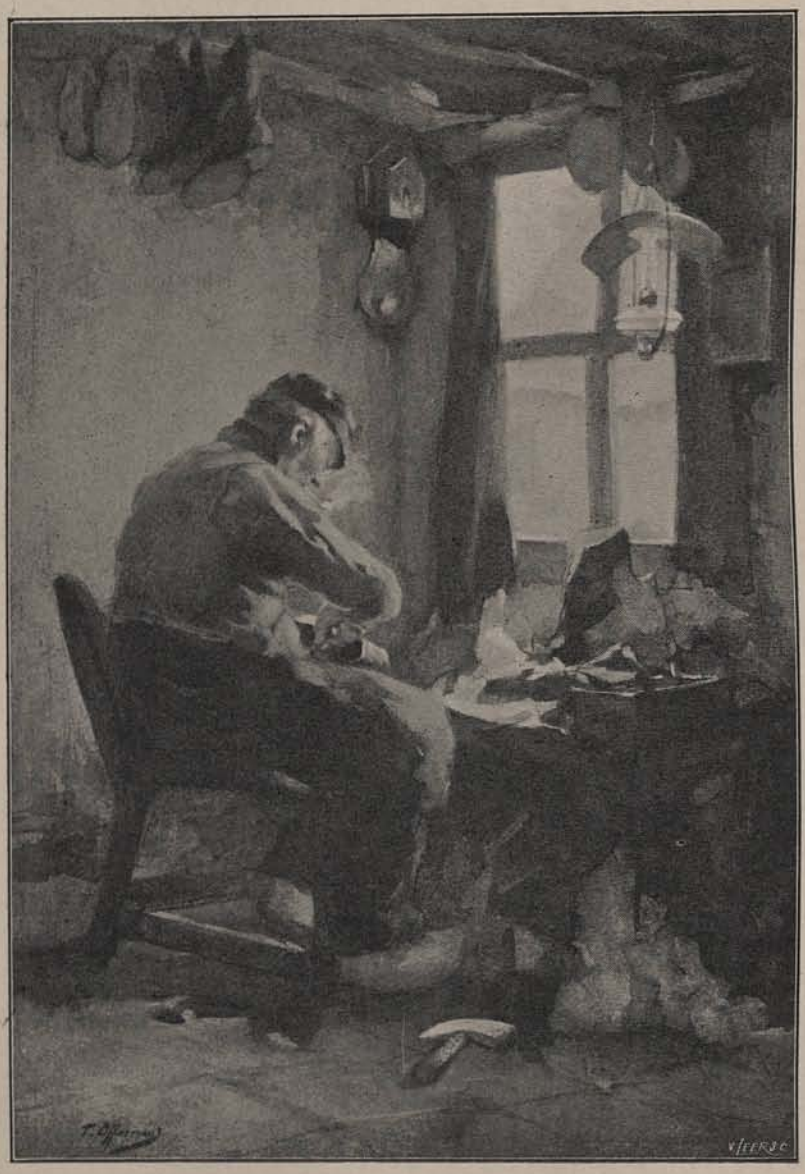
And have you any thing of this kind in a town? Are your emotions stirred in this manner? What do you see in the streets that is worth looking at?

Heigh there! Take care! Look where you are going! Mind, there's a carriage, a cart! Get out of the way! here comes the dust-cart or it may be a brewer's dray. What a disgusting smell! And then there are the beggars, if you don't dive down into your pockets at once, for a stray coin, they look at you with a look of utter scorn and mutter, between their teeth: "I wish *you* had *my* wooden leg, or I wish *you* were starving!"



"The Ice Sweeper." From a water-colour.

