

ARTIST LIFE BY THE NORTH SEA.

WITH PICTURES BY THE AUTHOR.



SAND-DUNES.

ENGRAVED BY F. H. WELLINGTON.



ONE of the most ideal spots which it was ever the pleasure of a painter to discover, is a little village, two hours' journey from Amsterdam, called Laren by Hilversum, to distinguish it from the other Laren by Zutphen. It is in itself one of the most insignificant hamlets of Holland—nothing, in fact, but a succession of thatch-roofed cottages strung along a few intersecting roads and lanes, and surrounded by waste lands the only growths of which are heather and stunted pines. On the edge of the Zuyder Zee, its sand-dunes have not yet become soil, so only the most promising spots of ground, made fertile by centuries of incessant labor, are cultivated. On the not over-frequent oases in these wide wastes, one comes upon the little villages of Laren, Blaricum, and Huizen, near together, yet separated by a strip

of heath. The people are all peasants, and both they and their homes are very picturesque.

When the artistic explorers first found out Laren, its only accommodation for strangers was a little inn that gloried in the name of "The Gilded Post Wagon." The peasant proprietor, finding that the painters were coming more and more numerous, built addition after addition to his house, and each addition made it more rambling and prettier. Now each season finds it full of artists from all parts of the earth, and the desolation of Laren contributes materially to the luxury of the art-loving world. The inn is the center of the village life, and may well be called the pulse of the place. It has two large rooms, one on each side of the central hall. The easterly room is reserved for the painters, who use it as a dining-room and, incidentally, also as a salon. The other apartment is the public room, containing the bar, which is delightfully decorated with old delft and rows of bottles, the billiard-table,—for the Dutch peasant is a

tireless if not skilful amateur with the cue,— and the little tables devoted to the games at cards that take place each evening between a choice coterie consisting of the village blacksmith, the village tailor, and a few peasants. These play interminable games for infinitesimal stakes.

In this room the “vergunnings,” or auctions, take place. The waste lands surrounding the

ergies for a go at the evening sky. The routine may be condensed into coffee from five to ten, lunch at one, dinner at six. After dinner come gossip, exploring strolls in the neighborhood, and a return for the tea, which is served under the trees at nine. A game or two of cards or billiards finishes the day.

One relief from the tedium of amusing ourselves is in the kermess, an annual event which



LANDSCAPE.

ENGRAVED BY HENRY WOLF.

villages are held in common between them; each village has a right to graze a certain number of sheep upon the downs. There are also some reclaimed patches of soil that are the property of the village, and the rights of these are disposed of under the hammer. The sale is a village event. The spectacle of the rival peasants bidding for a half-acre of ground has for this quiet world the flavor of a gladiatorial combat, and furnishes material for conversation a month afterward.

Even if the quaint and simple charm of nature and native life did not spur the sympathetic appreciation of the painter into activity, he would drift into a regular system of labor to avoid being bored to death. Some enterprising spirits will arise at daybreak to study sunrises; others struggle with previously secured models; some are off to the heath for sheep subjects, or toward Naarden for the polder country, after canals and ditches and pastures with black-and-white cattle; while others are saving their en-

takes place in the market-town of Hilversum, and for which the peasant scrimps a few guilders from his wages, that he may have a few days of wine and fleshpots, though he fast for the rest of the year. As good wages are here only one guilder (about forty cents) a day, and not steady work at that, it may be inferred that the margin for feasting is narrow; in some cases whole families—man, wife, and children—pool their labor for this sum, and, though poor, are yet content. At the time of the kermess the market-town gives up its public square for the erection of booths of various kinds, interspersed with merry-go-rounds and swings. Here are to be found troupes of acrobats; “ladies” who possess second sight, and tell your future for a *dubbelteje*; itinerant theaters that perform a comedy or a tragedy every twenty minutes, invariably winding up with a ballet in which three generations—grandmother, mother, and daughter—pose and smirk; the marvelous boy without arms who writes with his toes; in

