In the present study the author examines the meaning of "beweeglijkheijt" and "beweeglijk" in 17th and early 18th century literature of art, viz. in writings by Karel van Mander, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Gerard de Lairesse and J. Verhoek, and the interpretation of these words by their editors and translators. She finds that in the 17th century the word "beweeglijkheid" chiefly contains an abstract, but also a concrete element. If in addition it is taken into account that according to the 17th century conception of art there should be unity in a work of art between the innermost feelings of the persons depicted and their attitudes and motions (cf. Samuel van Hoogstraten, Ferdinand Brunot, Seymour Slive) and that this unity should be a means of stirring the spectator's emotions (S. van Hoogstraten) the conclusion may be drawn that "beweeglijkheid" is intended to mean: the capacity to stir the emotions owing to the unity of feelings and the expression given to them.

On the Verge of Mystery
by J. C. H. HELDRING

There are few persons who have not been surprised by the number of painters in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century who had ability to paint pictures which amaze us. The unparalleled numbers of artists and their perfection are the most striking characteristics of this era.

It is on this mystery that I would like to ponder awhile. Various questions raised as to the origin of the artistic eminence of the painters in the Low Countries in the 17th century have become, one after the other, subjects of special study. But a lover of strange phenomena may still try to reach a plausible explanation, realizing that to attribute these phenomena to coincidence would be to propose a solution too improbable for the intellect to accept.

Nations in all eras of history are swept from time to time by waves of artistic inspiration.

Some historians have attributed these renaissances to irresistible circumstances. In other words, they are the result of nothing more than the succession of natural causes and effects. In any series of events, those which follow are always fitted aptly to those which have gone before. So deeply rooted is the conviction of a rational connection that scholars instinctively turn away from considerations which border on the supernatural. Other historians, like Prof. Dr. W. Brede Kristensen maintain the contrary. He says:

"History is supposed to exhibit phenomena of cause and effect, which do not differ in any essential from those of the material world, more difficult to track down, it is true, but none the less present. If only we knew the particulars sufficiently, the causal connection in history would be clear. This is a delusion. Let us frankly acknowledge that no one has ever succeeded in explaining an historical phenomenon".1)

1) Symbool en Werkelijkheid, p. 92.
Much of the extraordinary perfection of Dutch painting in the 17th century must have been in embryo in the works of the artists of the 15th and 16th centuries. In addition the interfusion of the great number of engravings and etchings, even from beyond the Alps, must not be overlooked.

In part it was the result of communicable technical skill. The 17th century Dutch paintings link themselves to the works of the 15th and 16th centuries. Free from the stress of worries and thoughts which taxed so severely the resources of the previous generation, the outburst of creative force occurred in Holland after years of grave national peril and warfare. Here we approach the idea of Arnold J. Toynbee, who saw in such a movement a response to adverse circumstances. Dutch art in the seventeenth century is, indeed, a strong national affirmation. In this respect the artists partake of a common character, although in solitary groups with each artist confined to his own sphere.

Creative force and creative spirit are allotted in the hour of birth. So we turn our attention instinctively to the mothers of the artists. The brooding spirit of life itself is there. I was surprised to find that next to nothing is known about these mothers.

Of course, women often died at an early age, neither did the everyday women occupy such predominant places as they do to-day. But even when full allowance is made for these unfavourable conditions, it can only be regarded as an astonishing fact that there is a kind of vacuum where the knowledge of mothers of the artists is concerned.

Before entering into details, let me chronicle a few events of the second half of the 16th century although these have been discussed and analysed a thousand times.

In 1566 Philips II dispatched the Duke of Alva from Spain to the Low Countries. His entrance in 1567 was the signal for universal despair. Scaffolds, Inquisition, Naarden, Haarlem are but the names of the horrors of Alva’s regency. The seat of war had been chiefly Holland and Zeeland. There were the ravages of plague, malignant fevers and smallpox. The whole tragedy of those years is too well-known to need retelling.

A glimmer of hope came at the end of Alva’s career when the Gueux took the town of Den Briel and when he failed before Alkmaar. The ineffectual siege of Leiden in 1574 followed after Requesens had succeeded Alva.

As for the men, their lives must in many cases have been brief and sore. They lived for the day and died for it. The dangers fanned their desires and these claimed their rights. The incubation of life was theirs.

There was a circulation of foreign blood, particularly of Flemish immigrants, which kept vigour in the Dutch blood. However, let us remain mindful that any summary attempting to explain this must be incomplete and that the weightiest causes remain obscure.

Towerling above all talk and arguments, and welling from the centre of