



DUTCH GIRLHOOD.

By MRS. LECKY.



THE reader of Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* will have seen that the women of Holland, when the occasion required it, distinguished themselves no less than the men for courage and patriotism. From the earliest times of which we have a record, the Batavians, the ancestors of the present Dutch, made their women share in the struggles and responsibilities of men. As among all Teutonic races, the marriage tie was sacred with them, and the presents they offered their brides on the marriage day were "not the bracelets and golden necklaces with which the Gaul adorned his fair-haired concubine, but oxen and a bridled horse, a sword, a shield, and a spear—symbols that thenceforward she was to share his labours and to become a portion of himself."¹ Throughout Holland's long and desperate struggle for liberty and religion, the women showed themselves not unworthy of this trust. In the siege of Haarlem by the Spaniards in 1572 and 1573, Kenau Hasselaar, a widow lady of good family, at the head of three hundred women, armed with spears, muskets, and swords, shared in many of the fiercest engagements within and without the walls. When in the following year Leyden was besieged, and thousands perished from famine and pestilence, women and men vied with each other in fortitude and endurance.

In a charming country place in Guelderland, shaded by chestnut trees six centuries old, there is the portrait of a lady, an ancestress of the owner, who as a baby was fed on starch during the siege of Leyden. Notwithstanding the hardships of her babyhood, she reached a respectable old age, and her fine expressive countenance seems to typify the Dutch women of those stirring times.

At a later period when religious dissensions divided the country, when Grotius was imprisoned in the Castle of Loevestein, it was through the assistance of his wife, Maria van Reigersbergen, that he succeeded in making his perilous escape in a book box, while Elsje van Houweningen, the faithful young maid-servant who accompanied the precious charge, warded off by her native wit the suspicions of the soldiers. The wife of Oldenbarnevelt never flinched when, during that same period, her husband was beheaded; but when her son had been condemned for attempting to avenge his father's death on Prince Maurice the Stadtholder, she threw herself at the latter's feet for pardon. The prince asked why she now implored mercy for her son, when she had not done so for her husband. "Because," was the noble answer, "my husband was innocent—my son is guilty."

But it is not only for fortitude and patriotism that the women of Holland have been distinguished. They hold an honourable place in the intellectual life of their country. Anna Maria Van Schurman, who lived in the seventeenth century, the golden age of Dutch art and literature, was the most learned woman of a period which produced many remarkable women. She wrote and spoke Latin and Greek with fluency and elegance. She read the Talmud in Hebrew and the Koran in Arabic. She had a knowledge of Persian and compiled the elements of an Ethiopian grammar. She was no less versed in modern European languages. She studied various sciences—rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, astronomy, anatomy, and medicine, and especially philosophy and metaphysics. She was a poetess, a painter, and a musician. She modelled, etched, carved in wood and ivory, engraved on glass with the diamond, and excelled in calligraphy and art needlework. She was called "the Pallas of Utrecht,"

¹ Motley, i, p. 9.

“the tenth Muse,” “the marvel of her age.” Descartes, Gassendi, Bayle, Ménage, Huet, James Harrington, and many other learned men paid their homage to her, and she counted among her friends Cats, Heinsius, Saumaise, and the Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, daughter of the Winter King.

Her contemporaries, Anna and Maria Tesselschade, the charming daughters of Roemer Visser, were equally remarkable for their intellectual gifts. Less scholarly and theological, they were the ornaments of the brilliant circle which the historian Hooft gathered round him at the castle of Muiden, while Anna Maria Schurman from religious motives preferred a retired life.

Elisabeth Bekker, Agatha Deken, Petronella Moens, are names well known in Dutch literature, and in more recent times Madame Bosboom-Toussaint has delighted her generation with historical novels that are worthy to rank with those of Walter Scott and Van Lennep.

