

## THE LITTLE HERO OF HAARLEM

At an early period in the history of Holland, a boy was born in Haarlem, a town remarkable for its variety of fortune in war, but happily still more so for its manufactures and inventions in peace.

His father was a sluicer—that is, one whose employment it was to open and shut the sluices or large oak gates which, placed at certain regular distances, close the entrances of the canals, and secure Holland from the danger to which it seems exposed, of finding itself under water, rather than above it. When water is wanted, the sluicer raises the sluices more or less, as required, as the cook turns the cock of a fountain, and closes them again carefully at night; otherwise the water would flow into the canals, then overflow them, and inundate the whole country; so that even the little children in Holland are fully aware of the importance of a punctual discharge of the sluicer's duties.

The boy was about eight years old when, one day, he asked permission to take some cakes to a poor blind man, who lived at the other side of the dike. His father gave him leave, but charged him not to stay too late. The child promised, and set off on his little journey. The blind man thankfully partook of his young friend's cakes, and the boy, mindful of his father's orders, did not wait, as usual, to hear one of the old man's stories, but as soon as he had seen him eat one muffin, took leave of him to return home.

As he went along by the canals, then quite full, for it was in October, and the autumn rains had swelled the waters,—the boy now stooped to pull the little blue flowers which his mother loved so well, now, in childish gaiety, hummed some merry song. The road gradually became more solitary, and soon neither the joyous shout of the villager returning to his cottage home, nor the rough voice of the carter grumbling at his lazy horses, was any longer to be heard. The little fellow now perceived that the blue of the flowers in his hands was scarcely distinguishable from the green of the surrounding herbage, and he looked up in some dismay. The night was falling; not, however, a dark, winter night, but one of those beautiful, clear, moonlight nights, in which every object is perceptible, though not as distinctly as by day.

The child thought of his father, of his injunction, and was preparing to quit the ravine in which he was almost buried, and to regain the beach, when suddenly a slight noise, like the trickling of water upon pebbles, attracted his attention. He was near one of the large sluices, and he now carefully examined it, and soon

discovered a hole in the wood, through which the water was flowing. With the instant perception which every child in Holland would have, the boy saw that the water must soon enlarge the hole through which it was now only dropping, and that utter and general ruin would be the consequence of the inundation of the country that must follow. To see, to throw away the flowers, to climb from stone to stone till he reached the hole, and to put his finger into it, was the work of a moment, and to his delight he found that he had succeeded in stopping the flow of the water.

This was all very well for a little while, and the child thought only of the success of his device. But the night was closing in, and with the night came the cold. The little boy looked around in vain. No one came. He shouted—he called loudly—no one answered. He resolved to stay there all night, but alas! the cold was becoming every moment more biting, and the poor finger fixed in the hole began to feel benumbed, and the numbness soon extended to the hand, and thence throughout the whole arm.

The pain became still greater, still harder to bear, but yet the boy moved not. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he thought of his father, of his mother, of his little bed, where he might now be sleeping so soundly; but still the little fellow stirred not, for he knew that did he remove the small slender finger which he had opposed to the escape of the water, not only would he himself be drowned, but his father, his brothers, his neighbors—nay, the whole village.

We know not what faltering of purpose, what momentary failures of courage there might have been during that long and terrible night; but certain it is, that at daybreak he was found in the same painful position by a clergyman returning from attendance on a deathbed, who, as he advanced, thought he heard groans, and bending over the dike, discovered a child seated on a stone, writhing from pain, and with pale face and tearful eyes.

"In the name of wonder, boy," he exclaimed, "what are you doing there?"

"I am hindering the water from running out," was the answer, in perfect simplicity, of the child, who, during that whole night, had been evincing such heroic fortitude and undaunted courage.

The Muse of History has handed down to posterity many a warrior, the destroyer of thousands of his fellow-men—but she has left us in ignorance of the name of this real little hero of Haarlem.

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