short, every variety of the cheap or freak show that travels on wheels. At convenient intervals appears that great Dutch institution, the bakery of waffles "cooked in the open air before your eyes." This and its rival, the pancake-booth, do a rushing business. These booths are very gorgeous in white and gold, ornamented in the highest style of the art, with paper-lace trimmings and mirrors everywhere. It is a bewildering dream of magnificence to the humble peasant who, seated in one of the cupboard dining-rooms, engaged in putting out of sight plate after plate of waffles, feels that he is for once, at least, dining in princely state. The waffle is really an institution of Holland. It presents a temptation which no healthy Dutchman with a guilder in his pocket can resist. If Alva, instead of beleaguering Leyden with cannon and cantonments, had erected waffle-bakeries outside the moats, I verily believe the city would promptly have capitulated.



On the second day the crowd really begins to swarm, and by evening all the avenues of the fair are jammed. The gasoline-lamps shed a flaring light over the sea of heads; the hurdy-gurdies of the different merry-go-rounds try to drown one another; the managers of the theaters, with their companies in tights and spangles on the platforms beside them, are bawling through speaking-trumpets descriptions of the wonderful pieces about to be performed inside, occasionally giving short sketches as alluring samples; parties of young peasants and their sweethearts "charge" through the crowd. This "charge," which is peculiarly Dutch, is accomplished by from ten to twenty persons locking arms, with the weight forward, and acting on the principle of a battering-ram. It is very effective, and will open a lane through the densest throng. The chargers sing cheerfully during the onset, and the collisions are generally taken as neat bits of pleasantry. When the chargers reach, or have created, a comparatively open space, they form a ring, and jump up and down, shouting, "Hustle! Hustle!" in time to the steps, while the tempo is accelerated till the feet give out and the breath is gone.

What the Donnybrook Irishman would term "a fine bit of a fight" now



follows. A cry has gone up from two combatants who have squabbled about nothing — "Laren! Laren! Laren!" from one, and from the other, "Huizen! Huizen! Huizen!" Our village (Laren) is Catholic; Huizen, just beyond, is Protestant; and the feuds of the rival creeds, though mild in comparison with those of the past, are bitter yet. No decent and self-respecting Larenite would dream of marrying into Huizen, and vice versa. The women's caps and earrings are of another pattern; so are the sabots, even those of the children. There is absolutely no social communication between the communities. In the olden days there was constant fighting, and many a head was broken and many a knife-stab given; but in these times, except on special occasions, the towns preserve a surly peace. But hot blood boils at kermess time, and the old trouble breaks out again, and the war-cries bring the reserves hurrying to the field, clearing for action as they come. In this case the police separate the brawlers, taking one to one end of the fair, and the other, with a handsome cut on his head from his opponent's wooden shoe, in the opposite direction. It may be well to state, by the by, that a wooden shoe of the size worn hereabout, snatched off and used either as a club or projectile, makes a weapon of great effectiveness, and one very convenient to get at upon the first call of necessity.



The cafés adjacent to the main square have done a quiet, conservative business in smoked eels, hard-boiled eggs, and Schiedam during the fifty-one weeks preceding the kermess. For the fifty-second they adopt quite another policy, savoring somewhat of the wholesale line of trade. Dancing is really the base upon which the kermess rests, and the crafty café proprietor caters to the demand by clearing his large room, inclosing the verandas with canvas, and converting the garden into a restaurant. A band, usually of brass and of four pieces, of which the trombone plays the leading rôle, is stationed where it can best be heard and take up least room. In the old days "The Hoplen of the Kettle," "The Ship and Sail," "The Karen of the Dom," danced in wooden shoes, and full of pantomime, were the only dances seen; now these alternate with the waltz. The natives dance with vigor, and manifest determination to get their half-guilder's worth out of the exercise. Under the excitement of the



WINTER AT LAREN.