With such a heritage the Dutch girl starts in life, and she treasures it as a precious possession. She may be described as simple, genuine and unaffected, with native truthfulness and common sense, and strong domestic tastes and affections. From her Teuton origin she derives no doubt the tendency to be somewhat speculative and introspective, a tendency which is strengthened by her Calvinistic creed; while English sympathies are cultivated by an education which very often follows English lines. Her *tournure d'esprit* is frequently French from her early acquaintance with French authors. The education of girls in the upper classes is very cosmopolitan; from the fact of Holland being a small country and Dutch not being spoken out of Holland, foreign languages hold a

much more important place in education and in life than in England, and they are sometimes even studied at the expense of Dutch itself. Girls from their earliest childhood often have French, Swiss, or English nursery governesses, and they unconsciously learn to speak and write French and English as easily as they do Dutch. At a later period they frequently have finishing governesses, either French, English, or German, with the addition of masters, or sometimes they are sent for a year or two to a boarding school abroad. French is often spoken in the family circle, and it is very common to find sisters or friends writing to each other in English. As German, from a certain similarity with Dutch, is in some respects more easily acquired, less stress is laid in education on its conversational use, but the study of it is not neglected, and Goethe and Schiller are friends from early youth; in fact, a well educated Dutch young lady is equally at home in a French, English, or German *salon*, and in some cases it might scarcely be detected that she was a foreigner.

There are good boarding schools in Holland itself where girls of the upper classes are sometimes sent, but the best organized instruction is given at the *Hoogere Burgerscholen voor Meisjes*, day schools, which are equivalent to the girls' High Schools in England. The intermediate education of girls in Holland has not been regulated by



H.R.H. PRINCESS WILHELMINA OF THE NETHERLANDS.

law like that of the boys, because at the time the Bill on intermediate education was passed, in 1863, the want of such schools for girls had not yet been sufficiently recognized. By degrees, however, it became more and more apparent that neither the primary schools, though their programme had been considerably extended, nor the private day and boarding schools, could supply that thorough education which it was desirable that girls should receive; and in 1867 the town of Haarlem set the example in founding the first girls High School. This was speedily followed by other towns, so that at present there are twelve of these schools—at Arnhem, the Hague, Rotterdam, Leyden, Dordrecht, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Utrecht, Leeuwarden, Deventer, and Groningen. There are two at Amsterdam, one of which is a voluntary school. The other schools were erected by the *Communes*, and at first some of them were subsidized by the State, but the orthodox party, who have always been strongly opposed to unsectarian education, voted in the second Chamber for the withdrawal of the grants, and gained their point. This party is now in power and, having revised the law on primary education, no doubt intermediate education will have its turn in the course of time. Meanwhile these schools are very successful,¹ and the instruction given there is of the best kind. As no one is allowed to teach any subject in a Dutch school without having passed an examination in it, and as the requirements for intermediate education are very high, there is every guarantee that the teaching is thorough. The curriculum of study extends over five years, except at the schools at Amsterdam and Deventer, where there is a three years' course, corresponding with that of the three highest classes in the other schools. The instruction given at the primary schools leads up to that of the high schools—where girls are not admitted till they are twelve years old—enabling them to pass the entrance examination, but of course many girls go to the high schools, especially the better class of girls, who have never been to a primary school. The programme of study is with small variations the same in all the schools. The object is not so much to develop a girl's intelligence in the abstract as to give her that knowledge which will be useful to her in after life. The subjects taught are the Dutch, French, German and English languages and their literatures; history, geography, mathematics, botany and zoology, physics and chemistry, drawing and æsthetics including the history of the fine arts, needlework and gymnastics. Singing and book-keeping are taught at some of the schools, and so are the principles of hygiene and political economy. Instrumental music is not taught. The girls who have a taste for it learn to play at home. For the others it is considered mere waste of time, since bad music gives pleasure to no one. At the end of each school year the girls are examined before passing into a higher form, and at the end of the five years' course a diploma is given. This diploma confers no right to teach, but with a little additional study the pupil who might wish to become a teacher could easily qualify herself to pass the examination for primary instruction.

