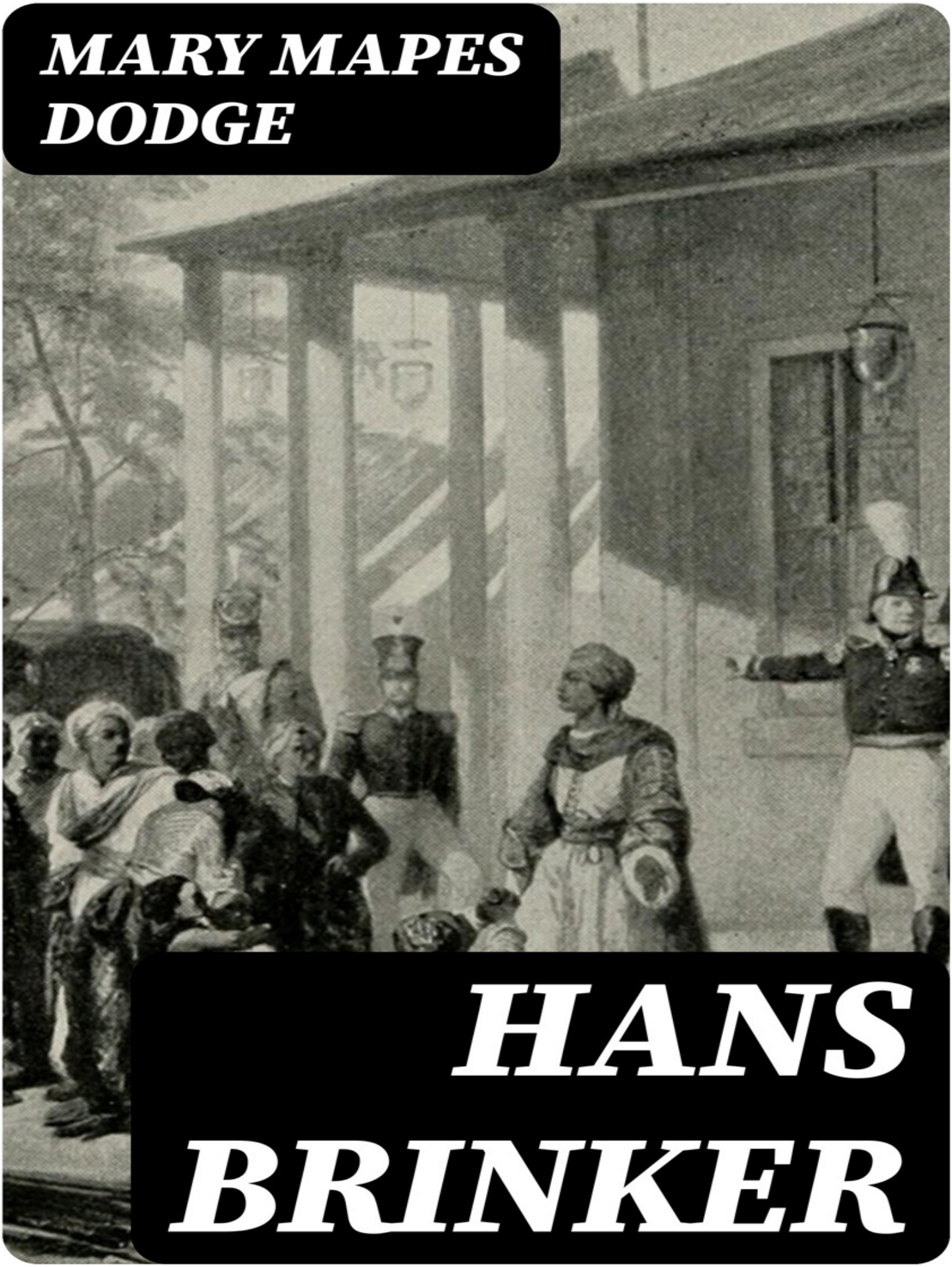
MARY MAPES DODGE



HANS BRINKER

Mary Mapes Dodge

Hans Brinker

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Table of Contents

To my father
James J. Mapes
this book is dedicated
in gratitude and love

Preface

Table of Contents

This little work aims to combine the instructive features of a book of travels with the interest of a domestic tale. Throughout its pages the descriptions of Dutch localities, customs, and general characteristics have been given with scrupulous care. Many of its incidents are drawn from life, and the story of Raff Brinker is founded strictly upon fact.

While acknowledging my obligations to many well-known writers on Dutch history, literature, and art, I turn with especial gratitude to those kind Holland friends who, with generous zeal, have taken many a backward glance at their country for my sake, seeing it as it looked twenty years ago, when the Brinker home stood unnoticed in sunlight and shadow.