Then again if you happen to be passing the office of the State-Lottery you will see haggard anxious faces watching for their number to appear, as having won the great prize! Then there are those cross-looking members of the Chamber, with a new tax-paper under their arm, coming from the Sitting where they have been listening perhaps to the speech from the throne, in which art and artists are not so much as mentioned, because once, some great statesman declared that art came under no law! Or we go into the cafés and notice the dandies and the smartly dressed women wasting their lives, then again we see many of these smart women looking in at the windows of the large shops, making fashion their life's object. We turn a corner and the sound of a barrel organ greets our ears with the everlasting Cavaleria, the handle turned by some poor widow with a dozen children to support. Is not all this too terrible? Too wearisome? What is there left for a man to do who cannot stand all this? Run away! Seek the beauties of nature! If this is impossible then go himself into a café and drown his sorrows in a good old drink! and stifle the thoughts of singing birds, of shady trees, the sound of the rippling river, and do as if *such* things did not so much as exist!



"The Cobbler."
From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. Yvo Opstelten at the Hague.

No, no, give me country life old fellow, the real article, nothing artificial and created out of the evil of a man's heart."

I must confess that I came under the spell of my poetical friend after this long *tirade*. Without taking breath he had described to me, with an energy that was catching in the extreme, the difference between town life and country

life, giving the one its death stroke and placing the other in the most attractive light.

A glass of wine soon set us both right! "I understand now," I said meekly, "why you are such a lover of nature in heart and in soul. You could not possibly thrive in a town if that is the drift of your feeling! But how about music? You surely cannot do entirely without music?"

"The fact is I have heard so much good music in my life that I can live without it for a few years. But I do get an occasional concert. Modern music however does not appeal to me. Programme music I don't want to hear at all, such music is *abracadabra* to me. It only produces a headache, brought on by trying to make a comprehensible text out of it, according to my own understanding. Sometimes the orchestra is five or six bars ahead of me and that puts me out altogether, and I cannot catch up with the instruments. I am still at *je t'aime* while the fiddles are fiddling away at the suicide. If you lose the ground from under your feet you may as well put the programme down, and if you try to pick up the thread of the story you get hopelessly muddled and the symphony, dramatic or fantastic, is playing its last accord when you are floundering midway.

Besides these modern arrangements are not true enough for me. They do not encourage me, they do not help me in my work, in my life, in my love! But give me the great compositions of the past. That is quite another thing. They stir my heart's strings, they express my feelings, they are true! Always beautiful in the Morning, always beautiful at Night, always beautiful at Midday."

"*Nous voiçons*" I cried, taking possession of my friend's favorite expression, which he had woven together from *Littré's* Dictionary.

"Yes! we have arrived at the kernel of the nut! There is nothing more left to be said! Come let us go out! I will take you to "The Angel" and we will go by way of my Rose Garden!!"

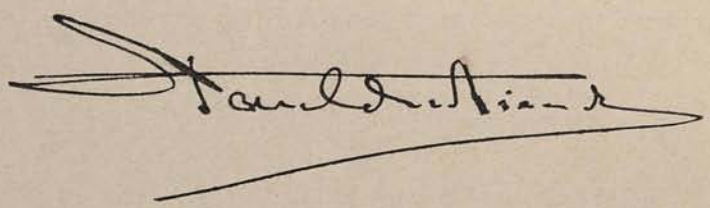
As we left the studio I was suddenly struck by a picture, on which shone a ray of sun. The subject was a cobbler patching old shoes.

"Is it not a trifle dark?" I ventured to remark.

"Yes, in parts. That comes of too much indoor work. An artist must see nature as she is in all her fine colours!"

"This canvas reminds me more of your former style of work."

"Yes, possibly. One wanders occasionally down a side path, but after much winding about you will find yourself back again in the main road! "*On en revient toujours à ses premiers amours.*""



# JOHN VAN ESSEN

BY

H. M. KRABBÉ.


A Reproduction from a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. H. van Eeghen in Amsterdam.

# JOHN VAN ESSEN.


About sixteen years ago there appeared in the Lion-House in *Artis* (Zoological Gardens in Amsterdam) a "gentleman" who excited our curiosity. Tall and thin, rather a grave face and wearing a pair of gold rimmed eye-glasses. His hair was brushed with evident care, yet a small astray lock waved on his forehead. He was dressed in a frock coat and wore a high hat, suggesting the Englishman. His stately appearance made us, artists and students, rather

inclined to laugh at him. But what a painter he turned out to be! We hovered around him in awe and reverence, but he ignored us completely; if however we approached too near, and bothered him a bit, then there came a look in his eye which drove us away with our tails between our legs. 1)

By degrees we got accustomed to him, but as we did not make friends quickly we used to go hunting about in the evening, at the back of the gallery, to look at his big canvases, the subjects being lions and tigers. 2)

This "gentleman" was John van Essen!

