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A
T O U R
THROUGH
BELGIUM, HOLLAND,
ALONG
THE RHINE,
AND THROUGH
THE NORTH OF FRANCE,
IN THE SUMMER OF 1816.

IN WHICH IS GIVEN AN ACCOUNT
OF THE CIVIL AND ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY, AND
OF THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

OF THE
Kingdom of the Netherlands;

WITH REMARKS ON
THE FINE ARTS, COMMERCE, AND MANUFACTURES.

By JAMES MITCHELL, M.A.

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LETTER XV.

MY DEAR SIR,

WHEN we hear people speak of the Dutch, it is generally to represent them as a dull, heavy, insipid people, solely occupied with the idea of gaining money, and incapable of social enjoyments. The picture is greatly overcharged in general. The Dutch are obliged to employ much of their time in business. They smoke, and think a great deal, and have little time during the day for any thing else. However, a man is born substantially the same in Holland, as in other countries; and when the hours of business are over, he enters into amusement with as keen a relish.

Winter, when the canals are frozen over, and skating and sledge-racing go on, is the time to see a Dutch carnival. But even in summer, every great town has its annual kermess, as well as in Belgium. At all times, the great and never-failing amuse-

ments of every age and country, eating, drinking, and the intercourse of society, go on in Holland. The Dutch enjoy a public promenade and looking at one another, as well as other people. If the wetness of most of the provinces prevent hunting, there is plenty of fishing on the canals and lakes, and shooting of snipes and ducks. In some of the towns there are many houses, where they may sit in their drawing-room, and angle at their pleasure. Almost every house in all the towns, has got two mirrors fixed outside at the windows, where the people who sit in the inside, may see every thing going on in the streets. Their theatres are well supported. The pipe and bottle, either in the little summer-house, where they look at the canal, or by the fire in winter, is a perpetual and never-failing amusement. Cards, dice, draughts, chess, backgammon, are all in use. Riding into the country on horse-back, or in a chaise, and sailing in a boat, afford healthful amusement. In the suburbs on Sundays and holidays, are tea-gardens, with the entertainments of music, dancing, swinging, skittles, and smoking.

There are abundance of coffee-houses, well attended of an evening, where they read the newspapers, smoke, drink beer, gin, rum, or wine, as suits every man's taste or circumstances. Billiards are very common in the coffee-houses. Not unfrequently there are musical performers who sing and play for such a trifle as the individuals choose to give to a handsome woman who goes round to collect. The music and dancing of the Spiel-houses are much resorted to, and the Musico's of a Sunday evening. Many of these amusements will not suit every man's taste, either in Holland or elsewhere, and some of them, in a moral point of view, are objectionable. I state them neither to praise nor to condemn, but only to shew, that Dutchmen can contrive recreation for themselves, and do indulge themselves in it, as well as nations that are thought to be more gay.

At Leyden and such inland towns, where a considerable number of people reside not engaged in business, may be seen much of what the severest ought to approve of, as real innocent enjoyment. There was one amusement I saw there, which we have not

got in England, which affords a most agreeable gentle exercise, and is particularly adapted for a cold moist climate, which often denies enjoyments out of doors. It is called *Kolven*, and I shall here describe it, as I saw it performed at a place of public entertainment, about a mile and a half without the Haarlem gate of Leyden, near to the country-house where the great Boerhaave used to reside.

There was a large room about seventy feet long, and upwards of twenty broad. A walk along the side was partitioned off with boards rising three feet high, and the rest of the room was laid with a whitish clay, and sand made very hard and smooth. About nine feet from each end of the room, in the exact middle, was a small pillar, the lower part of which was of brass. There were two stuffed balls, rather hard, of the size of twelve pound cannon balls, and clubs, the lower parts of which were brass. Two people play. The first commences at one end of the room, and drives his ball towards the pillar, at the other; the second player, commencing at the same place, does the same to his ball. He of the two, whose

ball has rolled nearest the pillar, has now the first blow. They strike their balls alternately, and the object is to make the ball first roll against one pillar, and then they drive it to the other end of the room, to try to make it strike the other pillar. He whose ball first does so, gains the first notch. The principle and mode of playing bears a resemblance to the Scotch game of Golf. The exercise is gentle, and the game seems easy, but it requires considerable dexterity. The landlord charges nothing for the room, as the parties usually play for a bottle of wine, and it affords great entertainment to the lookers on, who will also be doing something for the good of the house.

The popular amusements of a certain other country, in fighting and tormenting various animals, and fighting in pitched battles amongst themselves, are not practised by the mob in Holland. The old amusement of *snick-en-see*, or fighting with knives, is got completely out of use. The police are so strict, it is no longer practicable as an amusement. The Dutch boors, when provoked, will, in their passion, use

their knives. The English mode of the lower orders settling their disputes by boxing is much better, as very rarely any serious mischief is done, and both parties get generally well punished, as they richly deserve. The Dutch lower orders are a boorish, rough set, but they are fond of money, and a stranger may easily command any service he pleases.