Should this simple narrative serve to give my young readers a just idea of Holland and its resources, or present true pictures of its inhabitants and their every-day life, or free them from certain current prejudices concerning that noble and enterprising people, the leading desire in writing it will have been satisfied.

Should it cause even one heart to feel a deeper trust in God’s goodness and love, or aid any in weaving a life, wherein, through knots and entanglements, the golden thread shall never be tarnished or broken, the prayer with which it was begun and ended will have been answered.

—M.M.D.

A Letter from Holland

Table of Contents

Amsterdam, July 30, 1873

Dear Boys and Girls at Home:

If you all could be here with me today, what fine times we might have walking through this beautiful Dutch city! How we should stare at the crooked houses, standing with their gable ends to the street; at the little slanting mirrors fastened outside of the windows; at the wooden shoes and dogcarts nearby; the windmills in the distance; at the great warehouses; at the canals, doing the double duty of streets and rivers, and at the singular mingling of trees and masts to be seen in every direction. Ah, it would be pleasant, indeed! But here I sit in a great hotel looking out upon all these things, knowing quite well that not even the spirit of the Dutch, which seems able to accomplish anything, can bring you at this moment across the moment. There is one comfort, however, in going through these wonderful Holland towns without you—it would be dreadful to have any of the party tumble into the canals; and then these lumbering Dutch wagons, with their heavy wheels, so very far apart; what should I do if a few dozen of you were to fall under THEM? And, perhaps, one of the wildest of my boys might harm a stork, and then all Holland would be against us! No. It is better as it is. You will be coming, one by one, as years go on, to see the whole thing for yourselves.

Holland is as wonderful today as it was when, more than twenty years ago, Hans and Gretel skated on the frozen Y. In fact, more wonderful, for every day increases the marvel of its not being washed away by the sea. Its cities have grown, and some of its peculiarities have been washed away by contact with other nations; but it is Holland still, and always

will be—full of oddity, courage and industry—the pluckiest little country on earth. I shall not tell you in this letter of its customs, its cities, its palaces, churches, picture galleries and museums—for these are described in the story—except to say that they are here still, just the same, in this good year 1873, for I have seen them nearly all within a week.

Today an American boy and I, seeing some children enter an old house in the business part of Amsterdam, followed them in—and what do you think we found? An old woman, here in the middle of summer, selling hot water and fire! She makes her living by it. All day long she sits tending her great fires of peat and keeping the shining copper tanks above them filled with water. The children who come and go carry away in a curious stone pail their kettle of boiling water and their blocks of burning peat. For these they give her a Dutch cent, which is worth less than half of one of ours. In this way persons who cannot afford to keep a fire burning in hot weather may yet have their cup of tea or coffee and bit of boiled fish and potato.

After leaving the old fire woman, who nodded a pleasant good-bye to us, and willingly put our stivers in her great outside pocket, we drove through the streets enjoying the singular sights of a public washing day. Yes, in certain quarters of the city, away from the canals, the streets were lively with washerwomen hard at work. Hundreds of them in clumsy wooden shoes, with their tucked-up skirts, bare arms, and close-fitting caps, were bending over tall wooden tubs that reached as high as their waists—gossiping and rubbing, rubbing and gossiping—with perfect unconcern, in the public thoroughfare, and all washing with cold water instead of using hot, as we do. What a grand thing it would be for our old fire woman if boiling water were suddenly to become the fashion on these public washing days!

And now goodbye. Oh! I must tell you one more thing. We found today in an Amsterdam bookstore this story of Hans Brinker told in Dutch. It is a queer-looking volume,

beautifully printed, and with colored pictures, but filled with such astounding words that it really made me feel sorry for the little Hollanders who are to read them.

Good-bye again, in the touching words of our Dutch translator with whom I’m sure you’ll heartily agree: Toch ben ik er mijn landgenooten dank baar voor, die mijn arbeid steeds zoo welwillend outvangen en wier genegenheid ik voortdurend hoop te verdienen.

Yours affectionately,

The Author.

Hans and Gretel

Table of Contents

On a bright December morning long ago, two thinly clad children were kneeling upon the bank of a frozen canal in Holland.

The sun had not yet appeared, but the gray sky was parted near the horizon, and its edges shone crimson with the coming day. Most of the good Hollanders were enjoying a placid morning nap. Even Mynheer von Stoppelnoze, that worthy old Dutchman, was still slumbering “in beautiful repose”.

Now and then some peasant woman, poising a well-filled basket upon her head, came skimming over the glassy surface of the canal; or a lusty boy, skating to his day’s work in the town, cast a good-natured grimace toward the shivering pair as he flew along.

Meanwhile, with many a vigorous puff and pull, the brother and sister, for such they were, seemed to be fastening something to their feet—not skates, certainly, but clumsy pieces of wood narrowed and smoothed at their lower edge, and pierced with holes, through which were threaded strings of rawhide.