. . . . . .

Van Essen was born in Amsterdam in the year 1854. At an early age he showed that he was not cut out for the career of a merchant. It was not

easy to persuade the fond father to allow his boy to follow the bent of his desires and go in for art. However it came about that van Essen found himself working under old Greive, in whose studio he remained for two years, painting in company with Joan Berg, Kever, Ten Hoet and Jan ten Kate. At that time Greive was no longer in his prime, he had had a stroke and was not the able teacher of the days of August Allebé, Jamin, Lingeman and Koen Greive, these men having benefitted so much by his sound instructions. When van Essen left Greive he entered the studio of Valkenberg where he however remained but a short time.

At the age of twenty our artist felt a desire to be independent, he wearied

1) Krabbé the writer of this article is himself an artist of considerable renown.

2) In the grounds of *Artis* there is a Natural History Museum, where students study the anatomy of animals.

of being held in leading strings, so he set up a studio of his own and struck out a line for himself.

The animals at the Zoo attracted him very much, yet he began by painting figures, although introducing sometimes animal life. One of the first pictures that he brought before the public was a clever portrayal of two old crones, feeding the pelicans at *Artis*, a subject cleverly handled although perhaps somewhat brown in tone. This canvas gave evidence of an undoubted talent for depicting birds.

But the young painter had not then struck out any distinct line, he did not know in what direction the wind lay. Being of a susceptible nature and easily influenced by others he fell under the spell of Jacob Maris and forthwith decided to follow in his footsteps, and landscapes became the order of the day.

"A Street in Naarden."

Tersteeg, the well known art dealer, at the Hague, with whom van Essen had already done some business, was so enchanted with his landscapes that he bought one on the spot, advising him to give up all other subjects and become a landscape painter. "What else could I do?" said van Essen to me "my vanity was tickled and I was earning good money, therefore John van Essen became a landscape painter."

But in course of time he felt dissatisfied with himself, he knew that he was not in the right path. He then took up street views. "I happened to pass through Naarden" he continued, "and seeing a very picturesque little street I remained there and did a little painting. When Tersteeg saw "my little street" he went into ecstasy over it and said to me: "Van Essen, you have found the key to your life's work. Stick to it, old fellow, and your fortune is made."

This picture was sold almost directly by Tersteeg to Mr. Tak van Poortvliet but he (Tersteeg) was not willing to part with it at once, and asked the buyer to allow him to exhibit it in his window for a time. It so happened that Jacob Maris saw it there and when he met me one day he shook me warmly by the hand and immediately congratulated me on the success of my picture.

You may imagine that this was an encouragement and that I set to work with street views with a vengeance. But it was of no use, nothing came up

to my first efforts; I was perfectly convinced that I was no more a painter of streets than of landscapes."

This genre of painting was therefore also abandoned and a time of indecision followed, the weather-cock swinging around to all sides, the weather in van Essen's mind being extremely unsettled.

Good luck came however to our wavering artist in the shape of Swan, the English animal painter, who put him in the right direction. Swan was over in Amsterdam in 1885 and van Essen was delighted to make his acquaintance, having always been a great admirer of his work. Swan told him to try his

"A Funeral in Nunspeet."

hand at animal life, especially as he had such a splendid opportunity at *Artis*.

Van Essen followed this good advice and worked for three years, with all his energy, in the beautiful Amsterdam Zoological Gardens of which we Amsterdamers are so justly proud. It was *then* that he appeared on our territory, as the dignified high-hatted kid-gloved Englishman, of whom I have already spoken in the opening lines of this essay.