Latin is not taught to girls, and this is all the more striking because in the seventeenth century the knowledge of it was not only essential to a good education, but it was the language frequently spoken in the families of clergymen and professors. In some Dutch towns even the maid-servants sang Latin songs. The reason for excluding Latin from the girls' education is that Dutch girls have already four languages to learn, and that the time required to master Latin cannot be spared from other subjects which are considered more necessary and useful to a woman, while a smattering of Latin is believed to be of no use to her. There is a great fear of girls over-working themselves, because they seem to be always more eager to learn than boys, and the above-mentioned programme is already a very comprehensive one. If the parents of a girl wish her to have a classical education there is no reason why she should not go to the boys' gymnasium. This happens in a few cases, and offers no difficulty, though of course it is not thought desirable as a rule that girls should go to boys' schools.²

The teachers at the High Schools are mostly women, and the number of capable mistresses is on the increase, but there are a few male teachers, sometimes the same who teach at the boys' schools in the same town. Without making an invidious distinction I will select the school at the Hague as the representative of them all. The

¹ Their drawback is that they are very expensive. The fees are low, the salaries high, and the number of pupils is limited.

² As exemptions are allowed at the high schools, it seems a pity that the study of Latin should at least not be optional.

building is a large and handsome one, with an inner court, and with spacious, lofty and well-ventilated class-rooms, admirably adapted to their various uses. It is a pretty sight to see the many bright, good-looking and well-dressed girls, listening attentively to the teacher's demonstrations. The room specially devoted to zoology and botany is fitted up on one side with presses, containing a small natural history collection; on the other side the wall is hung with drawings of plants. Zoology is taught in winter, botany in summer. The mistress, who teaches both, has made an arrangement with the Director of the Botanical Garden at Leyden to send her regularly specimens of plants, and sometimes the girls bring the plants themselves. There is a beautiful laboratory for chemistry and physics, which are not begun till the third year. Drawing and the history of the fine arts are taught by the same mistress in a room where plaster casts and drawings serve both as models and illustrations. At the end of the year there is an exhibition of drawings and needlework. Needlework is thoroughly taught in all its branches for two hours a week, commencing with plain sewing and knitting in the first form, and ending in the fifth with cutting out and art needlework. Dutch girls of all classes are proficient in needlework, and in the remotest fishermen's villages the neatness of the quaint and often elaborate costume, of the linen on the bed and in the press is faultless. To the Dutch mind cleanliness, order, and neatness are the first conditions of prosperity and civilization, and Dutch cottages show that this does not exclude the picturesque. Special sewing schools are scattered all over the country, and have, in many instances, been founded by rich and charitable ladies. In the well-to-do class girls frequently meet one evening or afternoon in the week to make clothes for the poor, while one of them reads aloud to the others.

To return to the High School. One room in the school is fitted up for gymnastics, a specially important branch in Dutch education, since outdoor exercise, in the form of riding and various games, is not nearly as common as in England. There does not exist in Holland the sharp contrast between riches and poverty. There is less poverty than in England, but fortunes are also more limited, and it is only in few cases that parents can afford to give riding horses to their children. Lawn tennis has, however, of late years become very popular, and is played with great zest both in the country and in the towns.

The prejudice which once existed among the upper classes against day schools, has in a great measure, vanished, and in the commercial and provincial towns girls, without distinction, have begun to attend the High Schools. At the Hague the school is chiefly recruited from the professional and middle classes, and it is a matter of regret that in fashionable society the old prejudice still lingers. It is evident that home instruction cannot give a girl the same advantages, for it is impossible at home to have a certificated master or mistress for every branch of education, or to have the appliances required for the teaching of the various sciences. Hence the girls of the aristocracy are often less well-educated—as far as the instruction goes—than those of the upper middle class. But of course the instruction received out of the house is only part of a girl's education. The training of the moral faculties, without which all book learning is idle, must in every country be chiefly given at home. The Dutch mothers bestow a great deal of care upon their children's education both in the nursery and the schoolroom, and often give up all general society in order to spend their evenings at home with them. They enter into all their girls' interests—they carefully watch over what their girls may read, remembering how deep and ineradicable early impressions are.

