

VILHELM KYHN

1819–1903

76. *The Parsonage in Greve, 1877*

(*Præstegården i Greve*)

Oil on canvas, 37 x 29½ in. (94 x 75 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: V Kyhn 77

PROVENANCE: Winkel & Magnussen, Auction 160, 1934, lot 92, ill. p. 11 (described as *Greve Præstegaard*); Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 538, 1990, lot 36 (described as *Fra præstegårdshaven i Greve med kirketårnet i baggrunden*).

EXHIBITED: Charlottenborg 1878, no. 142; Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University Art Museum, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, 1994, no. 18; Bruce Museum of Art and Science, Greenwich, Connecticut, and The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, New York, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, 2005, no. 13, ill.

LITERATURE: Peter Nisbet, *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John Loeb Jr.*, Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994, ill. p. 8; Patricia G. Berman, "Lines of Solitude, Circles of Alliance, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century" in *Danish Paintings of the Nineteenth Century from the Collection of Ambassador John L. Loeb Jr.*, Bruce Museum 2005, p. 17; Patricia G. Berman, *In Another Light, Danish Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 2007, p. 117, ill. p. 115.

Peter William van Wylich (1803–1881) was a fine, wise, and much-loved minister in the parishes of Greve and Kildebrønde who retired on 30 January 1877 after thirty years of devoted service. It may be that Vilhelm Kyhn's superb picture of the parsonage that had formed the framework for van Wylich's personal and professional life for so many years was a presentation made to him by his grateful parishioners to mark his retirement.

The parsonage in Greve has a very special history. Under the pseudonym of "Nicolai, 18 Aar gammel" ("Nicolai, aged 18"), the theologian and author Henrik Scharling (1836–1920) published a novel entitled *Ved Nytaarstid i Nøddebo Præstegaard* (*New Year at Nøddebo Parsonage*). It was a tender, humorous portrayal of the idyllic life in a Danish parsonage, but at the same time contributed to the debate on social problems. The author used himself and his brothers as models for the novel's three students, who were spending their holidays in the parsonage. They bring up the social questions of the time for discussion with the gentle, understanding old pastor and his two daughters. Van Wylich is said to have served as the model for the pastor, and Nøddebo parsonage was the family's own home in Greve, where the young Scharling had been a visitor since childhood.

The book was an immediate success. Its reputation lives on in Danish popular culture, not least because it was dramatized and turned into a comic vaudeville at the end of the 1880s. *Nøddebo Præstegaard* is still performed every year at Christmas by both amateurs and professionals throughout the country.

Vilhelm Kyhn has chosen to show the lovely thatched parsonage on a beautiful day in midsummer as seen from the garden in the lee of the whitewashed medieval Greve church. One of the characteristic corbie-stepped¹ gables of the church tower stands out grandly against a magnificent clouded sky. At the top of the gable a stork is standing on one leg, while its mate is floating in from the blue sky. Farther down, a pair of pigeons are preening themselves.

We understand that the garden is spacious. A huge tree outside the area covered by the picture casts a shadow across the lawn, where some hens are walking about; the shadow just about reaches the bench in front of the white wall of the house. We glimpse flowering plants inside the window, and flowers grow outside everywhere. A profusion of pink roses are climbing up an ingenious pergola, and there are even pots on the ground containing flowering plants. The entrance, flanked by hops² on oblique frames, is crowned with a deer's formidable antlers. (Pastor Van Wylich was obviously a hunter.) He was also a paterfamilias with a large and lively family. As for the parson's wife, she "was the dearest little person."³

The painting was executed on the basis of a meticulous and almost identical preparatory study about half the size of the finished work (see Fig. A), presumably made on the spot. If we compare the two, we find only very small differences, such as slight variations in the foliage and in the distribution of the clouds.

The small town of Greve is situated about 18 miles (30 km) south of Copenhagen. The parsonage and church still exist.

S.L.



FIG. A *A Summer's Day at Greve Parsonage*, preparatory study for *The Parsonage in Greve*, 1877
Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ (44 x 37 cm), private collection

¹A series of steps that rise toward the ridgepole of a building and terminate at the upper part of a gable wall.

²A twining Eurasian vine.

³The words of the author Axel Valentiner, quoted from Wilhelm von Antoniewicz in *Greve og Kildebrønde Sognes Historie*, 1967, pp. 60–63. I am grateful to the Rev. Kjeld-Ole Munk for information on the history of Greve parsonage.