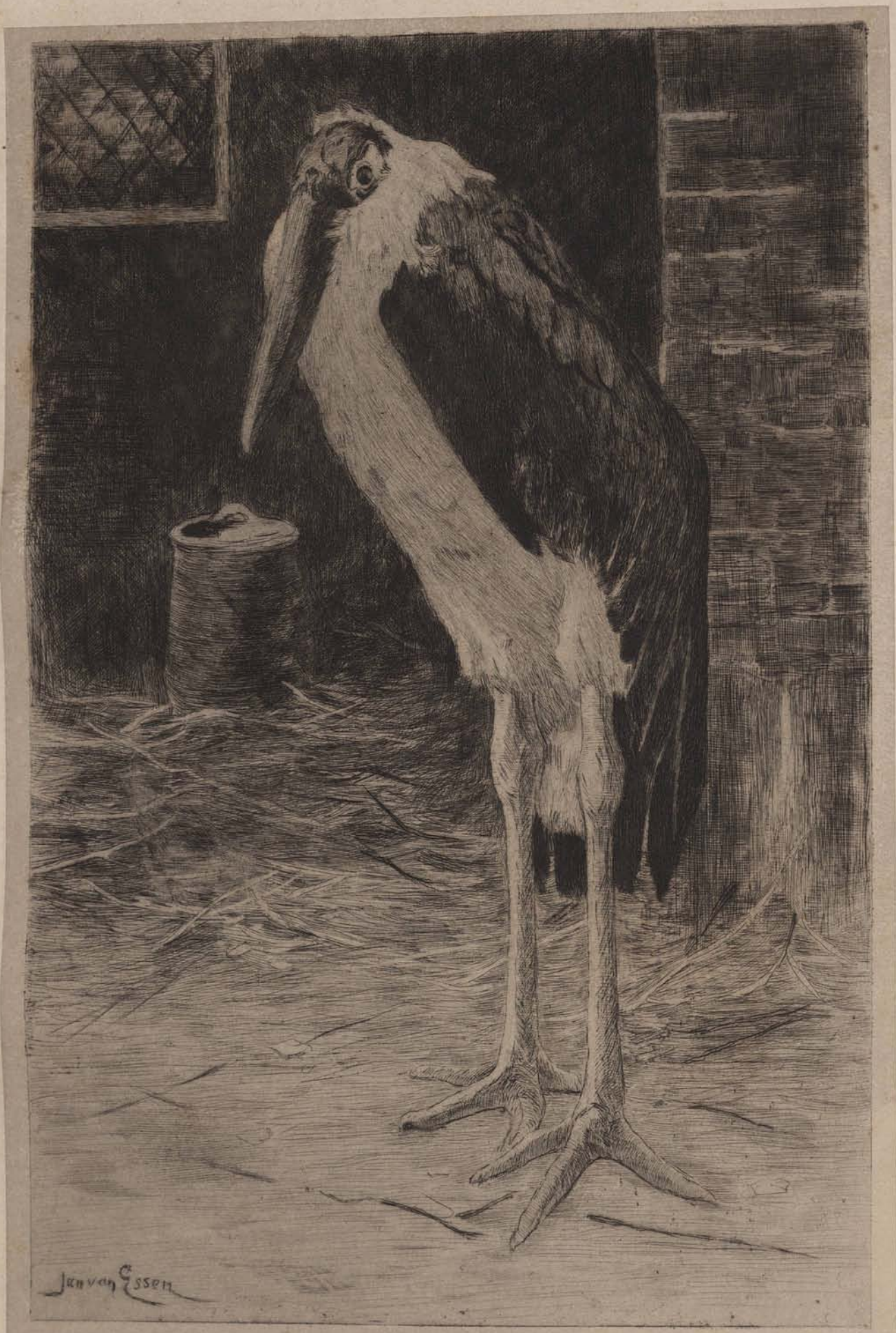
He soon made giant strides and although inspired by Swan he was by no means a copyist.