These queer-looking affairs had been made by the boy Hans. His mother was a poor peasant woman, too poor even to think of such a thing as buying skates for her little ones. Rough as these were, they had afforded the children many a happy hour upon the ice. And now, as with cold, red fingers our young Hollanders tugged at the strings—their solemn faces bending closely over their knees—no vision of impossible iron runners came to dull the satisfaction glowing within.

In a moment the boy arose and, with a pompous swing of the arms and a careless “Come on, Gretel,” glided easily

across the canal.

“Ah, Hans,” called his sister plaintively, “this foot is not well yet. The strings hurt me on last market day, and now I cannot bear them tied in the same place.”

“Tie them higher up, then,” answered Hans, as without looking at her he performed a wonderful cat’s cradle step on the ice.

“How can I? The string is too short.”

Giving vent to a good-natured Dutch whistle, the English of which was that girls were troublesome creatures, he steered toward her.

“You are foolish to wear such shoes, Gretel, when you have a stout leather pair. Your klompen *{Wooden shoes.} would be better than these.”

“Why, Hans! Do you forget? The father threw my beautiful new shoes in the fire. Before I knew what he had done, they were all curled up in the midst o the burning peat. I can skate with these, but not with my wooden ones. Be careful now—”

Hans had taken a string from his pocket. Humming a tune as he knelt beside her, he proceeded to fasten Gretel’s skate with all the force of his strong young arm.

“Oh! oh!” she cried in real pain.

With an impatient jerk Hans unwound the string. He would have cast it on the ground in true big-brother style, had he not just then spied a tear trickling down his sister’s cheek.

“I’ll fix it—never fear,” he said with sudden tenderness, “but we must be quick. The mother will need us soon.”

Then he glanced inquiringly about him, first at the ground, next at some bare willow branches above his head, and finally at the sky, now gorgeous with streaks of blue, crimson, and gold.

Finding nothing in any of these localities to meet his need, his eye suddenly brightened as, with the air of a fellow who knew what he was about, he took off his cap and,

removing the tattered lining, adjusted it in a smooth pad over the top of Gretel's worn-out shoe.

"Now," he cried triumphantly, at the same time arranging the strings as briskly as his benumbed fingers would allow, "can you bear some pulling?"

Gretel drew up her lips as if to say, "Hurt away," but made no further response.

In another moment they were all laughing together, as hand in hand they flew along the canal, never thinking whether the ice would bear them or not, for in Holland ice is generally an all-winter affair. It settles itself upon the water in a determined kind of way, and so far from growing thin and uncertain every time the sun is a little severe upon it, it gathers its forces day by day and flashes defiance to every beam.

Presently, squeak! squeak! sounded something beneath Hans' feet. Next his strokes grew shorter, ending oftimes with a jerk, and finally, he lay sprawling upon the ice, kicking against the air with many a fantastic flourish.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Gretel. "That was a fine tumble!" But a tender heart was beating under her coarse blue jacket, and even as she laughed, she came, with a graceful sweep, close to her prostrate brother.

"Are you hurt, Hans? Oh, you are laughing! Catch me now!" And she darted away, shivering no longer, but with cheeks all aglow and eyes sparkling with fun.

Hans sprang to his feet and started in brisk pursuit, but it was no easy thing to catch Gretel. Before she had traveled very far, her skates, too, began to squeak.

Believing that discretion was the better part of valor, she turned suddenly and skated into her pursuer's arms.

"Ha! ha! I've caught you!" cried Hans.

"Ha! ha! I caught YOU," she retorted, struggling to free herself.

Just then a clear, quick voice was heard calling, "Hans! Gretel!"

“It’s the mother,” said Hans, looking solemn in an instant.

By this time the canal was gilded with sunlight. The pure morning air was very delightful, and skaters were gradually increasing in numbers. It was hard to obey the summons. But Gretel and Hans were good children; without a thought of yielding to the temptation to linger, they pulled off their skates, leaving half the knots still tied. Hans, with his great square shoulders and bushy yellow hair, towered high above his blue-eyed little sister as they trudged homeward. He was fifteen years old and Gretel was only twelve. He was a solid, hearty-looking boy, with honest eyes and a brow that seemed to bear a sign GOODNESS WITHIN just as the little Dutch zomerhuis *{Summer house} wears a motto over its portal. Gretel was lithe and quick; her eyes had a dancing light in them, and while you looked at her cheek the color paled and deepened just as it does upon a bed of pink and white blossoms when the wind is blowing.

