

Brown John Irwin

The Further Adventures of O'Neill in Holland



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Brown J. Irwin John Irwin The Further Adventures of O'Neill in Holland

CHAPTER I WHERE DID O'NEILL'S DUTCH COME FROM?

We had all heard something of Jack O'Neill's adventures in Holland; and the members of our informal little club in Trinity College Dublin were positively thirsting for fresh details. There must be much more to tell, we felt sure: and we had a multitude of questions to ask.

Now the odd thing about O'Neill was that he didn't like to be interrogated; he preferred to tell his story straight through in his own way. He had evidently studied hard at the Dutch language, but without the least regard for system: and it was clear that he had been by no means careful in the choice of text books. Indeed, he seemed to be rather sensitive on this point, no doubt regretting that, in the ardour of his early enthusiasm, he had just taken the first grammar and exercise-book he could lay his hands upon, without consulting anybody. It was that curious plan of doing everything by himself that doubtless led him into the initial mistake, that of trying to get any sense out of "Boyton and Brandnetel".

A GREAT WORK

Apparently he had kept that "literary find" by him for reference, and for digging stray idioms and rules out of, while he added more modern volumes to his working stock. This would account for his glibness in rattling off out-of-the-way phrases, and for that rich bizarre flavour which his simplest Dutch utterance undoubtedly had.

But we didn't know the worst.

Intentionally vague though he was in talking about his authorities, we ran him to earth (so to speak) at last in the matter of "Boyton and Brandnetel"; and had a happy evening.

That book was all O'Neill told us, and more. Printed on paper that seemed a cross between canvas and blot-sheet, it bore the date 1805. It was very Frenchified, and the English puzzled us extremely. Here is the Preface – or a part of it.

The following WORK was, originally, compiled by William Boyton. After passing five Editions, a Sixth appeared partly enlarged, and partly improved, by Jac. Brandnetel. This last Edition was published, at the Hague, in the Year, 1751.

THE CIVILIZED LADY

The several particles, of Speech, are arranged by the usual Order; and Declare with precision; every rule being followed, with practical exercise. This Mode, of teaching, being already appreciated; it will not be deemed Essential; nor do we, point out, the utility of it. As to Syntax; it is fully treated: whilst, last not least, cares have been exercised, to unite ease with simplicity, accuracy with idiom, and animate the Learner. It aims at the pupil of High-Life, and to acquire the Polish of the civilized Lady.

THE HAGUE, 1805.

This brilliant introduction raised our expectations to fever heat. We had never encountered such an army of commas before; and as for the English – !

Anything, evidently, might be met with inside the covers of William Boyton's 'Work'.

BOYTON ANIMATES THE LEARNER

The best of it, of course, was its extraordinary politeness. Every other question was prefixed with "Verschoon my", and went on something like this: "Zoudt gij zoo goed willen zijn mij toe te staan...". Then there were some plain and unornamental phrases such as "Men weet nooit hoe een koe eenen haas vangt". – This was labelled 'proverbial expression', and was translated, happily enough, by "The unexpected often occurs."

"Ik heb er het land aan je" was rendered mysteriously: "I have an objection", "I cannot agree".

That was puzzling enough, and delightfully vague! But for all that found the phrase doubly underlined by O'Neill and marked by him as 'useful for general conversation'. —

CHAPTER II

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMPENDIOUS GUIDE TO THE DUTCH LANGUAGE

There was something good on every page, as might be expected from the very preface. And, withal, there was a steady process of boasting about its own merits that was most refreshing in the barren realm of grammar.

With mock modesty it dubbed itself on the title page, “The Compendious Guide,” and followed this up with another title “*Korte Wegwijzer tot de nederduitsche taal.*” The whole compilation was evidently the work of several generations of literary gentlemen, who aimed at the ‘Polish of the Civilized Lady’ in quite different ways, but whose united efforts certainly made ‘The Work’ remarkably incoherent.