Swan sees his majestic animals in a poetic sense and places them in poetic surroundings. Van Essen is attracted by the wild beast as he sees him in

*"Marabout"*

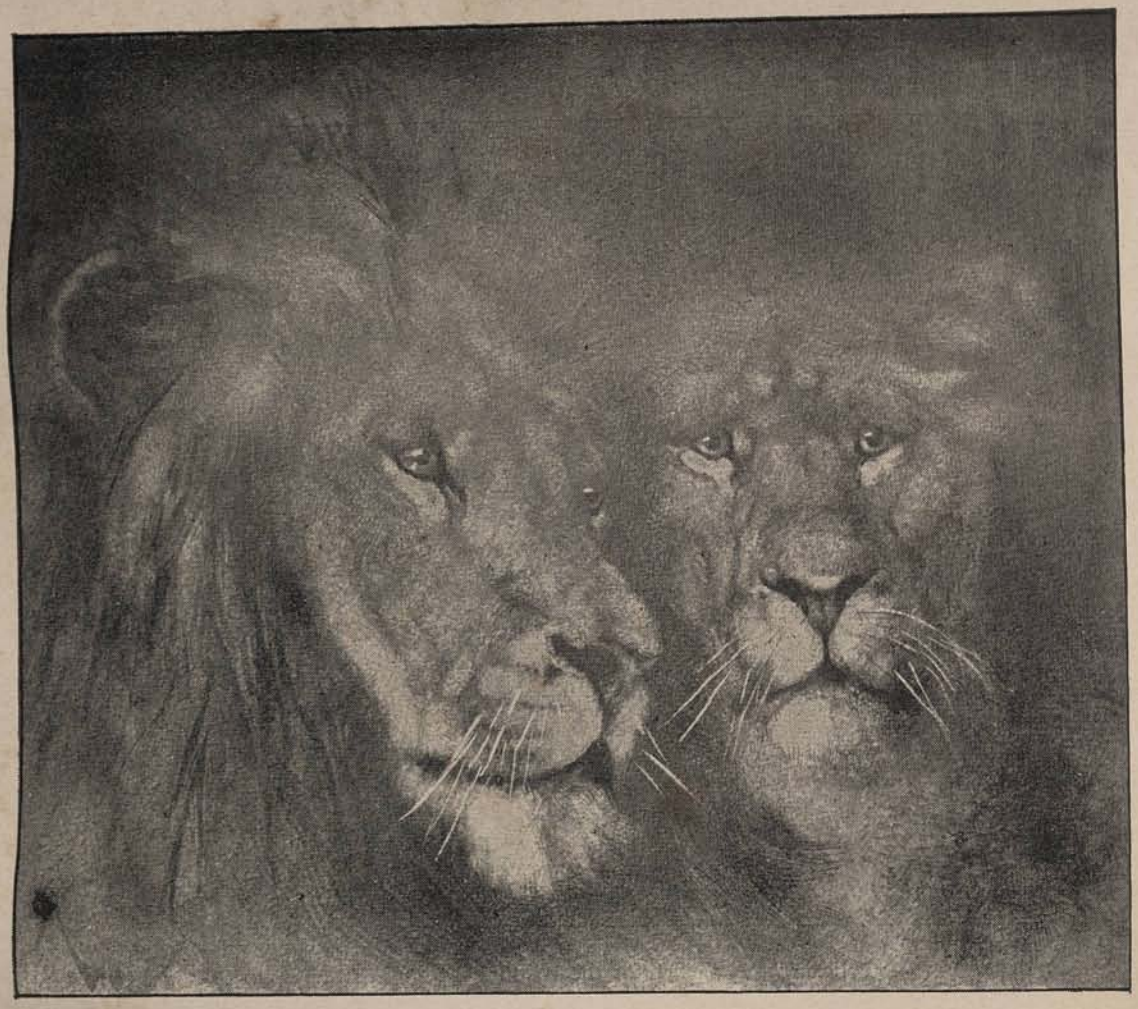
FROM A PAINTING

In the Municipal Museum in Amsterdam.


Jan van Essen

his common-place iron-barred prison. He paints his lions in their European captivity, not on their native soil. He studies their manes closely, their form, their every attitude and knows so well how to render the animal in every detail. He studied the anatomy of these majestic creatures for many months, drawing from the skeleton and making many clever studies. Although Swan may perhaps be placed above van Essen, yet I, personally, know no truer animal painter than van Essen.