... Le cœur de l'homme est un vase profond
Lorsque la première eau qu'on y verse est impure.
La mer y passerait sans laver la souillure,
Car l'abîme est immense et la tache est au fond !

In this way girls frequently become their mothers' intimate friends, and from such intercourse the moral side of their nature is more developed than it could be by any amount of class teaching. The warm friendships too, formed in early youth, and transmitted almost like a heritage from parents to children, in Holland, are an education in themselves. How wholesome is the mutual chaff! How profitable the lessons shared, the books read and discussed, the lectures attended together!

One of the objections made to the High Schools is that religious instruction is not

given, but ample provision is made for this out of school. Besides the religious teaching received at home, it is the custom for children of all classes in Holland to go from an early age for an hour a week to a clergyman to be instructed in Bible History and the Catechism. Confirmation usually takes place at eighteen, and during the last year a good deal of time is devoted to preparing for the examination which precedes it, and which is called the Confession of Faith. The clergyman examines in Bible History, Doctrine, and Church History at his own house or in the vestry in the presence of an elder of the church, and on the following Sunday the new members are publicly confirmed in the church and take the Communion. The Bible-classes are often continued after Confirmation, there being special classes for members of the Church. The zeal with which religious instruction is gratuitously given for years by men of small means, among whom the standard of learning is very high, and who forsake all social pleasures to devote themselves to their calling, is above all praise. The result is that religious knowledge is widely spread through the community, that the churches are well filled with people of all classes, and that the level of preaching is very high. To the illiterate who have no time to read in the week, the artisan in the town, or the peasant in the country, the Sunday sermon is the one spiritual and intellectual treat of the week, and they would look upon it as a grievance if it were to last much less than an hour!¹

Confirmation is a solemn event in a girl's life, marking, as it does in Holland, the transition from girlhood into womanhood, the close of school-room life, and the entrance into a new world in which she henceforth becomes a responsible person. She must now make her own life. For most girls the path is traced. They go into society, they assist their mothers in the management of the household. Some continue their studies, take up a fresh language, such as Italian, or if they have a special talent for music or painting, now devote more time to it. Those who from principle or taste do not care for balls and parties undertake charitable work, Sunday school teaching, visiting the poor, or when they are old enough, hospital nursing. A young lady is now at the head of the Deaconesses' house at the Hague. Another lady is superintendent of a hospital at Groningen. A third has the direction of the children's hospital at Amsterdam.

But this already requires a certain amount of experience, and the younger girls of course remain under their parents' wings. The position of girls in Holland and in England is very much the same. They have the same liberties, and the same restraints. They do not walk alone in the towns, or travel or go into society alone, but as in Dutch society people all know each other, and many have known each other always, the intercourse is very free and unconventional. The girls are not in a hurry to marry. They seldom marry except from love, and marriages as a rule are happy. As fortunes and titles are equally shared by all the children of the family, there is no rush after an elder son. Holland has changed less within the last centuries than most countries, and what a French writer says of the Dutch women of the seventeenth century is still true. Speaking of the simplicity and frugality of Dutch habits in those days, he says,

"A cette école, la fidélité conjugale s'était entretenue et épargnait le spectacle des désordres domestiques si fréquents ailleurs . . . L'indépendance n'était laissée aux jeunes filles que pour rechercher le mariage, et une fois mariées, satisfaites de l'autorité qui leur était laissée dans leurs maisons, elles ne connaissaient plus d'autres inclinations que les affections domestiques. . . . Les habitudes de vie sédentaire entretenaient, comme un culte domestique, les sentiments de famille. Dans l'un des tableaux du temps, deux femmes sont assises ; la vieille mère écoute, la plus jeune lit la Bible ; entre elles l'enfant dort dans le berceau. Le père est absent, mais voici sa place qui est réservée au foyer, et c'est avec confiance que son retour est attendu. Il semble qu'on dise, en pénétrant du regard entre ces murs ornés sans faste, éclairés par l'âtre qui flamboie : 'Le bonheur est là.'"²

Many questions that agitate women in England have no place in Dutch life. If you ask a Dutch woman whether she has any grievances, she will look at you in bewilderment at first, and the next moment burst out laughing. There is no demand

¹ The late Queen of Holland said to a clergyman for whom she had a great regard, that if he would but shorten his sermons she would like oftener to come and hear him. He replied that he was very sorry, but that his congregation would not allow him.