POLITE DIALOGUES

We all quizzed O'Neill unmercifully about the Civilized Lady, and read some dialogues with immense satisfaction. So uproarious, indeed, did the fun become at last, that our neighbours on the stair came trooping in. Three of them were Cape-students, hard-working medicals, whom we never heard speaking Dutch, though we were well aware they must have known it. Like the others, they insisted on a full explanation of the tumult, and we showed them “Boyton”. They didn't mind so much about the Civilized Lady; but when they turned to the Polite Dialogues at the end, a kind of shudder seemed to pass through them, as if they had got an electric shock – till finally they dropped the book and screamed with delight.

“Why! that's nothing so very odd”, said O'Neill, looking hurt. “I have often used lots of those phrases.” Picking up the dishevelled leaves from the floor, he ran his eye down a page or two and said: “Yes, of course. These things are all right: A bit stiff and bookish, perhaps; but correct, quite correct. You fellows needn't be so excited over nothing.”

“Read us some!” clamoured the men from the Cape. “Read us some of the dialogues you imitated. Go on! Read!”

HOW TO BUY A CASTOR

“Oh!” said O'Neill, “almost any one of these conversations about common things is good enough. Here, for instance.” And he took the book in his hand and walked about the room, giving us first the English – then the Dutch.

“TOUCHING BUYING AND SELLING.	WEGENS KOOPEN EN VERKOOPEN.
Have you any fine hats?	Hebt gij mooie hoeden?
This is one of the finest in the Country.	Daar is een van de fraaiste in 't land.
Yes, Sir; this is a dreadfully nice one.	Ja, hoedemaker; deze tenminste is ijselijk mooi
Just come close to the fire, Sir; and examine that hat narrowly.	Eilieve! kruip bij het vuur, mijnheer; en bezie dien hoed eens wel.”

“That conversation,” said the Professor, “must have been of immense help to you now in modern Holland?”

“Hm” – replied Jack doubtfully.

“O’Neill,” said I; “Stop! You’re making that out of your head. That stuff’s never in any book.”

NOT MURDERED?

“Well,” was the hasty reply; “I see this isn’t so good as some parts – not so practical, perhaps; but that’s all here. Wait a bit... Now listen. Here’s something better. Hush!”

“BETWEEN TWO ENGLISH GENTLEMEN.	TUSSCHEN TWEE ENGELSCH HEEREN.
My dear Friend, I am extremely happy to see you.	Waarde Vriend! ik ben ten uiterste verheugd u te zien (bezichtigen, of a house).
It has been reported for a certainty that you were taken by the Turks and murdered halfway between Leghorn and Civita Vecchia.	Men heeft voor de waarheid verteld (als eene zekerheid verhaald) dat gij van de Turken genomen waart en vermoord halfwege tusschen Livorno en Civita Vecchia.
But these atrocities did not befall me!	Maar deze gruwelen zijn mij niet gebeurd!
You are convinced it is not true?	Gij zijt overtuigd dat zulks onwaar is?
I am.	Gewisselijk.
I rejoice that you are restored.	Ik verheug mij dat gij heelemaal hersteld zijt geweest (of a building: geheel en al gerestaureerd geworden).”

GIJ ZIJT GERESTAUREERD

There was a noise in the room at this, but O’Neill went on boldly to finish the Dialogue.

“Are you speaking in jest?”	Gekt gij ermede?
I do not jest.	Ik gek er niet mede.”

“That’s enough – quite enough – for the present”, said the Cape men. “We’ll borrow the Wegwijzer from you, and bring it back safe.

“No, there’s no fear we’ll mislay it, or harm it. Much too valuable for that. But – you’ll excuse us; we can hardly believe you’ve got that actually in print. And we’re curious to know what kind of rules those learned grammarians give. You’ll lend us this mine of wisdom for a few days, won’t you? Thank you, so much.

THE ENGERT

“And by the way, here are some of your own notes. What’s this about *engert*?”

“Oh”, said O’Neill; “that’s a reminder about a neat phrase I picked up from my landlady. Did I never tell you?