As soon as the children turned from the canal, they could see their parents’ cottage. Their mother’s tall form, arrayed in jacket and petticoat and close-fitting cap, stood, like a picture, in the crooked frame of the doorway. Had the cottage been a mile away, it would still have seemed near. In that flat country every object stands out plainly in the distance; the chickens show as distinctly as the windmills. Indeed, were it not for the dikes and the high banks of the canals, one could stand almost anywhere in middle Holland without seeing a mound or a ridge between the eye and the “jumping-off place.”

None had better cause to know the nature of these same dikes than Dame Brinker and the panting youngsters now running at her call. But before stating WHY, let me ask you to take a rocking-chair trip with me to that far country where you may see, perhaps for the first time, some curious things that Hans and Gretel saw every day.

Holland

Table of Contents

Holland is one of the queerest countries under the sun. It should be called Odd-land or Contrary-land, for in nearly everything it is different from the other parts of the world. In the first place, a large portion of the country is lower than the level of the sea. Great dikes, or bulwarks, have been erected at a heavy cost of money and labor to keep the ocean where it belongs. On certain parts of the coast it sometimes leans with all its weight against the land, and it is as much as the poor country can do to stand the pressure. Sometimes the dikes give way or spring a leak, and the most disastrous results ensue. They are high and wide, and the tops of some of them are covered with buildings and trees. They have even fine public roads on them, from which horses may look down upon wayside cottages. Often the keels of floating ships are higher than the roofs of the dwellings. The stork clattering to her young on the house peak may feel that her nest is lifted far out of danger, but the croaking frog in neighboring bulrushes is nearer the stars than she. Water bugs dart backward and forward above the heads of the chimney swallows, and willow trees seem drooping with shame, because they cannot reach as high as the reeds nearby.

Ditches, canals, ponds, rivers, and lakes are everywhere to be seen. High, but not dry, they shine in the sunlight, catching nearly all the bustle and the business, quite scorning the tame fields stretching damply beside them. One is tempted to ask, “Which is Holland—the shores or the water?” The very verdure that should be confined to the land has made a mistake and settled upon the fish ponds. In fact, the entire country is a kind of saturated sponge or, as the English poet, Butler, called it,

A land that rides at anchor, and is moor’d,
In which they do not live, but go aboard.

Persons are born, live, and die, and even have their gardens on canal-boats. Farmhouses, with roofs like great slouched hats pulled over their eyes, stand on wooden legs with a tucked-up sort of air, as if to say, “We intend to keep dry if we can.” Even the horses wear a wide stool on each hoof as if to lift them out of the mire. In short, the landscape everywhere suggests a paradise for ducks. It is a glorious country in summer for barefoot girls and boys. Such wading! Such mimic ship sailing! Such rowing, fishing, and swimming! Only think of a chain of puddles where one can launch chip boats all day long and never make a return trip! But enough. A full recital would set all young America rushing in a body toward the Zuider Zee.

Dutch cities seem at first sight to be a bewildering jungle of houses, bridges, churches, and ships, sprouting into masts, steeples, and trees. In some cities vessels are hitched like horses to their owners’ doorposts and receive their freight from the upper windows. Mothers scream to Lodewyk and Kassy not to swing on the garden gate for fear they may be drowned! Water roads are more frequent there than common roads and railways; water fences in the form of lazy green ditches enclose pleasure-ground, farm, and garden.

Sometimes fine green hedges are seen, but wooden fences such as we have in America are rarely met with in Holland. As for stone fences, a Dutchman would lift his hands with astonishment at the very idea. There is no stone there, except for those great masses of rock that have been brought from other lands to strengthen and protect the coast. All the small stones or pebbles, if there ever were any, seem to be imprisoned in pavements or quite melted away. Boys with strong, quick arms may grow from pinafores to full beards without ever finding one to start the water

rings or set the rabbits flying. The water roads are nothing less than canals intersecting the country in every direction. These are of all sizes, from the great North Holland Ship Canal, which is the wonder of the world, to those which a boy can leap. Water omnibuses, called trekschuiten, *{Canal boats. Some of the first named are over thirty feet long. They look like green houses lodged on barges and are drawn by horses walking along the bank of the canal. The trekschuiten are divided into two compartments, first and second class, and when not too crowded, the passengers make themselves quite at home in them; the men smoke, the women knit or sew, while children play upon the small outer deck. Many of the canal boats have white, yellow, or chocolate-colored sails. This last color is caused by a tanning preparation which is put on to preserve them.} constantly ply up and down these roads for the conveyance of passengers; and water drays, called pakschuyten, are used for carrying fuel and merchandise. Instead of green country lanes, green canals stretch from field to barn and from barn to garden; and the farms, or polders, as they are termed, are merely great lakes pumped dry. Some of the busiest streets are water, while many of the country roads are paved with brick. The city boats with their rounded sterns, gilded prows, and gaily painted sides, are unlike any others under the sun; and a Dutch wagon, with its funny little crooked pole, is a perfect mystery of mysteries.

