

## Chapter 31

### Haarlem

Haarlem, whither, three days ago, we conducted our gentle reader, and whither we request him to follow us once more in the footsteps of the prisoner, is a pleasant city, which justly prides itself on being one of the most shady in all the Netherlands.

While other towns boast of the magnificence of their arsenals and dock-yards, and the splendour of their shops and markets, Haarlem's claims to fame rest upon her superiority to all other provincial cities in the number and beauty of her spreading elms, graceful poplars, and, more than all, upon her pleasant walks, shaded by the lovely arches of magnificent oaks, lindens, and chestnuts.

Haarlem, -- just as her neighbour, Leyden, became the centre of science, and her queen, Amsterdam, that of commerce, -- Haarlem preferred to be the agricultural, or, more strictly speaking, the horticultural metropolis.

In fact, girt about as she was, breezy and exposed to the sun's hot rays, she seemed to offer to gardeners so many more guarantees of success than other places, with their heavy sea air, and their scorching heat.

On this account all the serene souls who loved the earth and its fruits had gradually gathered together at Haarlem, just as all the nervous, uneasy spirits, whose ambition was for travel and commerce, had settled in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and all the politicians and selfish worldlings at the Hague.

We have observed that Leyden overflowed with scholars. In like manner Haarlem was devoted to the gentle pursuits of peace, -- to music and painting, orchards and avenues, groves and parks. Haarlem went wild about flowers, and tulips received their full share of worship.

Haarlem offered prizes for tulip-growing; and this fact brings us in the most natural manner to that celebration which the city intended to hold on May 15th, 1673 in honour of the great black tulip, immaculate and perfect, which should gain for its discoverer one hundred thousand guilders!

Haarlem, having placed on exhibition its favourite, having advertised its love of flowers in general and of tulips in particular, at a period when the souls of men were filled with war and sedition, -- Haarlem, having enjoyed the exquisite pleasure of admiring the very purest ideal of tulips in full bloom, -- Haarlem, this tiny town, full of trees and of sunshine, of light and shade, had determined that the ceremony of bestowing the prize should be a fete which should live for ever in the memory of men.

So much the more reason was there, too, in her determination, in that Holland is the home of fetes; never did sluggish natures manifest more eager energy of the singing and dancing sort than those of the good republicans of the Seven Provinces when amusement was the order of the day.

Study the pictures of the two Teniers.

It is certain that sluggish folk are of all men the most earnest in tiring themselves, not when they are at work, but at play.

Thus Haarlem was thrice given over to rejoicing, for a three-fold celebration was to take place.

In the first place, the black tulip had been produced; secondly, the Prince William of Orange, as a true Hollander, had promised to be present at the ceremony of its inauguration; and, thirdly, it was a point of honour with the States to show to the French, at the conclusion of such a disastrous war as that of 1672, that the flooring of the Batavian Republic was solid enough for its people to dance on it, with the accompaniment of the cannon of their fleets.

The Horticultural Society of Haarlem had shown itself worthy of its fame by giving a hundred thousand guilders for the bulb of a tulip. The town, which did not wish to be outdone, voted a like sum, which was placed in the hands of that notable body to solemnise the auspicious event.

And indeed on the Sunday fixed for this ceremony there was such a stir among the people, and such an enthusiasm among the townsfolk, that even a Frenchman, who laughs at everything at all times, could not have helped admiring the character of those honest Hollanders, who were equally ready to spend their money for the construction of a man-of-war -- that is to say, for the support of national honour -- as they were to reward the growth of a new flower, destined to bloom for one day, and to serve during that day to divert the ladies, the learned, and the curious.

At the head of the notables and of the Horticultural Committee shone Mynheer van Systems, dressed in his richest habiliments.

The worthy man had done his best to imitate his favourite flower in the sombre and stern elegance of his garments; and we are bound to record, to his honour, that he had perfectly succeeded in his object.

Dark crimson velvet, dark purple silk, and jet-black cloth, with linen of dazzling whiteness, composed the festive dress of the President, who marched at the head of his Committee carrying an enormous nosegay, like that which a hundred and twenty-one years later, Monsieur de Robespierre displayed at the festival of "The Supreme Being."

There was, however, a little difference between the two; very different from the French tribune, whose heart was so full of hatred and ambitious vindictiveness, was the honest President, who carried in his bosom a heart as innocent as the flowers which he held in his hand.

Behind the Committee, who were as gay as a meadow, and as fragrant as a garden in spring, marched the learned societies of the town, the magistrates, the military, the nobles and the boors.

The people, even among the respected republicans of the Seven Provinces, had no place assigned to them in the procession; they merely lined the streets.

This is the place for the multitude, which with true philosophic spirit, waits until the triumphal pageants have passed, to know what to say of them, and sometimes also to know what to do.

This time, however, there was no question either of the triumph of Pompey or of Caesar; neither of the defeat of Mithridates, nor of the conquest of Gaul. The procession was as placid as the passing of a flock of lambs, and as inoffensive as a flight of birds sweeping through the air.

Haarlem had no other triumphers, except its gardeners. Worshipping flowers, Haarlem idolised the florist.

In the centre of this pacific and fragrant cortege the black tulip was seen, carried on a litter, which was covered with white velvet and fringed with gold.