“Well. When my cousin came over, you know, on his way to Germany, he stayed with me a couple of days. He’s very athletic – a fine wiry, muscular young fellow, lithe as a willow, as you are aware. So I wasn’t astonished at overhearing the landlady and a crony of hers discussing him. They used a rumble of unintelligible words about Terence, as he passed the two of them on the stairs with the slightest of nods, and mounted three steps at a time, whistling as he went. There was no mistake about their referring to him; and amid the chaos of sounds I caught the words *eng* and *engert*.

Curious to know how Terence’s agility, or perhaps his swarthy complexion, had affected them, I turned up these terms of admiration in my dictionary; and found *eng*, ‘thin’, ‘narrow’. The longer word wasn’t there. But on the whole it seemed safe to conclude from *eng* meaning ‘narrow’, that *engert* would work out something like “fine strapping fellow and in excellent training”. If that

was it, my landlady had hit the nail on the head. For Terence had just been carrying all before him at the last Trinity sports.

Her admiring criticism I duly entered in my notes and kept for use.

Some days after Terence had left, the landlady was praising her son's cleverness to me; and to please her I just said that he was a wonderful boy. 'Mirakel van een jongen' was the expression I employed; and I was quite proud of it. But she didn't seem appreciative of my effort, so I fell back on her own idiom. Fortunately the lad was quite slender, and I could dwell with satisfaction on the suitability of my new word.

"Hij is zoo eng", I said. "Ja juffrouw hij is een engert! – een echte engert!!"

She received my encomium on her boy with speechless indignation, and rose and left the room. You can't be too careful", added O'Neill thoughtfully.

BETAALD ZETTEN

"Jack," said one of the students. "I prefer your own notes even to Boyton. Haven't you some more? Ah, what's this?" he enquired, turning to some pencillings inside the back. "*Dat zou je wel willen*", he read aloud, "signification doubtful!"

"And here's one marked '*commercial*': 'We'll consider the transaction as settled': Dutch apparently something like, '*Dat zal ik u betaald zetten*'. Here's another labelled, '*not deftig, but very popular*': '*Ben je niet goed snik?*' Translation *seems* to be: 'you're not quite able to follow my meaning.'

"Ah! No more? That's a pity."

"Oh I have plenty more," interposed O'Neill; "but not here. And you want to read this Boyton volume."

GEKT GIJ ER MEDE?

"Let me finish the 'Dialogue between English gentlemen', and you may have The Work.

The first Englishman says: "Ik bid U, mijnheer; laat mij geene onheusheid begaan."

Then the other, the man who had been so disappointed that his friend wasn't murdered, answers politely: "Ik weet zeer wel welke **eerbied** ik U schuldig ben."

Up to this moment the two acquaintances seemed to have got on fairly well together in spite of some difficulties. Why two Englishmen when they met in Paris about the year of grace 1805 should plunge into a complimentary dialogue in Dutch, is not very clear. But that there was a lurking feeling of antagonism in the **gossip's** mind towards his compatriot, seems to be shown by the remark that he now makes to wind up the dialogue.

DUIZENDMAAL VERSCHOONING, MEJUFFROUW!

"*Mejuffrouw (!) ik bid U duizendmaal om verschooning, indien ik heden eenige onheusheid omtrent U bega.*"

That was final. The returned traveller hasn't a word for himself, after he is called 'mejuffrouw.'

"Mind you, gentlemen," continued O'Neill, holding Boyton aloft like a trophy, "if I **did** try to stop too prolonged conversations in that gracefully irrelevant fashion, I had caught the trick of it from Brandnetel himself. You have only to go on heaping civilities on your wearisome talker's head, but take care to call him, just once, Mejuffrouw, and he'll have to go. It's a neat way of saying Good-bye. I never found the method to fail.

Some day I'll tell you how supremely effective I found that unexpected little turn.
Why it's nearly as good as *Zanik nouw niet*."