“One thing is clear,” cries Master Brightside, “the inhabitants need never be thirsty.” But no, Odd-land is true to itself still. Notwithstanding the sea pushing to get in, and the lakes struggling to get out, and the overflowing canals, rivers, and ditches, in many districts there is no water fit to swallow; our poor Hollanders must go dry or drink wine and beer or send far into the inland to Utrecht and other favored localities for that precious fluid older than Adam yet younger than the morning dew. Sometimes, indeed, the inhabitants can swallow a shower when they are provided with any

means of catching it; but generally they are like the albatross-haunted sailors in Coleridge's famous poem "The Ancient Mariner." They see

Water, Water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink!

Great flapping windmills all over the country make it look as if flocks of huge sea birds were just settling upon it. Everywhere one sees the funniest trees, bobbed into fantastical shapes, with their trunks painted a dazzling white, yellow, or red. Horses are often yoked three abreast. Men, women, and children go clattering about in wooden shoes with loose heels; peasant girls who cannot get beaux for love, hire them for money to escort them to the kermis, * {Fair.} and husbands and wives lovingly harness themselves side by side on the bank of the canal and drag their pakschuyts to market.

Another peculiar feature of Holland is the dune, or sand hill. These are numerous along certain portions of the coast. Before they were sown with coarse reed grass and other plants, to hold them down, they used to send great storms of sand over the inland. So, to add to the oddities, the farmers sometimes dig down under the surface to find their soil, and on windy days DRY SHOWERS (of sand) often fall upon fields that have grown wet under a week of sunshine.

In short, almost the only familiar thing we Yankees can meet with in Holland is a harvest song which is quite popular there, though no linguist could translate it. Even then we must shut our eyes and listen only to the tune, which I leave you to guess.

Yanker didee dudel down
Didee dudel lawnter;
Yankee viver, voover, vown,
Botermelk and Tawnter!

On the other hand, many of the oddities of Holland serve only to prove the thrift and perseverance of the people. There is not a richer or more carefully tilled garden spot in the whole world than this leaky, springy little country. There is not a braver, more heroic race than its quite, passive-looking inhabitants. Few nations have equalled it in important discoveries and inventions; none has excelled it in commerce, navigation, learning, and science—or set as noble examples in the promotion of education and public charities; and none in proportion to its extent has expended more money or labor upon public works.

Holland has its shining annals of noble and illustrious men and women; its grand, historic records of patience, resistance, and victory; its religious freedom; its enlightened enterprise; its art, music, and literature. It has truly been called “the battlefield of Europe”; as truly may we consider it the asylum of the world, for the oppressed of every nation have there found shelter and encouragement. If we Americans, who after all are homeopathic preparations of Holland stock, can laugh at the Dutch, and call them human beavers and hint that their country may float off any day at high tide, we can also feel proud, and say they have proved themselves heroes and that their country will not float off while there is a Dutchman left to grapple it.

There are said to be at least ninety-nine hundred large windmills in Holland, with sails ranging from eighty to one hundred and twenty feet long. They are employed in sawing timber, beating hemp, grinding, and many other kinds of work; but their principal use is for pumping water from the lowlands into the canals, and for guarding against the inland freshets that so often deluge the country. Their yearly cost is said to be nearly ten million dollars. The large ones are of great power. The huge circular tower, rising sometimes from the midst of factory buildings, is surmounted with a smaller one tapering into a caplike roof. This upper tower is

encircled at its base with a balcony, high above which juts the axis turned by its four prodigious ladder-back sails.

Many of the windmills are primitive affairs, seeming sadly in need of Yankee “improvements,” but some of the new ones are admirable. They are constructed so that by some ingenious contrivance they present their fans, or wings, to the wind in precisely the right direction to work with the requisite power. In other words, the miller may take a nap and feel quite sure that his mill will study the wind and make the most of it, until he wakens. Should there be but a slight current of air, every sail will spread itself to catch the faintest breath, but if a heavy “blow” should come, they will shrink at its touch, like great mimosa leaves, and only give it half a chance to move them.

One of the old prisons of Amsterdam, called the Rasphouse, because the thieves and vagrants who were confined there were employed in rasping logwood, had a cell for the punishment of lazy prisoners. In one corner of this cell was a pump, and in another, an opening through which a steady stream of water was admitted. The prisoner could take his choice, either to stand still and be drowned or to work for dear life at the pump and keep the flood down until his jailer chose to relieve him. Now it seems to me that, throughout Holland, nature has introduced this little diversion on a grand scale. The Dutch have always been forced to pump for their very existence and probably must continue to do so to the end of time.