ENGRAVED BY K. C. ATWOOD.

dance and the gin-and-water, they gradually lose the air of sheepishness that hung over them earlier in the day; the boys' arms steal round their sweethearts' waists, and finally each cozy or convenient nook contains a pair of lovers entirely oblivious of the rest of the world, her helmeted head resting confidingly on his shoulder.

The multitude of little lanes and footpaths which environ the village are always presenting fresh beauties and invitations for pictures, and as it is also the custom to drop in at any peasant home and look about *sans cérémonie*, one finds subjects indoors as well as out. Their houses—barn, living-rooms, and all—are under one great roof. The barn occupies most of the space, while the living-rooms are cubby-holes partitioned off at one end. The barn part is always interesting, with its cemented floor, the beams and rafters going off into the gloom overhead, the grain and hay hanging down from platforms. The cow and goat have one corner to themselves, and the spinning-wheels and loom take up another.

One night in October we

were startled by the ringing of the alarm-bells. We expected to find a fire, but the peasants, as they tumbled out of their doors, shouted, "The cows! The cows!"—which brings us back to a curious bit of local history and custom. As is well known, the Zuyder Zee is kept back from these villages by a great dike that connects sand-dune with sand-dune. During the low water of summer the sea retires for a long distance, and the uncovered shore becomes fine pasture, giving the farmers a chance to convert their own meager grass-patches into hay for the winter. Unfortunately, this provision of nature cannot be enjoyed by all. It is a bequest to these villages from a countess who died in

the year 1642; to speak exactly, each descendant of a resident of the villages of Laren, Blaricum, and Huizen, of that date, has inherited the right to pasture seven cows. This privilege cannot be bought or sold; it can be acquired only from an ancestor of the village of that date. When the spring comes, the cattle are driven to the pastures, where they remain for the summer. Their owners commonly live miles away, and



it necessitates two daily milking-trips, on which they jog over in a cart with the cans and pails at midday and midnight. The pastures are hundreds of acres in extent, and for a long time it puzzled us how an owner could find his cows on a dark night; but we discovered that they have trained their animals to come to a certain place at the same hour each day and night by always carrying to them some dainty in the shape of salt or potatoes. During the summer these pastures are used without danger, but in the autumn the succession of northerly gales, in conjunction with a high tide, will put the land many feet under water. Sometimes the inundation is so sudden that the cattle are caught by the rising waters, and drowned. So, at the beginning of September, watchmen are always stationed on the dike to keep a sharp lookout upon the sea. The church towers of the villages are all in sight of one another, and the Huizen tower is in close communication with the dike. With a rise of the sea, the man on the dike hangs up a lantern;

year none were drowned; but it was perilous work, and the peasants heaved long sighs of relief as they told us the details, and announced that the cows were safe in the stables for the next six months.

Jan, the waiter who presides over our meals, has bought a new pair of trousers. As they are of unusual material and color, it is really a great event in the village, where for centuries the successive village tailors have worked from plain cloths and from one shape. We have tried to trace this shape to its origin, but the trail vanishes in the obscurity of the sixteenth century. It would be impossible to describe it with exactness, but the general effect is to make the straightest legs seem bowed. The only measure the tailor takes is the circumference of the body and the length of limb, and the result is always the same. It is also a local tradition, which goes with the trousers, that an honest man shall have three pairs, one of black cloth, for Sundays, marriages, and funerals, which shall last him his life, and which he can will to his eldest



COTTAGE YARD.

ENGRAVED BY A. NEGRI.

if the sea rises more, he hangs up two, which is a danger-signal; but if it rises fast, three, which says, "Great danger; come quickly." Similar lights are flashed from tower to tower by watchers in the belfries, and at three lights the alarm-bells are rung. This was the alarm we heard, and in ten minutes the roads were thronged with people on foot and on horseback, rushing to the rescue of the herds. This

son; the other two, which form a never-ending cycle, are made of cheap, strong cloth for working purposes, a new pair being ordered when the second-best will hold no more patches.