CHAPTER III

HOW O'NEILL LEARNED TO PRONOUNCE

"I never could quite understand," said Bart van Dam, the big Cape giant, who had carried off Boyton the week before, "how O'Neill managed, out of such an extraordinary book, to pick up anything of the pronunciation. For, as a matter of fact, he **does** get quite close to some of the sounds; and I can nearly always guess what he is trying to say.

"When he is talking about that interesting Rotterdam street, the Boompjes, he doesn't make the first part rhyme with the English word loom, and then add **cheese**, a thing I have heard Britishers do who should have known better. And actually, I have noticed he can distinguish goed, groot, goot. That's promising.

THE GOAT THAT RAN ROUND THE ROOF

"Some of my British friends at the Cape, even after I graduated on English Literature and History, used kindly to drop Dutch words into their conversation, either to make it easy for me, or to keep up my spirits, so to speak. Oh never a talk of over five minutes, but little familiar terms like taal, zolder, maar, and so on, would begin to be showered in, here and there. One of these linguists had taken me into his own back garden, (he was very fond of animals of all kinds and we had gone out to inspect those he had) when he began to explain the new improvements on his premises.

We got into a deep discussion on the right way of draining a flat roof. "Come here", said he, at last. "Look up there, and you'll see a **goat of mine** running all round the open space!"

"Goat!" I exclaimed; "it'll fall!"

"Nonsense", he said, "not unless lightning strikes it. Firm as a rock! Now, isn't that the right sort of **goat to carry the water off?**"

He thought he had said goot in Dutch!

Well now, Jack's beyond **that**. Who had been coaching him?

A HAS A BROAD SOUND

Naturally I turned up Boyton on pronunciation the very first thing at home – and the mystery was solved! I was amazed. Boyton excels in teaching the sounds. Here is an extract or two from his **REMARKS ON THE DUTCH PRONUNCIATION.**

A	has a broader sound than in English, bal. has a broader sound than in English, bal.
AA	has a broader sound, aal. has a broader sound, aal.
AAU	sounds broad, as in graauwen, to snarl. sounds broad, as in graauwen, to snarl.
EU	is described as resembling eu in Europe. For the falsity thereof, let the word be pronounced by a Native, and the Mistake will be felt. is described as resembling eu in Europe. For the falsity thereof, let the word be pronounced by a Native, and the Mistake will be felt. is described as resembling eu in Europe. For the falsity thereof, let the word be pronounced by a Native, and the Mistake will be felt.
G	is a guttural letter difficult to an Englishman; it can only be acquired by hearing it from a Civilized Native, e.g. gierig and gijzelen. is a guttural letter difficult to an Englishman; it can only be acquired by hearing it from a Civilized Native, e.g. gierig and gijzelen. is a guttural letter difficult to an Englishman; it can only be acquired by hearing it from a Civilized Native, e.g. gierig and gijzelen.
UU	No Englishman can emit this sound. It may be well heard in vuur (fire) and in guur. Consult a Dutch Instructor. No Englishman can emit this sound. It may be well heard in vuur (fire) and in guur. Consult a Dutch Instructor.
EI	This sound is beyond the powers of the unassisted English Organs of Speech. It must first be heard from an educated Hollander.
UI	It is improper to make this identical with oy as in boy; the native pronunciation must be followed.

There you have some of the Rules! They won't lead you far wrong, in any case. Then, to crown all, for fear the diligent reader wouldn't have caught the point yet, Boyton goes back to his favourite "Doctrine of the Native." Here it is:

The Editor places the learner on his guard against receiving wrong references, and directs him to an Instructor, or Native, whose Dialect it is, for the sound peculiar to each letter.

NATIVES

Bravo, Boyton!

Three kinds of Natives he recommends the beginner to consult. He has them arranged in a sort of ascending scale —**the Civilized, the Intelligent and the Polite.**

The two former classes will help you with the pronunciation, or with Het.

From the latter you get idioms.

CHAPTER IV

AN INTERLUDE AND AN APPLICATION

“So our friend Jack had to ask always for the sounds of the words. That would be right good for him,” said Bart, “and should have made his talk intelligible.”

