

Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

London, 1840

To Miss Wilmont, at Woodlands, near Beckenham, Kent

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124956](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124956)

The dominoes are rattling,
 The hookahs raise a cloud ;
 A flavour, none of Fearon's,
 That mingles with my dram,
 Reminds me you're in England,
 But I'm in Rotterdam.

Then here it goes, a bumper,—
 The toast it shall be mine,
 In Schiedam, or in Sherry,
 Tokay, or Hock of Rhine,—
 It well deserves the brightest
 Where sunbeam ever swam,—
 " The girl I love in England,"
 I drink at Rotterdam.

TO MISS WILMOT, AT WOODLANDS, NEAR
 BECKENHAM, KENT.

MY DEAR MARGARET,—As I predicted, our travels began in trouble, and from the course of events, will end, I expect, in the same way. What could be more unfortunate than to come to the Continent in a storm so awful that I cannot bear to think of it, much less to describe it, beyond saying, that between raging winds and waves, and thunder and lightning, nature itself seemed on the point of being wrecked ! But I must not

repine ; for though I have been frightened to death, and shaken to pieces, and worn down by sea-sickness, and subjected to all sorts of discomforts and disagreeables, and within an inch of being drowned at sea myself, it was all to wean me from my losses, and restore my peace of mind. As such, it is my duty to reflect on nothing but my brother's affection, however distressing in its effects on my own weak nerves. It took us two whole days to reach Rotterdam, though it was but a remove from one danger to another, for the country of Holland lies so low in the water, that they say it would be as fatal to spring a leak as in a ship. Indeed, as my own eyes assured me, we were often swimming higher than the tops of the houses ; a dreadful consideration, when you think that a water-rat, by boring a hole in the banks, would do more havoc amongst the inhabitants than a loose tiger. As it is, the poor people are compelled to employ a whole army of windmills,—though how the water is to be ground dry into dry ground is beyond my chemical knowledge. I do not quite know what he means, but my nephew says the natives live like a party in a parlour and all dammed. Still it was a change for the better, after all the dreadful sights and motions, and noises and smells, of a ship, to come to a quiet room and a comfortable meal. Above all, it was a real luxury to repose in a steady bed, with snow-white sheets, though, my spirits being overtired, I did nothing but cry all night long. But it is my dispensation to travel for the rest of my days through a

vale of tears. Mentioning snow-white sheets, if cleanliness can ever be carried to excess it is in Holland ;— indeed, I fear I shall hardly be able to put up with English neatness when I return. The very servants have such caps and kerchiefs, and aprons and lace, and so beautifully got up, I can compare it to nothing but a laundress on a pleasure party taking a day's wear of her mistress's best things. It is quite delightful to see, — though not unmixed with painful recollections, for you know how precise your dear late brother was about his linen. He was quite Dutch in that. Of course, they have a wash every week-day, besides the grand one on Saturdays, when they really wash up everything in the place except the water. As an instance of their particularity, at almost every house there is a sort of double looking-glass outside the window, as if for seeing up and down the street ; but Frank says it is, that the Dutch ladies may watch, before being at home to a friend, whether he has dirty boots or shoes.

We have seen the principal sights of Rotterdam, the statue of Erasmus, the Arsenal, the Cathedral, with its monuments of Dutch Admirals, and its great organ, which plays almost too powerfully for mortal ears. But what most took my fancy was the curious pleasure-grounds round the town, with their outlandish summer-houses and little temples. They are all what you and I should call Old Bachelors' Gardens, laid out in fantastic figures and formal walks, but full of the finest plants. I never saw such superb flowers of their kind, or smelt so delicious a perfume. How the Dutch gentlemen can reconcile

themselves to smoking tobacco in the midst of such a paradise of sweets, I cannot imagine, unless it is to kill the caterpillars; but their noses are surely insensible to good or bad smells, or they would never allow so many stagnant ditches and ponds covered with duckweed, that towards evening give out a stench fit to breed a plague. But such is life, sweet in the morning, but oh, how different in savour at the close! Knowing your partiality for flowers, I intended to send you a few of the finesorts, particularly tulips and hyacinths, and was lucky enough, as I thought, to find out a shop, with roots and plants in the window, and a clerk who spoke a little English and politely helped me in selecting the choicest kinds. Indeed, they had all such fine names that they were sure to be good. The young man himself very civilly carried the parcel home to the hotel; but judge of my feelings when I came to look at the bill. I can only say I screamed! What do you think, Margaret, of seventy odd pounds for a few bulbs! But that's where I miss your dear brother,—for as you know, I used to leave all bargaining and accounts, and money matters, and in short everything, to poor George. The consequence was, we had quite a scene, which I need not say was extremely distressing in a strange hotel. To add to my agitation, my nephew was absent, and when I wanted to consult my brother, he was in his own room in one of his old fits, and nothing could be got from him except that he had done with this world. In the meantime the foreign clerk grew impatient, and at last worked