Jan is a very good boy. In addition to waiting on us, he keeps our boots presentable, runs our errands, transacts our small business arrangements, takes a sincere interest in our artistic progress, and delivers our mail. He is



THE ZUYDER ZEE.

ENGRAVED BY PETER AITKEN.

studying English with the aid of a dictionary and our postal cards—the latter portion of his method sometimes keeping us waiting an indefinite period while he struggles with a hard word or a complicated sentence. Our grammar evidently gives him trouble, but he smiles contentedly when he finally permits us to have our mail, remarking: “This is a card from Mr. So-and-so, who says,” etc. He is the son of a respectable peasant in the neighborhood, and is learning how to run an inn of his own. He is also in love with a very pretty young thing of some twenty summers whose father sells ounce packages of tea, spools of thread, wooden shoes, etc., in a room of his house which he has converted into a store. The trade is not extensive, so between calls on the shop she keeps the kettle boiling and digs in the garden. One evening when we saw Jan steal out of the side door, wearing his new trousers, and with a package done up in tissue-paper sticking out from under his coat, and pass in the direction of Mynheer Watels, we must confess that our curiosity so got the better of us that we were base enough to follow and look in at the window. We had heard of the betrothal custom, and now we saw it for ourselves. Jan entered, and said, “Queen Avand.” The girl’s father and mother responded, “Queen

Avand,” and then she said, “Queen Avand.” Then Jan pulled a half-guilder from his pocket, and laid it on the table, and the girl hung her head, and blushed a pleased sort of blush, after which she took the half-guilder and a pitcher from the shelf, and disappeared. In an incredibly brief space of time she was back with the pitcher full of beer—plain, every-day sort of beer to outsiders, but to them, no doubt, true nectar, for when they had each drunk a glass they were betrothed. Then the cake came out from under Jan’s coat, and all took a piece and ate it, and the betrothal ceremony was complete. The old folks having discreetly gone off to bed and left the young couple to build plans for their future life, we too beat a retreat. The next afternoon Jan’s father and mother were over to see her father and mother, and the old ladies took tea, and the old men something sharper; while Vrouw Watels showed the chest of sheets and pillow-cases and caps and helmets which went with the match, and the old men arranged how that two-year-old black heifer should be balanced by a pig, nine hens, and a stock of hay, and discussed starting Jan in a little inn over at Amness.

But here is the cold weather: outdoor work is no longer possible, and we break up, some



MOONLIGHT.

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

for Paris, some for London, and some for New York. As one looks over the long rollers with which this strange, humble, patient, and heroic

people wage a perpetual war of self-preservation, the charm of the life grows stronger as the life itself recedes.

H. W. Ranger.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

I BELIEVED thee, friend, with unflinching faith, I revered and loved thee well,
Till the foe drew near whom I need not name, with his hints like sparks from hell.
He showed me a blot that I dared not doubt on thy large unsullied soul;
He tore from the sacred head of my saint its illumining aureole.

Oh, strange by the shattered statue's form to watch where its fragments lie!
From the lute's half-ruptured strings, oh, strange to hear the old music sigh!
Oh, strange where the bounteous lamp once beamed, its enfeebled flame to scan!
In place of the white-browed god, oh, strange to behold but the earthly man!

And yet is perfection always rich in the rarer, the subtler charms?
Would the Venus of Melos lure the same were she reëndowed with arms?
Has the speckless pearl a delight to match the pearl that must always bear
Its pathos of one little birth-mark flaw to remind us it still is fair?

So now, while I feel thee fallible thus, I find (as 't were fate's choice boon!)
That reverence had keyed my love too high, and that sympathy sets it in tune.
Nay, the fault I have loathed for the stain it stamps on a purity such as thine,
Makes thee dearer still to my human heart, since it leaves thee less divine.

Edgar Fawcett.