

HOLLAND AND ITS PEOPLE.*

DE AMICIS is the foremost of contemporary travelers in the artistic sense. With him travel is purely dramatic, pictorial, a thing of light and shade. Abhorring in his literary passion everything statistical, technical, or tradesmanlike, he is a subtle interpreter of nationalities. Spain, Morocco, Constantinople, Paris, have each been turned under the brilliant focus of his gaze, until the reader wonders whether it is a poem, a picture, or a drama that is before him; and now Holland and its people come in for a share of his omnivorous attention.

To characterize De Amicis in brief: he is the Taine of travelers. The same dash, eloquence, and imagery; the same copiousness of diction, cumulative effect of heaped and piled up periods, perilous extravagance of phrase, show that both have drawn their inspiration from the same artistic models. Realism, rich sensuous effects, the elaboration of the imagination into an engine for projecting art criticism or landscape painting vividly before the consciousness, is the method pursued by each. The tranquil travels of Goethe, with all their breadth and beauty, are entirely thrown into the shade beside these meteors of modern travel—De Amicis, Gautier, Hans Andersen. For simple light we have effulgence; for simple day, the play of the Northern Lights. On the whole, which is best?

De Amicis is the pupil of Théophile Gautier, without Gautier's humor. Somehow, in

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attending the lectures of his master, he has left his wit behind; but, instead, a beautiful and all-titillating fancy has taken its place—a subtle Jacob's voice that penetrates one's spirit and calls up vivid and pleasurable recollections. In the *Holland* we are carried through one Dutch city after another at the finger-ends of a really matchless cicerone—if you are no statistician. Old Delft, learned Leyden, leaning Amsterdam, the gray horizons of the Zuyder Zee, Utrecht with its lightning-cloven cathedral and sunny walks, Zealand with its amphibious landscape, Haarlem, Rotterdam, Alkmaar—what a brisk and overflowing guide we have for all this. De Amicis literally took Constantinople and painted it on panels for our vivid delectation. In *Holland*, in the twinkling of an eye, he sweeps together an infinitude of little pictures—*eidullia*, the Greeks would call them—minute, realistic, true to life; and leaves us to gaze on them as if standing before the water-colors of South Kensington. His talent is like a fountain-pen—self-supplying, inexhaustible. His history is somewhat antiquated, to be sure; he quotes familiarly from books of the sixteenth century; he is not always accurate, nor does the artist necessarily aspire to be. But for pure panoramic effects—for seas, dykes, canals, atmosphere, inns—for the true emphasis given to custom—for the illumination of any strange thing, habit, house, costume—give us the Italian as the prince of artistic travelers. Livingstone, Burton, Lane, Kinglake, Geary, Schuyler, all recall to us learned or thorough or enthusiastic work, each in his special sphere; but De Amicis is by himself apart, like the nameless One to whom Diogenes Laertius tells us the Athenians erected altars for the stay of the plague. The most popular of living Italian writers, still young, a poet and novelist as well as traveler, this writer seems indeed the favorite of the gods. Too intensely picturesque, peradventure, to be read except by snatches, in the gray inter-twilight or to the sound of rain, his brightness is welcome, his niche is in the *penetralia*, his habitation is more or less in the heart.