Every year millions of dollars are spent in repairing dikes and regulating water levels. If these important duties were neglected, the country would be uninhabitable. Already dreadful consequences, as I have said, have followed the bursting of these dikes. Hundreds of villages and towns have from time to time been buried beneath the rush of waters, and nearly a million persons have been destroyed. One of the most fearful inundations ever known occurred in the autumn of the year 1570. Twenty-eight terrible floods

had before that time overwhelmed portions of Holland, but this was the most terrible of all. The unhappy country had long been suffering under Spanish tyranny; now, it seemed, the crowning point was given to its troubles. When we read Motley's history of the rise of the Dutch republic, we learn to revere the brave people who have endured, suffered, and dared so much.

Mr. Motley, in his thrilling account of the great inundation, tells us how a long-continued and violent gale had been sweeping the Atlantic waters into the North Sea, piling them against the coasts of the Dutch provinces; how the dikes, taxed beyond their strength, burst in all directions; how even the Hand-bos, a bulwark formed of oaken piles, braced with iron, moored with heavy anchors, and secured by gravel and granite, was snapped to pieces like thread; how fishing boats and bulky vessels floating up into the country became entangled among the trees or beat in the roofs and walls of dwellings, and how, at last, all Friesland was converted into an angry sea. "Multitudes of men, women, children, of horses, oxen, sheep, and every domestic animal, were struggling in the waves in every direction. Every boat and every article which could serve as a boat was eagerly seized upon. Every house was inundated; even the graveyards gave up their dead. The living infant in his cradle and the long-buried corpse in his coffin floated side by side. The ancient flood seemed about to be renewed. Everywhere, upon the tops of trees, upon the steeples of churches, human beings were clustered, praying to God for mercy and to their fellow men for assistance. As the storm at last was subsiding, boats began to ply in every direction, saving those who were struggling in the water, picking fugitives from roofs and treetops, and collecting the bodies of those already drowned." No less than one hundred thousand human beings had perished in a few hours. Thousands upon thousands of dumb creatures

lay dead upon the waters, and the damage to property was beyond calculation.

Robles, the Spanish governor, was foremost in noble efforts to save life and lessen the horrors of the catastrophe. He had previously been hated by the Dutch because of his Spanish or Portuguese blood, but by his goodness and activity in their hour of disaster, he won all hearts to gratitude. He soon introduced an improved method of constructing the dikes and passed a law that they should in future be kept up by the owners of the soil. There were fewer heavy floods from this time, though within less than three hundred years, six fearful inundations swept over the land.

In the spring there is always great danger of inland freshets, especially in times of thaw, because the rivers, choked with blocks of ice, overflow before they can discharge their rapidly rising waters into the ocean. Adding to this that the sea chafes and presses against the dikes, it is no wonder that Holland is often in a state of alarm. The greatest care is taken to prevent accidents. Engineers and workmen are stationed all along in threatened places, and a close watch is kept up night and day. When a general signal of danger is given, the inhabitants all rush to the rescue, eager to combine against their common foe. As, everywhere else, straw is supposed to be of all things the most helpless in the water, of course, in Holland, it must be rendered the mainstay against a rushing tide. Huge straw mats are pressed against the embankments, fortified with clay and heavy stone, and once adjusted, the ocean dashes against them in vain.

Raff Brinker, the father of Gretel and Hans, had for years been employed upon the dikes. It was at the time of a threatened inundation, when in the midst of a terrible storm, in darkness and sleet, the men were laboring at a weak spot near the Veermyk sluice, that he fell from the scaffolding

and became insensible. From that hour he never worked again; though he lived on, mind and memory were gone.

Gretel could not remember him otherwise than as the strange, silent man whose eyes followed her vacantly whichever way she turned, but Hans had recollections of a hearty, cheerful-voiced father who was never tired of bearing him upon his shoulder and whose careless song still seemed echoing near when he lay awake at night and listened.

The Silver Skates

Table of Contents

Dame Brinker earned a scant support for her family by raising vegetables, spinning, and knitting. Once she had worked on board the barges plying up and down the canal and had occasionally been harnessed with other women to the towing rope of a pakschuyt plying between Broek and Amsterdam. But when Hans had grown strong and large, he had insisted on doing all such drudgery in her place. Besides, her husband had become so very helpless of late that he required her constant care. Although not having as much intelligence as a little child, he was yet strong of arm and very hearty, and Dame Brinker had sometimes great trouble in controlling him.

“Ah! children, he was so good and steady,” she would sometimes say, “and as wise as a lawyer. Even the burgomaster would stop to ask him a question, and now, alack! he doesn’t know his wife and little ones. You remember the father, Hans, when he was himself—a great brave man—don’t you?”

“Yes, indeed, Mother, he knew everything and could do anything under the sun—and how he would sing! Why, you used to laugh and say it was enough to set the windmills dancing.”