“Well of course it did,” said O'Neill. “They always understood the **words** I used. It was the applications I made that hampered them.

“I had great trouble with a chatty old gentleman in the tram one morning going down to Scheveningen. It was just seven – I was hurrying to get an early dip, and he seemed bent on the same errand.

Attracted by my blazer and towel he opened conversation about sea-bathing, and then proceeded to discourse on the beauties of the landscape. He seemed chilled by the poverty of my adjectives, though I worked them vigorously.

A LOFTY CANOPY OF GREEN

“Deze weg vin je zeker wel mooi?” he said at last, looking up at the arched green overhead. “Of houd U niet van de natuur?”

“Ja, zeker wel!” I hastened to assure him. “Ik houd er erg van – Het is prachtig! Net een tunnel van geboomte – van loofgroen.”

Then observing the pleasure my encomiums gave him, I ventured on something a little more lofty and poetic. My landlady had occasionally talked about a “canopy,” which, so far as I had understood her, I took to mean the vast cupola of hangings over the old-fashioned bed in my lodging. She used to say that the canopy was new and beautiful, and needed constant dusting.

I had always agreed to this, but never dreamt of hunting up a word that to all intents and purposes seemed the same as in English.

“Indrukwekkend schoon,” I added. “Wij zitten, als het ware, onder een canopey (that was my landlady's pronunciation) van bladeren.”

“Een kanapé, mijnheer?”

“Ja,” said I, “een verheven canopy, niet waar?”

Wij zeilen onder een groene canopy – verbazend – magnifique!”

BENT U EEN DICHTER?

“Hoe bedoelt U dat?” said the old gentleman more and more puzzled, and determined to find out my meaning.

“Wij zitten hier, niet waar?” I began slowly; then pointing to the roof of green over our heads, I explained: “dat alles vormt een prachtige canopy boven ons heen. Zeker wel?”

“Ik geloof het niet”, said the chatty old gentleman. “De tram lijkt ook niet op een kanapé; of meent U dat?”

“De tram niet,” I exclaimed, “maar de boomen; kijk; het gebladerte, het geboomte en de hoge dak dat ze maken – dat alles zoo schitterend groen, dat is, mijns bedunkens, niets dan een canopy, uitgehangen zoo te spreken, over ons heen, in uitgestrekte schoonheid.”

The old gentleman surely was a little dull. He said, “Ik begrijp niet goed wat u zegt. Waar is de canapé? Of bedoelt U soms een badstoel – op het strand?”

“Nee”, I answered with a deprecating smile; “Ik sprak maar poetisch. **Verheven**”, I added with a wave of my towel towards the greenery overhead.

“Hé,” said he with friendly interest, “bent U een dichter? Ik had U voor een schilder gehouden,” he explained with a glance at my blazer.

THE CLOTURE

“Ik – een dichter!” I returned modestly. “Neen; niet erg. Op een kleine schaal, misschien.” **On a small scale**, I meant to say; but I must have mangled the **sch** badly, for he didn’t catch the point, and I heard him mutter: “Een sjaal! een sjaal, EN een kanapé!!”

“Ja zeker, mijnheer,” I reasoned; “U ziet het zelf voor U – daar onder de boomen – dat IS hier een canopy – ”

“Pardon”, he interrupted, “dat is niet waar. Dat zijn gewone houten banken,” he persisted argumentatively. “En wat bedoelt U met een sjaal?”

How pertinacious the old gentleman was! He stuck to me like a leech. I couldn’t shake him off; and we were still far off the Kurhaus.

It was clearly a case for Boyton’s conversational method.

AN INTERLUDE AND AN APPLICATION

“Mejuffrouw!” I said firmly, leaning towards him, “Ik ken Uwe edelmoedigheid genoeg. Maar” – and here I added two nice little local idioms from the rich stores of my memory – “maar – U komt pas te kijken.”

That told him he wasn’t looking at the matter in true philosophic perspective.