When van Essen had sufficiently studied the anatomy of the lion he painted



Reproduced from a drawing.

some very fine large water-colours, which surprised every one. The rich art-fanciers even quarrelled over their possession, which had a bad influence upon the artist, for it produced a series of potboilers. The art dealers bought up every thing as fast as he could produce them, most of the work being sent to foreign countries; in fact he could not paint quick enough to keep pace with the demand.

Mr. van Eeghen as well as Mr. Schorer and Mr. Moliere are the lucky possessors of some fine drawings of lions by van Essen and the Theyler's Museum in Haarlem has also several good copies.

I once asked van Essen why he did not visit the home of the wild beast. "Because" he replied "I am afraid I should be disappointed and although I might get a more correct idea of their habits the ideal creature would be weakened. Besides here I can approach him, the solid looking bars of his cage give me courage, although I know that he could annihilate the whole concern, and me too, if he knew his own power. In his wild state, on the great plains of the desert, he is only a speck on the immensity, after the manner in which Gérôme handles his subjects. We thus miss the golden tints in his magnificent mane, we do not see the great power of his limbs, nor do we hear that frightening roar of the angry animal. It becomes a sort

"Pelicans." A sketch for the painting belonging to *Artis*.

of lap dog, a small creature viewed in the distance; whereas here, behind his trellis work, he is a beast whose approach makes one fear and tremble. Besides I will not endeavour to paint after the manner of Swan, for I tried that once and was laughed at.

Not only do the wild beasts of the forest attract me, but the fowls of the air too. I have a large picture hanging in the Museum of *Artis*, the subject being pelicans and ducks and all the variety of birds you see in the big lake. That canvas is, I believe, considered very good. But to my mind my most successful picture is my "Marabout" which hangs in the Museum Lopes Suasso (Amsterdam). That is really a good thing and has given me

much satisfaction; Willet bought a water-colour drawing of it, and Vosmaer wrote a flattering article upon it. It was exhibited in London and the criticism in the papers was good. It was however hard upon Preyer, who bought it of me, that he could not get rid of it, so at last, in despair, he presented it to the Museum. It is really too bad of the public that they drive us to paint only potboilers."

I asked him how he managed his "Marabout". "I did it" he replied "from chalk sketches. I went daily to *Artis* and looked long and thoughtfully at my subject then raced back to my studio, by tram, without so much as looking up, retaining the impression in my mind. I knew that if I painted

"A Burning Question."

the picture direct from the model, I should be carried away by the ever changing impressions, and the result would be merely a sketch and not a satisfactory picture.

Shall I tell you what was also a successful picture and a pleasant thing to do, it was the little picture I called "A burning Question." I dare say you recollect that St. Bernard puppy of mine, perhaps you remember the picture I made of it. The little creature with his head to one side, looking intently at the burning end of a cigar. I will tell you how I came to paint such a subject. Returning home one night very late or rather early morning, from some entertainment, I thought I would go into the stables and see how the

animals looked at that hour of the day. I was in tail coat, white tie, opera hat, kid gloves—in fact the swell. As I entered I threw away the lighted end of my cigar, which immediately attracted the attention of the puppy. The position was delicious and the expression on its face so comical that I set to work at once, and by twelve o'clock the picture was finished. I showed it at that year's exhibition, where it found a purchaser, and the subject seemed such a favorite one with the public that I got several orders for the same style of thing."

I noticed in van Essen's studio several landscapes, and upon the easel stood a water-colour, the subject being ducks in a ditch.

A Landscape with ducks.