“So I did. Bless me! how the boy remembers! Gretel, child, take that knitting needle from your father, quick; he’ll get it in his eyes maybe; and put the shoe on him. His poor feet are like ice half the time, but I can’t keep ‘em covered, all I can do—” And then, half wailing, half humming, Dame Brinker would sit down and fill the low cottage with the whirr of her spinning wheel.

Nearly all the outdoor work, as well as the household labor, was performed by Hans and Gretel. At certain seasons

of the year the children went out day after day to gather peat, which they would stow away in square, bricklike pieces, for fuel. At other times, when homework permitted, Hans rode the towing-horses on the canals, earning a few stivers *{A stiver is worth about two cents of our money.} a day, and Gretel tended geese for the neighboring farmers.

Hans was clever at carving in wood, and both he and Gretel were good gardeners. Gretel could sing and sew and run on great, high homemade stilts better than any other girl for miles around. She could learn a ballad in five minutes and find, in its season, any weed or flower you could name; but she dreaded books, and often the very sight of the figuring board in the old schoolhouse would set her eyes swimming. Hans, on the contrary, was slow and steady. The harder the task, whether in study or daily labor, the better he liked it. Boys who sneered at him out of school, on account of his patched clothes and scant leather breeches, were forced to yield him the post of honor in nearly every class. It was not long before he was the only youngster in the school who had not stood at least ONCE in the corner of horrors, where hung a dreaded whip, and over it this motto: “Leer, leer! jou luigaart, of dit endje touw zal je leeren!” *{Learn! learn! you idler, or this rope’s end shall teach you.}

It was only in winter that Gretel and Hans could be spared to attend school, and for the past month they had been kept at home because their mother needed their services. Raff Brinker required constant attention, and there was black bread to be made, and the house to be kept clean, and stockings and other things to be knitted and sold in the marketplace.

While they were busily assisting their mother on this cold December morning, a merry troop of girls and boys came skimming down the canal. There were fine skaters among them, and as the bright medley of costumes flitted by, it looked from a distance as though the ice had suddenly

thawed and some gay tulip bed were floating along on the current.

There was the rich burgomaster’s daughter Hilda van Gleck, with her costly furs and loose-fitting velvet sack; and, nearby, a pretty peasant girl, Annie Bouman, jauntily attired in a coarse scarlet jacket and a blue skirt just short enough to display the gray homespun hose to advantage. Then there was the proud Rychie Korbes, whose father, Mynheer van Korbes, was one of the leading men of Amsterdam; and, flocking closely around her, Carl Schummel, Peter and Ludwig van Holp, Jacob Poot, and a very small boy rejoicing in the tremendous name of Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck. There were nearly twenty other boys and girls in the party, and one and all seemed full of excitement and frolic.

Up and down the canal within the space of a half mile they skated, exerting their racing powers to the utmost. Often the swiftest among them was seen to dodge from under the very nose of some pompous lawgiver or doctor who, with folded arms, was skating leisurely toward the town; or a chain of girls would suddenly break at the approach of a fat old burgomaster who, with gold-headed cane poised in air, was puffing his way to Amsterdam. Equipped in skates wonderful to behold, with their superb strappings and dazzling runners curving over the instep and topped with gilt balls, he would open his fat eyes a little if one of the maidens chanced to drop him a curtsy but would not dare to bow in return for fear of losing his balance.

Not only pleasure seekers and stately men of note were upon the canal. There were workpeople, with weary eyes, hastening to their shops and factories; market women with loads upon their heads; peddlers bending with their packs; bargemen with shaggy hair and bleared faces, jostling roughly on their way; kind-eyed clergymen speeding perhaps to the bedsides of the dying; and, after a while, groups of children with satchels slung over their shoulders,

whizzing past, toward the distant school. One and all wore skates except, indeed, a muffled-up farmer whose queer cart bumped along on the margin of the canal.

Before long our merry boys and girls were almost lost in the confusion of bright colors, the ceaseless motion, and the gleaming of skates flashing back the sunlight. We might have known no more of them had not the whole party suddenly come to a standstill and, grouping themselves out of the way of the passersby, all talked at once to a pretty little maiden, whom they had drawn from the tide of people flowing toward the town.

“Oh, Katrinka!” they cried in one breath, “have you heard of it? The race—we want you to join!”

“What race?” asked Katrinka, laughing. “Don’t all talk at once, please, I can’t understand.”

Everyone panted and looked at Rychie Korbes, who was their acknowledged spokeswoman.

“Why,” said Rychie, “we are to have a grand skating match on the twentieth, on Mevrouw van Gleck’s birthday. It’s all Hilda’s work. They are going to give a splendid prize to the best skater.”

“Yes,” chimed in half a dozen voices, “a beautiful pair of silver skates—perfectly magnificent—with, oh! such straps and silver bells and buckles!”