² Lefèvre Pontalis, Jean de Witt, i. p. 20, 22.

for the suffrage, there is no canvassing at elections, and Dutch women are in no way actively mixed in political life. The University career is open to them. No law prevents their obtaining degrees, but not above half a dozen—if as many—avail themselves of the opportunity. Though the men do not put any obstacles in the way of the higher education of girls, they do not encourage it, but rather deprecate learning in a woman. There is one female Doctor of Medicine—at Amsterdam. A woman is *Conservator* of the Natural History Collection at Utrecht, and another has been appointed in the same capacity at Haarlem. A woman on the platform is a *rara avis*. The Dutch dislike their women taking part in public affairs, and the women themselves have an innate shrinking from publicity and sensation. They are not as ambitious, and do not take as high a flight as the women in England, partly because the struggle for existence is less severe, and partly because there is not the same stimulus as in a big country. Dutch ladies, married or single, sit on councils of orphanages as they did in the days of Frans Hals, of industrial schools, and of various other useful and charitable institutions such as the Red Cross, which has lately started a nursing institute at The Hague. A very cultivated lady who is an excellent Spanish scholar, is the soul of the Dutch association for Evangelising Spain. But the hearth is still the Dutch woman's sanctuary, and she is loth to leave the sacred fire to take care of itself. To the Dutch the word home is more than a name. They seldom live abroad if they can help it. Those who have a country house spend their summers in the country, and their winters in the town, for the season is in the winter and it is over at Easter. Others go, perhaps, for a month or two in the summer to be braced in the Swiss mountains, but they are sedentary for the greater part of the year. Like the mother who is specially fond of the child that has given her a great deal of trouble, they love their country all the more because they have had to reclaim it from the sea, and have had to fight so hard for its independence. In the absence of mountains they love their ever shifting cloud scenery, the wide horizons with radiant sunsets, the undulating tracts of purple heather, the meadows with grazing cattle where the stork ranges undisturbed. They love their snow-white buckwheat fields, their woods of tall beeches, the large expanses of water where everything is reflected, and that subdued mellow atmosphere which gives so much expression to the simplest landscape, and which has inspired one of the greatest schools of painting in the world.

Among those of an older generation there is always a tendency to praise the good old times at the expense of the present, and to believe that things were better in their day. Those who now look back on their own girlhood, think that they were both less spoiled and less independent than the present generation. They had more respect for authority and still believed their elders knew better than themselves. They had greater enthusiasm, more illusions and perhaps higher aspirations and ideals. The critical spirit of the age had not damped their hero-worship. They had a craving for knowledge, but in spite of all their parents could do, female education in those days was not organised as it is now, and the girls of the present day have privileges which they had not. Are the girls of to-day more developed, not only intellectually, but in those qualities of the mind and heart which give life its colour, its charm and its usefulness?

Dutch girlhood in its most attractive form is at present typified in the Princess Wilhelmina the heiress to the Dutch throne. On the 31st August she completed her ninth year, and every year endears her more to the Dutch people. Her birthday, Princess's Day, as it is called, is a day of rejoicing all over the country. Flags are displayed, orange ribbons or flowers are worn, and there are popular games and illuminations, but it is the happiest day of all for the children who are specially thought of and treated, for is not their Princess one of them? It has been a great sorrow to the Dutch nation to see the male heirs of their beloved House of Orange one by one find an untimely grave. But the women of that great house have shown no less remarkable qualities than the men ever since the days of Juliana Van Stolberg, the pious mother of William the Silent, and of a whole race of heroes. With their hopes fixed on their young Princess, the Dutch people look with confidence to the future.