

THEUN DE VRIES

was born in 1907 in a Frisian village, from an old peasant family with strong progressive tendencies. Amongst his ancestors are an Anabaptist preacher, who at the same time was an enthusiastic Jacobin in the days of the French revolution, and several men, who showed slumbering literary qualities and strong social feeling. From all them Theun de Vries inherited a good deal.

After his father had turned from peasant to merchant, the parents of the author moved into town and later on from Friesland to the properly so called Holland, where he visited a gymnasium. Theun de Vries in his early youth began to draw and to paint, but took soon to writing. His first book, a small collection of Frisian folk tales, was published when he was yet at school. He ran away from the schoolbanks before having finished the 6 year's gymnasium course and worked as a private secretary, and officeclerk, a shop-assistant and a reporter, till he became a librarian. In the meantime he wrote several small volumes of poetry, and began, barely 20 years old, a romantic novel about Rembrandt, which was published in 1931 and provided its author with a literary prize and some fame. The book was translated into English in 1938 under the title: Son of Rembrandt (Harrap). - In 1937 Theun de Vries turned from librarianship to journalism and moved over to Amsterdam, the favourite centre of Dutch art and national culture. There he worked as a novelist and a critic, at the same time bent on economical and historical studies. Amongst his best known novels and short stories are those which deal with old Frisian peasant life and the early socialist upheavels of peat-moor workers and oppressed petty farmers. -

As a result of his historical interest Theun de Vries wrote the biographies of two distinguished Dutch statesmen: Oldenbarneveldt, one of the leading characters in the 80-year's war of the Dutch people against monarchal and feudal Spain, and of Schimmelpenninck, the antagonist of Bonaparte during the revolutionary years 1795-1812 in Holland.

In 1939 Theun de Vries started also a historical novel, dealing with old Babylonian culture and social struggles, the history of the rebel-king Urukagina of Shumer; this novel was finished in the year 1942, when the author had left Amsterdam to ..dive under.. forced into ^{isolation} by the nazi occupants, who had invaded his country. In the same year Dutch underground forced began slowly and surely to organize; Theun de Vries was soon with them. During the years 1943 and 1944 he returned from his hiding-place to Amsterdam, and took part in the resistance against the attempts of the fascist oppressors, to force the Dutch writers into a German-modelled Kulturkammer. At the same time he wrote seven stories, who dealt with several aspects of the daily life in his occupied and misused country, which stories ~~you will find here with~~ under the collective name: De Laars (The Jackboot). In the course of the year 1944 de Vries formed one of the editors of the underground paper De Vrije Katheder (The Free Cathedra), rallying the antifascist movement of intellectuals, students and artists. In July 1944 de Vries was arrested by the nazi police and put into prison and soon here after to a concentration-camp in Holland. There he was held by the nazis till March 1945, when he was delivered by a daring ruse of the Dutch Underground Resistance, and safely put away by them in the neighbourhood of Amsterdam.

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The weeks, that went by before British and Canadian troops liberated Western Holland, he spent writing an account of his camp life and composing the two last stories of De Laars.

The 5th May of 1945, the day of recovered liberty for his country. Theun de Vries appeared on the stage again as one of the leading editors of the now legalised weekly De Vrije Katheder. He has since finished a novel „Liberty wears red.. (1946) depicting the abolition of slavery in the French colony Guadeloupe during the Robespierre regimen and is working now on a 3-volume novel about the year 1848 in Europe, that will give a broad canvas of the events and personalities of a fast-moving period, as well as the clash of ideas between the world of Holy Alliance and modern socialism.



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