“WHO said they had bells?” put in a small voice of the boy with the big name.

“I say so, Master Voost,” replied Rychie.

“So they have”; “No, I’m sure they haven’t”; “OH, how can you say so?”; “It’s an arrow”; “And Mynheer van Korbes told MY mother they had bells”—came from the excited group, but Mynheer Voostenwalbert Schimmelpenninck essayed to settle the matter with a decisive “Well, you don’t any of you know a single thing about it; they haven’t a sign of a bell on them, they—”

“Oh! oh!” and the chorus of conflicting opinions broke forth again.

“The girls’ pair is to have bells,” interposed Hilda quietly, “but there is to be another pair for the boys with an arrow engraved upon the sides.”

“THERE! I told you so!” cried nearly all the youngsters in one breath.

Katrinka looked at them with bewildered eyes.

“Who is to try?” she asked.

“All of us,” answered Rychie. “It will be such fun! And you must, too, Katrinka. But it’s schooltime now, we will talk it all over at noon. Oh! you will join, of course.”

Katrinka, without replying, made a graceful pirouette and laughing out a coquettish, “Don’t you hear the last bell? Catch me!” darted off toward the schoolhouse standing half a mile away on the canal.

All started, pell-mell, at this challenge, but they tried in vain to catch the bright-eyed, laughing creature who, with golden hair streaming in the sunlight, cast back many a sparkling glance of triumph as she floated onward.

Beautiful Katrinka! Flushed with youth and health, all life and mirth and motion, what wonder thine image, ever floating in advance, sped through one boy’s dreams that night! What wonder that it seemed his darkest hour when, years afterward, thy presence floated away from him forever.

Hans and Gretel Find a Friend

Table of Contents

At noon our young friends poured forth from the schoolhouse, intent upon having an hour's practice upon the canal.

They had skated but a few moments when Carl Schummel said mockingly to Hilda, "There's a pretty pair just coming upon the ice! The little ragpickers! Their skates must have been a present from the king direct."

"They are patient creatures," said Hilda gently. "It must have been hard to learn to skate upon such queer affairs. They are very poor peasants, you see. The boy has probably made the skates himself."

Carl was somewhat abashed.

"Patient they may be, but as for skating, they start off pretty well, only to finish with a jerk. They could move well to your new staccato piece, I think."

Hilda laughed pleasantly and left him. After joining a small detachment of the racers and sailing past every one of them, she halted beside Gretel, who, with eager eyes, had been watching the sport.

"What is your name, little girl?"

"Gretel, my lady," answered the child, somewhat awed by Hilda's rank, though they were nearly of the same age, "and my brother is called Hans."

"Hans is a stout fellow," said Hilda cheerily, "and seems to have a warm stove somewhere within him, but YOU look cold. You should wear more clothing, little one."

Gretel, who had nothing else to wear, tried to laugh as she answered, "I am not so very little. I am past twelve years old."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. You see, I am nearly fourteen, and so large for my age that other girls seem small to me,

but that is nothing. Perhaps you will shoot up far above me yet, but not unless you dress more warmly, though. Shivering girls never grow.”

Hans flushed as he saw tears rising in Gretel’s eyes.

“My sister has not complained of the cold, but this is bitter weather, they all say.” And he looked sadly upon Gretel.

“It is nothing,” said Gretel. “I am often warm—too warm when I am skating. You are good, jufvrouw, *{Miss; young lady (pronounced yuffrow). In studied or polite address it would be jongvrowe (pronounced youngfrow).} to think of it.”

“No, no,” answered Hilda, quite angry at herself. “I am careless, cruel, but I meant no harm. I wanted to ask you—I mean, if—” And here Hilda, coming to the point of her errand, faltered before the poorly clad but noble-looking children she wished to serve.

“What is it, young lady?” exclaimed Hans eagerly. “If there is any service I can do, any—”

“Oh, no, no,” laughed Hilda, shaking off her embarrassment. “I only wished to speak to you about the grand race. Why do you not join it? You both can skate well, and the ranks are free. Anyone may enter for the prize.”

Gretel looked wistfully at Hans, who, tugging at his cap, answered respectfully.

“Ah, jufvrouw, even if we could enter, we could skate only a few strokes with the rest. Our skates are hard wood, you see”—holding up the sole of his foot—“but they soon become damp, and then they stick and trip us.”

Gretel’s eyes twinkled with fun as she thought of Hans’s mishap in the morning, but she blushed as she faltered out timidly, “Oh, no, we can’t join, but may we be there, my lady, on the great day to look on?”

“Certainly,” answered Hilda, looking kindly into the two earnest faces and wishing from her heart that she had not spent so much of her monthly allowance for lace and finery.