But this I followed up, in a more authoritative way, with the assurance that I didn’t at all agree with him. “Waarempeltjes,” I whispered with elaborate distinctness, “ik heb het land aan je!”

The chatty old gentleman got off at the next halte.

CHAPTER V

THE 'COMPENDIOUS GUIDE' ON DUTCH SYNTAX

Boyton's monograph on pronunciation is his finest piece of work. He never quite reaches that level elsewhere; and, if he is destined after a hundred and fifty years to achieve a name, it had better rest on his 'Doctrine of the Native' than on his Syntax.

So van Dam assured us, when our little party met in his room the week before Christmas.

We had all been busy; but busy or not, the Cape men found time to skim over Boyton's entertaining paragraphs, as, indeed, we guessed, from the frequent guffaws and readings that reached us from time to time through the closed doors. To night we had accepted an invitation to supper, before the holidays; and we were to hear his views on O'Neill's 'Guide, Philosopher and Friend', Boyton, – in other words the *'Wegwijzer tot de nederduitsche taal'*. Long since Jack had, indeed, got other and more modern manuals of Dutch, so that he was supposed to look now with a certain contempt on his former monitor: but the "compendious guide" had laid the basis of his erudition, and he had still a sneaking regard for its honest old pages.

NO DEFINITE RULES

What we wanted, indeed, was stories from Jack himself: but we had exhausted the more dramatic of these; and to get the fine aroma of the others – there were still many others – we thought some acquaintance with the compendium's syntax was essential.

Van Dam had undertaken to put us up to any niceties he had been struck with.

The first thing he told us was that Boyton had no clear ideas of any sort, and never laid down any definite rule. This lent him a certain diffidence in regard to most points, – a diffidence which in the case of HET became positive fright. At the first mention of *de*, *het*, and an **adjective**, he gives as much encouragement as he can.

ALL NOUNS TO WHICH HET IS PREFIXED ARE NEUTER

It is not much.

An insurmountable Difficulty for the Englishman is the right use of the Particles, especially *het*. Sufficient rules cannot be given, E. g. *het mooie kind: eene sterke vrouw, een zwart schip*.

This is certain, that all Nouns, to which the Particles, *het*, *dat*, or *dit*, are added are of the Neuter Gender; on this account, the *e* final, in the Adjectives, when joined with such words, is, generally, rejected.

Even this rule admits of an exception. E. G. It is never said: *een snel vogel: de groote paard*. But it is correct to say, if the meaning admits it, *een groote man*. (also *groot*.) A native may be consulted with advantage.

When Boyton is labouring under strong emotion, the effect is always to increase the number of commas, colons, and other stops.

His agitation may also be traced in the way he harks back to any fundamental rule that he has already discussed ad nauseam.

DEN IS NOT A PURE NOMINATIVE

It is quite pathetic to note how he urges on his readers to reserve their *dezen* and *dien* and *den* for the accusative.

It is good Dutch to say: *ik zag dien braven man gisteren, I saw that honest man yesterday; but it is very bad Dutch, – whatever custom may have introduced in some places; to say– dien braven man heeft het gezegd.*

Take some gems at random.

N.B. Prepositions are that part of speech, which are so called because they are, commonly, put before the words, which are subsequent to them, as *onder* and *ondanks*.

N.B. Most Adverbs may be distinguished from adjectives by this rule: If a substantive is added after them, they will make **nonsense**; whereas, being joined to an Adjective or a Verb, they will make good sense.

“What I admire most,” said van Dam handing back *The Work* to O'Neill, “is the elasticity of the rules. He says, for instance, that you can render **I know** by *ik weet*, and on the whole he is inclined to recommend that way of it. But he never commits himself.

“It must be also admitted that there are other authors of good standing who employ the Subjunctive form where we might expect the Indicative and who say IK WETE, I know.”

IK GRAUW, IK KEF, EN IK KWEEL

That's one of his rules!