"I don't often do this sort of thing" he said as if in reply to my inquiring look "but I get orders for these Mauve-like little water-colours. But to do it as Mauve did there is no use even trying, all work in his style, next to his own, is adulterated and by no means the real article. I examine the works of great artists and in spite of myself I cannot help trying to do likewise. Sometimes perhaps I succeed. I took to studying Diaz for a time, inspired by that magnificent exhibition of his works here in Amsterdam a little time back. I also tried my hand at Marises and Bosbooms but there is absolutely no use, no one can do it like those men did, it always remains but a poor imitation. I find myself in a maze from which I cannot get out and do not remember how I got in, fondly imagining that if I could only lay hold of their

"Royal Prisoners." From a water-colour in the possession of Mr. J. D. Ferwerda at Hilversum.

technique the rest would follow, but it is all a mistake. When I see young fellows, with a certain amount of original talent, adopting the mannerisms of others, I warn them, for they are standing on dangerous ground and in the end lose their own personality."

There was a time when van Essen had a taste for painting vultures. He made some wonderfully fine sketches of these creatures. They were not placed in confinement, like his lions and tigers, but on rocks and mountain top, in their state of nature. For a time he took up dogs and made some clever pictures of these patient animals drawing carts and barrows.

There is no doubt but that van Essen is our best animal painter, no one

"Wheatsheaves." A painting belonging to the Queen of Holland.

else in Holland can hold a candle to him. He understands the art of portraying animals and especially the wild beast of the forest, not only beautifully but accurately. He is artist to the back bone. He is now convinced that animals are his subject and I hope he will stick to them. He is steadily improving and we shall still see many beautiful things from his able brush. But he has not always used his talent quite seriously, sometimes he has forgotten the maxim "*L'art pour l'art.*" Perhaps this comes from his having been obliged to stand too early upon his own legs; had he had a sensible man to guide his first footsteps, his talent might have attained good qualities at an earlier date.

Van Essen has always had to fight with the *défauts de ses qualitiés*. His too great desire to please his public has hindered him and this he knows himself.

A dog lying.

He is a pleasant companion and a keen sportsman and fisherman. He is very fond of spinning yarns about his sporting adventures which he elaborates with the most exciting incidents. When he is in that vein there is not a more amusing and delightful companion. A patient fisherman who can sit for hours,

A Dog standing.

in a quiet corner, keeping his eye on the float. After the accident, which cost him his arm, he gave up shooting altogether and therewith many of his amusing stories vanished. Now his chief joy is fishing.

Van Essen is very concise and to the point. To *one* artist who has a stroke of good luck, or succeeds better than his colleagues, there must be at least *six* who are unsuccessful and among these six there is sure to be at least *one* who plainly shows his disappointment by trying to revenge himself upon his more fortunate brothers-of-the-brush. At an exhibition, where most of the art colleagues had exhibits, Van Essen sold his picture on the opening day. Meeting one of his less fortunate artist friends he (the friend) said to him (Van Essen) "I say, my friend, in what part of the world did you meet those creatures which are marked *sold*.'

"Oh!" replied our artist without hesitating, "those creatures I saw in the same land where you met your bears!"

This answer, although not exactly kind under the circumstances, was certainly a clever hit.

Just a few words in conclusion as to Van Essen's opinion on the subject of criticism. "To be reviewed and criticized is a good wholesome thing, that is if you fall into the hands of a competent and honest judge. A young artist cannot get on without the critics, they place him before the public and they help to raise the market value of his wares.

Although I have much to thank critics for and their *réclame* has helped me considerably, yet I consider that the columns of the newspapers are often rashly written by either Tom or Dick or Harry who has made himself responsible to a little group of artists who have to be helped at any price. And if your critic is an artist himself worse luck still. He will probably run down the man who paints in his own style. Of course there are exceptions to this rule, as in all rules, but generally this is the case."

Now it only remains for me to add the various rewards showered upon Van Essen.

In 1883 he got the silver gilt medal at the Amsterdam Exhibition, the same in Nice, in Cologne and in Melbourne. In Paris he was honorably mentioned. The *Société des Aquarellistes* and the Academy at the Hague made him honorary member. The Queen of the Netherlands bought one of his pictures. You see he has not been without honour in his own country and elsewhere.

With these last pleasant remarks I conclude my article hoping that these lines will have made my readers better acquainted with the man from whom yet much may be expected.

A. M. Krabbé