The handles of the litter were supported by four men, who were from time to time relieved by fresh relays, -- even as the bearers of Mother Cybele used to take turn and turn about at Rome in the ancient days, when she was brought from Etruria to the Eternal City, amid the blare of trumpets and the worship of a whole nation.

This public exhibition of the tulip was an act of adoration rendered by an entire nation, unlettered and unrefined, to the refinement and culture of its illustrious and devout leaders, whose blood had stained the foul pavement

of the Buytenhof, reserving the right at a future day to inscribe the names of its victims upon the highest stone of the Dutch Pantheon.

It was arranged that the Prince Stadtholder himself should give the prize of a hundred thousand guilders, which interested the people at large, and it was thought that perhaps he would make a speech which interested more particularly his friends and enemies.

For in the most insignificant words of men of political importance their friends and their opponents always endeavour to detect, and hence think they can interpret, something of their true thoughts.

As if your true politician's hat were not a bushel under which he always hides his light!

At length the great and long-expected day -- May 15, 1673 -- arrived; and all Haarlem, swelled by her neighbours, was gathered in the beautiful tree-lined streets, determined on this occasion not to waste its applause upon military heroes, or those who had won notable victories in the field of science, but to reserve their applause for those who had overcome Nature, and had forced the inexhaustible mother to be delivered of what had theretofore been regarded as impossible, -- a completely black tulip.

Nothing however, is more fickle than such a resolution of the people. When a crowd is once in the humour to cheer, it is just the same as when it begins to hiss. It never knows when to stop.

It therefore, in the first place, cheered Van Systems and his nosegay, then the corporation, then followed a cheer for the people; and, at last, and for once with great justice, there was one for the excellent music with which the gentlemen of the town councils generously treated the assemblage at every halt.

Every eye was looking eagerly for the heroine of the festival, -- that is to say, the black tulip, -- and for its hero in the person of the one who had grown it.

In case this hero should make his appearance after the address we have seen worthy Van Systemen at work on so conscientiously, he would not fail to make as much of a sensation as the Stadtholder himself.

But the interest of the day's proceedings for us is centred neither in the learned discourse of our friend Van Systemen, however eloquent it might be, nor in the young dandies, resplendent in their Sunday clothes, and munching their heavy cakes; nor in the poor young peasants, gnawing smoked eels as if they were sticks of vanilla sweetmeat; neither is our interest in the lovely Dutch girls, with red cheeks and ivory bosoms; nor in the fat, round mynheers, who had never left their homes before; nor in the sallow, thin travellers from Ceylon or Java; nor in the thirsty crowds, who quenched their thirst with pickled cucumbers; -- no, so far as we are concerned, the real interest of the situation, the fascinating, dramatic interest, is not to be found here.

Our interest is in a smiling, sparkling face to be seen amid the members of the Horticultural Committee; in the person with a flower in his belt, combed and brushed, and all clad in scarlet, -- a colour which makes his black hair and yellow skin stand out in violent contrast.

This hero, radiant with rapturous joy, who had the distinguished honour of making the people forget the speech of Van Systemen, and even the presence of the Stadtholder, was Isaac Boxtel, who saw, carried on his right before him, the black tulip, his pretended daughter; and on his left, in a large purse, the hundred thousand guilders in glittering gold pieces, towards which he was constantly squinting, fearful of losing sight of them for one moment.

Now and then Boxtel quickened his step to rub elbows for a moment with Van Systemen. He borrowed a little importance from everybody to make a kind of false importance for himself, as he had stolen Rosa's tulip to effect his own glory, and thereby make his fortune.

Another quarter of an hour and the Prince will arrive and the procession will halt for the last time; after the tulip is placed on its throne, the Prince, yielding precedence to this rival for the popular adoration, will take a magnificently emblazoned parchment, on which is written the name of the grower; and his Highness, in a loud and audible tone, will proclaim him to be the discoverer of a wonder; that Holland, by the instrumentality of him, Boxtel, has forced Nature to produce a black flower, which shall henceforth be called *Tulipa nigra Boxtellea*.

From time to time, however, Boxtel withdrew his eyes for a moment from the tulip and the purse, timidly looking among the crowd, for more than anything he dreaded to descry there the pale face of the pretty Frisian girl.

She would have been a spectre spoiling the joy of the festival for him, just as Banquo's ghost did that of Macbeth.

And yet, if the truth must be told, this wretch, who had stolen what was the boast of man, and the dowry of a woman, did not consider himself as a thief. He had so intently watched this tulip, followed it so eagerly from the drawer in Cornelius's dry-room to the scaffold of the Buytenhof, and from the scaffold to the fortress of Loewestein; he had seen it bud and grow in Rosa's window, and so often warmed the air round it with his breath, that he felt as if no one had a better right to call himself its producer than he had; and any one who would now take the black tulip from him would have appeared to him as a thief.

Yet he did not perceive Rosa; his joy therefore was not spoiled.

In the centre of a circle of magnificent trees, which were decorated with garlands and inscriptions, the procession halted, amidst the sounds of lively music, and the young damsels of Haarlem made their appearance to escort the tulip to the raised seat which it was to occupy on the platform, by the side of the gilded chair of his Highness the Stadtholder.

And the proud tulip, raised on its pedestal, soon overlooked the assembled crowd of people, who clapped their hands, and made the old town of Haarlem re-echo with their tremendous cheers.