As a matter of fact there is no finality about anything in these pages. O'Neill, you were in training for a poet when you took up this book. I confess I should have liked to hear you going over your fifteen classes of irregular verbs, on the model (say) of *ik grauw*, *ik kef* en *ik kweel*, or even of *ik krijsch*, *ik piep* en *ik lieg*.

There is a rich profusion of tenses too in Boyton. He needn't have apologized for being too simple when he furnishes you with four ordinary optatives and four future optatives.”

A BOYTON TO THE RESCUE

“You may jest as you like about Boyton”, interrupted Jack; “but I tell you it's a book that has points. Do you know it once helped me to save a lady's life?”

“Save a lady's life!” said the Professor and the Philosopher in one breath. “We'll withdraw all we've said, if you'll prove to us, now, that the ‘Compendious Guide’ was ever the least good to any human being.”

“Tell your adventure in your own way, O'Neill,” a boyish voice chimed in; “and shame the cynics.”

We all glared at the First-year's man – who was making himself very much at home for a lad of his tender years – but as he had nothing more to say, we let him off with a look, and turned to the lethargic story-teller.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAMMATICAL CARESS

“You saved life with that Boyton-Grammar of yours, if I catch the drift of your last remark?” interposed the Professor magniloquently, as if he were addressing a public meeting.

“May I hazard the guess that Boyton on that occasion was rather a weapon of offence than of defence?”

“Well, you’re right,” said O’Neill. “Offence is more in Boyton’s line. And he certainly did press heavily, that day, on a butcher’s boy. You remember those slagersjongens that saunter about, in white linen coats, with great protruding baskets on their shoulders. They jostle and push wherever they have a chance, and whirl round with their cargoes of meat, so as to make you start. You know the tribe. Well, Boyton proved an admirable corrective to the insolence of one of these imps.

A HAPPY CROWD

It was a day there was a sort of festival in the Hague.

From early in the afternoon there was a crush everywhere. The singels and the main roads through the Wood were filled with holiday-makers. Soldiers were parading here and there. Everyone was in the best of good humour; music in the distance rose and fell on the air; flags fluttered from the windows. Look where you might, there were bright dresses, prancing horses, snorting motors, and pedestrians of all descriptions.

I was one of the pedestrians.

I had been at my grammar in the morning; and after a long spell in the house had stepped over to Enderby’s, and coaxed that lazy fellow out for a stroll. It was perfect weather, and the crowds were wonderfully well-behaved. We enjoyed ourselves finely ‘under the green-wood tree,’ till we were brought to a stand-still in a dense mass of humanity that was packed along the edge of a canal, scarcely moving. A procession or something had impeded the traffic some moments.

INNOCENCE IN DANGER

There was a knot of butchers’ boys right in front of us. They were roughly shoving their neighbours about, and seeing what mischief they could do. Horse play, in fact. They didn’t seem to fit into Boyton’s categories, either of ‘Natives intelligent’ or ‘polite’.

Presently one brawny scoundrel began to throw stones at the occupants of a carriage that was slowly passing by.

I couldn’t believe my eyes!

There sat an old lady of eighty or ninety, with soft white hair – the very picture of fragility; opposite her was a nurse in dark uniform, in charge of three dainty little children in pink and white – mere babies of three or four – with innocent blue eyes gazing all round them. And, actually, that ruffianly knecht was about to bombard the group with whatever he had in his hand!

Bang went a big mass of something – presumably hard, from the rattle it made – against the side of the carriage.

Happily he was a poor marksman, that rascally slager; for at that short range he ought to have been able to demolish so fragile an old lady at the first shot, or at the very least have put out one eye.

As it was, he only knocked off her bonnet.

Enraged, apparently, at his poor practice at a practically stationary target so close at hand, he picked up another half-brick and wheeled, to take more deliberate aim.

The delicate old lady grew pale, and spasmodically fumbled with her parasol to shield the children.

