

Notes and news

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In every representative collection of old Dutch books formed since the beginning of the last century there is a predominance of two classes of work: topographical books relating to the Low Countries, and song-books. Guicciardini's volume on the Low Countries, first published in 1567, illuminated with town plans in the form of bird's-eye views, was succeeded by an unbroken stream of illustrated descriptions of the ancient towns and districts in which, particularly during the eighteenth century, much attention was also focused on villages, castles and country estates. But whereas the country's topography was an enduring feature in Dutch book production, the heyday of the illustrated song-book was confined to a short period, the 'Golden Age' of about 1600 to 1635, when the nation's best printers and artists applied themselves with evident enthusiasm to the production of such works — large and small, but almost always in oblong format.

Nowadays both topographical works and song-books have become exceedingly rare. It has become impossible to form complete collections of the two genres. Frederik van Hattum, one of the last bibliophiles to succeed, with much love and patience, in putting together exquisite collections of works in both fields, died last year at the age of seventy-eight.

Born on 26 November 1900, Frederik van Hattum came of a Zeeland family one of whose members was the pietistic pantheist Pontiaan van Hattem (1641–1706) whose followers were to cause alarm and despondency in the Reformed Church, especially in Zeeland, for many years. The branch to which 'Freke' van Hattum (as he was generally called) belonged came to be known chiefly for several generations of builders of harbours who made the name of Dutch construction engineers known all over the world. His grandfather Jan Christiaan, who had a white palace built in Victorian style on the banks of the West Scheldt at Ellewoutsdijk, was also an eager collector of paintings. In 1897 he bought the historical gallery of the 'Arti et Amicitiae' society in Amsterdam, a collection of two hundred canvases in which romantic artists had portrayed moving scenes from Dutch history. Having hung for some time in the municipal museum in The Hague they were transferred to the house at Ellewoutsdijk where, along with many other art treasures, they were destroyed by fire in 1944 following an air raid by British bombers.

Freke, whose father Arie stood at the head of the firm of Van Hattum & Blankevoort, studied law at Leiden. At the same time he made himself familiar with Dutch literature, particularly that of earlier periods, and laid the foundations for his collections. Later he set up as a lawyer in Amsterdam and built up a busy practice. During the occupation he was one of the few lawyers to display great courage in defending the victims of German persecution. After the war he became a member of the council at Velzen, his home at Santpoort being part of the administrative district of Velzen. It was in that capacity that he made himself particularly useful with his unrelenting efforts to save the Beeckesteyn estate from ruin — efforts which eventually met with success. He also exerted himself on behalf of the monuments and buildings of interest in the picturesque little town of Veere, and the foundation of the society of 'Friends of Veere' was his work.

I got to know Van Hattum in the years leading up to the occupation, and in the early occupation itself, when a small group of book-lovers would meet every morning at Salomon Israel's antiquarian bookshop in the Leidsestraat in Amsterdam. Other members of the group were Bastiaan Kist (cf. *Quaerendo*, 7 (1977), p. 103), the Greek scholar Paul Auerbach (cf. *ibid.*, 3 (1973), p. 247), the poet J.J. van Geuns and George Tielens, a collector of cookery books. Lively, full of character, quick to take an interest, always in a hurry, Van Hattum was in his element in these surroundings. He was fond of letting his friends share his unrivalled knowledge of the books to which he had given his heart. Once when he was confined to a hospital bed for several weeks, was not allowed to read and was, indeed, completely cut off from his books, he owed his recovery, so he said, to the sight of his favourite book, the *Zeeusche nachtegael*, which was placed on a whatnot in his room in such a position that he could always see it. A dramatic event in his life took place in 1953, when he found himself obliged to sell his almost complete collection of topographical books. This was on 3 June 1953 at an auction held by Van Huffel's Antiquariaat (F.W.G. Théonville) in Utrecht. However, it was not long before he was again getting his collection together, and in so doing buying back a number of the books which had once been his.

Van Hattum was not content merely to collect, however. He not only enjoyed his books, he also studied them with great thoroughness and sometimes wrote about them. At the request of the Frederik Muller Fonds he revised the *Bibliographie van Noord-Nederlandsche plaatsbeschrijvingen tot het einde der 18e eeuw*, originally compiled by Wouter Nijhoff in 1894, for its second edition, published in 1953. It was Nijhoff's wish that Van Hattum should continue this work and to this end he placed his own annotated copy at Van Hattum's disposal. Since then, of course, 'Nijhoff-Van Hattum' has become an indispensable work for both collector and antiquarian bookseller. Having completed this work he began to collect material for a sequel to cover the topographical works of the nineteenth century, when lithography and steel engraving superseded copper-plate engraving. This work, unfortunately, was never completed.

On the subject of his beloved song-books Van Hattum, who had a fine style in writing, wrote a charming little book which has received too little attention, entitled *Oude Hollandse liedboeken uit de 16e en 17e eeuw*. This treatise, which contained the text of a talk given to the Society of Friends of Amsterdam University Library (on the board of which he sat until his death), appeared in 1958 in the series 'Het model van de uitgever' under the editorship of Johan van Eikeren. The emphasis was on the illustrated secular song-books of the Golden Age. 'It is in this area', wrote Van Hattum, 'that we find the most beautiful work ever to leave the workshops of the seventeenth-century printers in the Low Countries.' He wondered whether these attractive books had been put together deliberately 'or whether the natural, spontaneous, and hence unreasoned feeling for the right proportions and the aesthetics of format, typeface, layout and illustration gave these books the shape we admire so much.' Referring to the *Neder-landtsche gedenck-clanck* by the Veere magistrate Adriaen Valerius (Haarlem 1626), Van Hattum declares: 'In this precious jewel lies the soul of the Eighty Years War', and on the *Zeeusche nachtegael*, his favourite (Middelburg 1623): 'To possess this book means to possess the Dutch seventeenth century in the confines of a few sheets of print.'

I shall mention only two of his shorter essays. In 'Boekillustratie van Romeyn de Hooghe' (published in the first volume (1942) of IMP, the organ of the 'Nederlands verbond van boeken vrienden', on whose committee Van Hattum served) he gave the first survey of the illustrative work of that artistic genius. In an obituary notice in the year-book *Haarlem* for 1946 he paid sensitive tribute to the memory of the gifted Haarlem art dealer and bookseller J. H. de Bois.