himself into such a passion that he could not speak English, and Heaven knows what violence he threatened or would have done, if my brother, hearing the noise had not rushed in, and scuffled him down the stairs. In the end, Frank had to go to the shop and arrange the matter, but as he declines saying on what terms, I am convinced it cost no trifle to get the Dutchman to take back his bulbs. It was as much as I could do, when all was over, to keep from hysterics, especially as my brother chose to be extremely harsh with me, and said it was very hard he could not go out of the world without a parcel of trumpery flowers distracting his latter end. But I was born to troubles, and as the proverb says, they never come single. The roots might be an error in judgment, but there could be none about the Dutch linen; which, of course, must be cheaper in Holland than anywhere else. Accordingly I laid in a good stock of shirting and sheeting, and napkins and towelling, for home use; but although the quality was excellent, and the bill quite reasonable, this good bargain cost me as much vexation as the bad one. My brother, indeed, did not scold, but though both he and my nephew wished me joy of my purchase, I saw by their faces that they meant quite the reverse. Such an untoward beginning quite scares me, and fills me with misgivings that in going farther I shall only fare worse. It grieves me to think, too, how *you* would delight in this tripping up the Rhine, instead of taking my place at Woodlands, whilst I am only fit for domestic duties and

the quiet of home. A heavy heart, weak nerves, and broken spirits are bad travelling companions, and at every step, alas! I am reminded by some dilemma or other, what a stay and guide a woman loses in a husband like poor George.

Providentially we have not suffered as yet in our health, but I shall not be easy on that score till we leave Holland, as there is a low fever, they say, peculiar to the country, and very apt to attack the English, unless they smoke and drink drams all day long. Our next stage is by steam-boat to Nimeguen, which is in a state of war against the Belgians for being Roman Catholics. Frank says the best plan would be to convert the Belgians to the Church of England, and then they would take the Thirty-Nine Articles, instead of fighting about Twenty-Four. And for the sake of peace, and to save bloodshed, I devoutly hope it may be settled in some such way. But fatigue compels me to close. Pray distribute my kindest regards amongst all friends, and accept my love from, dear Margaret,

Your affectionate sister,

CATHARINE WILMOT.

P.S.—Martha begs me to forward the inclosed. She has had her own troubles, but has become more reconciled; though not without flying occasionally to her old trick of giving warning. But her warnings are like my poor brother's, and I really believe she would be heart-broken if I took her at her word. Like her mis-

tress she has been buying bargains—though more as foreign curiosities than for use, except a beautiful brass milk-pail, which I have taken off her hands for the dairy at Woodlands.

TO REBECCA PAGE, AT THE WOODLANDS, NEAR
BECKNAM, KENT.

DEAR BECKY.—Littel did I think I shud ever ever
ever rite you again! We have all bean on eternitty's
brinx. Such a terrifickle storm! Tho' we are on
Shure, I cant get it out of my Hed. Every room keeps
spinnin with me like a roundy-bout at Grinnage Fare.
Every chare I set on begins rockin like a nussin chare
and the stares pitch and toss so I cant go up them xcept
on all fores. They do say elevin other vessels flounderd
off the Hooks of Holland in the same tempest with all
their cruise. It begun in the artemoon, and prevaled
all nite,—sich a nite O Grashus! Sich tossin and
tumblin it was moraly unpossible to stand on wons
legs and to compleat these discomfortables nothin wood
sit easy. I might as well have et and drunk Hippo-
kickany and antinomial wine. O Becky the Tea-totlers
only give up fomentid lickens, but the Sea Totlers give
up every thing. To add to my frite down flumps the
stewardis on her nees and begins skreeking we shall be
pitcht all over! we shall be pitcht all over. Think I