NEMESIS

I thought her eye caught mine; and, seeing there was no escape for her unless I interposed – no one till now seemed to have noticed the occurrence – I shouted, “Stop, slager, stop!” and whisked Boyton’s learned pages right into his face, taking care at the same moment to administer a vigorous push to the long arm of the lever conveniently made by his basket.

This forced him to revolve suddenly on his own axis – beefsteak and all; and, as he spun round, I accelerated his motion with a pat or two from the ‘**compendium**’. It was all the work of an instant, and executed just in time. The grammatical caress foiled his aim completely, and he flung his missile blindly in the wrong direction.

As I slipped unostentatiously into the crowd out of the immediate neighbourhood of the discomfited marksman, I had the satisfaction of seeing the dear old lady recover colour and smile. The babies crowed with delight, and clapped their hands. They thought it was a game got up for their special benefit!

THE OUTCOME OF A REVOLUTION

I raised my hat and retired, a warm glow of self-approval in my breast, and on my lips an involuntary quotation from Boyton: “De spraakkunst is voor iedereen onmisbaar.”

Meantime the brickbat fell harmlessly on the back of a policeman who, with hands tightly clasped behind him, was studying a bed of scarlet geraniums.

He never even turned, but only said “Ja, ja,” over his shoulder!

Two days after this adventure my eye caught the following paragraph among the advertisements in the Nieuwe Courant:

“Stop, Slager, stop!”

The Baroness X. and her three grandchildren herewith beg heartily to thank the young Englishman for his gallant conduct in the Wood, on the 31st Ultimo.

CHAPTER VII

A GOSSIPY LETTER

“Don’t talk any more about that grammar-book,” I interposed. “It’s all very well in its way, but it doesn’t account for half Jack’s adventures. Now I can let you into a secret. Please don’t look so apprehensive, O’Neill! As it happens, I had a descriptive letter from Enderby just about the time that Jack was making the most brilliant progress with his Dutch vocabulary. It gave me a vivid picture of what was going on in the Hague when this linguist of ours got really started to work.

O’NEILL AS A GUIDE

Here are two of these long epistles. In the first he tells me all about the MacNamaras – Jack’s cousins, you know – who came across from Kilkenny, for a trip to Holland. They were at the Oude Doelen when he wrote, and our friend Jack was posing as a great Dutch scholar and showing them the sights.

(From Enderby to Cuey-na-Gael)
Doelen Hotel,
The Hague.

My dear Cuey-na-Gael,

You would be amazed to see the confidence with which O’Neill acts as guide to the MacNamaras.

MacNamara père is mostly buried in museums, or is on the hunt for archaeological papers, so Kathleen and Terence are left on Jack’s hands.

He has been everywhere with them, and has evidently impressed them with his astounding Dutch. To them it seems both correct and fluent. They have only had three days of it as yet, and haven’t had time to find him out. Kathleen is as haughty as ever; and I can see she chafes at being obliged to submit to the direction of a mere boy, as she regards Jack.

She was furious the day before yesterday, when in passing through one of the back streets he asked her if she had ever noticed what the Dutch Government printed in front of the surgeries.

MEN MANGLED HERE

She glanced up and, to her horror, read: “Hier mangelt men.” It was only a momentary shock; she guessed soon enough what it meant; but it gave her a turn all the same. Perhaps it wasn’t a very finished kind of joke, but she needn’t have been quite so fierce about it.

“You’re cruel,” she said, “cruel and heartless! Why even your dogmatic and intolerable chum, Mr. van Leeuwen wouldn’t have been so harsh as that.”

Now it was that little speech of hers that suggested something to me. Was there ever anything between her and van Leeuwen? They were at the University about the same time, and it seems van Leeuwen was a great friend of the father, who had him down to his place in the country and showed him his manuscripts. But I believe Kathleen couldn’t stand him. They used always to be arguing about the Suffragettes, and passed for official enemies, in a way, – at least as uncompromising leaders on opposite sides. She was fond of saying that van Leeuwen was a standing proof that

mere learning couldn't enlarge the mind. Once in a private debate she referred to him as a "learned barbarian and a retrograde mediævalist."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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