Rough sensual amusements are of course their delight, but I do not know that they are much worse than the lower orders elsewhere. But it is time to leave this subject, and to go on with matters of more importance.

“ Sed tamen amoto quæramus seria ludo.”

At Leyden we see that body of water, for which the learned of that city and of Utrecht, preserve the classic appellation of the Rhine. It formerly lost itself in the sand at Catwyck, a little below Leyden, and filtrating through the soil, made a marsh of the surrounding lands. It was therefore resolved to make a proper channel or canal for this river, and to construct such sluices as would prevent the tide when it rose, from

forcing the water of the sea and river back upon the country. These every traveller ought to go to see. The canal is twenty feet broad, and the water passes through a triple row of sluices. That which is next the sea is made very solid, to resist the fury of the waves. It slopes at an angle of 40°, and the billows break against it. At high tide the sea keeps the sluice shut, but when the flood has gone out, the weight of the water of the river throws the sluice open, and it rushes out into the sea. The plan has fully answered every expectation.

I felt truly sorry on leaving Leyden, as I had found the people with whom I had occasion to mix, so very agreeable.

Betwixt that town and Haarlem, the canal runs through a fine grass country as before. It is a long distance, and the treckschuyt, having stopped about half way for a few minutes, I inquired the cause, and found it was for the master to go into the public house, and get fresh fuel in the fire-pan for the pipes. Not to have a convenience for lighting pipes and segars, would be an unpardonable offence. In most tobacconists' shops, (and almost every sixth

house has written up "*tobac en snuf te koop,*") there is a fire-pan on the shop counter, and matches ready to be used. It is so in all coffee houses, and public houses of every sort. Often enough you meet with the fire-pan on the table in private houses, and the lower orders still put the spitting dish on the table also. On calling on a clergyman at Amsterdam, a native of our own country, at about one o'clock, I found he had been smoking ever since breakfast. In Rome, they say, you must do as the people of Rome do. I know you will object to this in all matters of conscience, but in trivial matters you will not forbid it. Smoking is indeed no trivial matter in Holland, and to gain the good opinion of my Dutch friends, I smoked segars as much as I could. I verily believe there is good reason for the print, in which a young Dutchman is exhibited in bed on his marriage night, his bride by his side, his large pipe in his mouth with the lid fastened on, and the glass of Geneva on the shelf ready at hand.

The great boast of Haarlem is the invention of printing, which they claim on be-

half of their townsman Laurens Coster, about 1430. His statue is seen in the great square near the principal church. It rivals that of Erasmus at Rotterdam. I was much gratified in viewing the memorial of a man, whose invention is the greatest that ever blessed mankind.

The celebrated organ is in the great church, and most strangers are anxious to hear it. I should have liked it very well, but as the Dutchman demanded 10 guilders for playing, I suddenly embraced the musical creed of our learned and worthy Lord Chancellor, and preserved my money. I was fortified in this act of prudence, by knowing that I should have an opportunity of hearing, in the new church of Amsterdam, the organ there, which though of later erection, and therefore of less extended fame, is larger in size, and by many reckoned to be every way superior.

When about to enter the treckschuyt, the boatman made me at last comprehend by signs, that the whole ruif was taken. It was by an English gentleman and his wife. I had accordingly to go into the great cabin, where were about thirty people. There

was smoking enough, but not overmuch conversation. It was a fortunate circumstance for me, as my person became known to several, who afterwards in Amsterdam, more than once, when they saw I had lost my way, or was in want of a guide, &c. spoke to me, and did what was in their power to assist me. Half way to Amsterdam, we left the treckschuyt to walk to another, across the narrow isthmus that separates the sea of Haarlem from the gulf of Y. The waves were running high like the ocean. As we approached the great capital of Holland, the wind-mills near it seemed innumerable. I desired the porter to take my portmanteau to the "*Wapen van Amsterdam*,"* but he and two others assured me it was quite full, for they had been there but an hour before, and no

* "*Wapen van Amsterdam*," signifies arms of Amsterdam. This is one instance of many, in which the Dutch nearly resembles the English. I could almost always know what was sold in a shop, by the words over the door. Persons who desire information on this subject, I beg to refer to Sewel's Key to the Dutch Language, edited and improved by Mr. Low, one of the ministers of the Scotch church of Amsterdam.

chamber was to be had. I insisted on his going to it, and found as I expected I should, his assertion was only a *ruse de guerre*, to take me to an hotel, which probably rewarded such services.

In the hotel, I found many of our countrymen. Most of them were men of business. The immense forest of masts in the harbour, the number of barges moving about on the canals, the hundreds of windmills in every direction at work on the walls and in the suburbs, demonstrated, in spite of the complaints you heard, that business was going on. I shall here conclude this letter and my next shall be devoted to the important subject of Ecclesiastical polity, and religious sects in Holland.

I am,

&c. &c.