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Another Report/Letter [Undated] Was Received from Albertus C. Van Raalte and Published in De Hope

A. C. Van Raalte

Simone Kennedy

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July 12, 1866

Holland, Michigan

Another report/letter [undated] was received from Albertus C. Van Raalte and published in *De Hope* on this date. He reported that he attended the synod meeting of the Gereformeerde Kerk, the church formed from the Afscheiding of 1834, held in Amsterdam. And he was interested in many of the subjects under discussion.

He deplored the lack of missionary zeal. The church has only one missionary in Java [Indonesia].

He, as a representative of the Reformed Church in America, was happy to report that "It was also very enjoyable to know that the Synod, after having investigated the old-Holland Church in America was convinced that it kept to the doctrines, discipline and worship, and has expressed their brotherly union and recognition, and decided to keep fraternal contact as with the churches in Scotland." Undoubtedly members of the Christian Reformed Church in America had gotten the ear of some people in the Netherlands and cast aspersions on the RCA after the secession of 1857.

He and his wife continue to enjoy their stay. He commented that Americans could learn something from the Dutch about planting more trees around their homes. But the country is generally "depressed." He was astonished to see that the Harlem Lake was drained and now contained many beautiful farms.

In Dutch. Translation by Simone Kennedy, 1997.

Original in the archives of Hope College, Joint Archives of Holland, at Hope College.

the emigration movement and am glad that my children are at the other side of the ocean.²⁰ O, that all of us be grateful for this. Truly, for as long as you do not forsake God, it is far better for a human being to live in American than to live in the old, densely populated countries. With sincere greetings.

*Your Father who loves you,
A. C. van Raalte*

***De Hope, 12 July 1866
Letter from Dr. van Raalte***

We relate the following to you from the last letter we received from Dr. van Raalte:

It has been wonderful to know that the prayers of my beloved friends go up to the throne on our behalf. It is my sincere wish that your hearts be filled with joy for the heavenly matters and expanded through love. Please, write me if such is the case. By God's grace we are well and enjoy all good things abundantly.

In the last days I have had the great pleasure to attend the Synod in Amsterdam.²¹ They were very glad to receive the greetings of the brothers in the American Churches. It was great and wonderful to be able to participate in the debates going on (to which I was cordially invited) and be among so many dear friends and colleagues. To the Synod's credit all debates in their meeting were held in a sphere of openness and love, even though there were differences of opinion. Many participants are aware of the danger and damage of too many laws and defunct ordinances which were made in the past. In general people supported the rights of church councils and disapproved of hurting this by striving for uniformity.

The view on baptism, on which there are differences of opinion among us, was also discussed in several speeches. The Dutch generally seem to agree on the baptism of the descendants of baptized children, but conflict on the way this should be done, namely if they should have the baptismal witnesses answer the questions or the parents or not. All agree that baptismal members in the congregation should make a confession of faith when they have grown up.

They decided to appoint a qualified teacher for lower education at the Theological University to help overcome the shortcomings often found with seminary students who lacked this kind of education in their younger years. Although many long for a good gymnasium for the church, they judged the Church not to be knowledgeable or wealthy enough. To improve the level of education they will consider taking Utrecht up on their invitation to move the school there, and enjoy the benefits which are related to that move. But for different reasons this idea is not well received. I guess that it will "fall in the water" [fall through], as they call it here. I

²⁰ As happy as he was to see his homeland again, Van Raalte had no desire to stay there. He saw its limitations and was happy for the opportunities his children had in the United States.

²¹ Attending the Synod meeting of the Christelijke Afscheiden Gereformeerde Kerk (CGKN) was one of the compelling reasons for Van Raalte to go to the Netherlands. Dissenting pastors and churches who left the Classis of Holland over the union of Classis with the Dutch Reformed Church in 1850 and formed a new denomination in 1857 had sent letters to the CGKN seeking recognition and union. Being at the Synod meeting gave Van Raalte an opportunity to clarify and defend the action of Classis and the union of 1850 and to assure them of the orthodoxy of the Dutch Reformed Church.

wonder if the Church in the Netherlands values a seminary education as much as it should, given the value God places on it. The differences in upbringing in the separated classes in society has much influence on that. I also fear that people are too satisfied with what they already have. To my opinion this great number of Churches and Ministers should propel them to expand their life's goal, and work with great hope towards the capturing of the whole country. The soul that lives in truth and salvation cannot wish for less and should feel encouraged by God's blessings. And although mountains rise up—which can easily be flattened by God—because of the breakthrough of unbelief, through following the so-called “modern” people, Separatists have a great opportunity to work there and exert extensive influence. More and more people see that Babel is present in the Reformed Church and are unable to accept that. They long for a community where they and their children are certain to be nourished with the known truths. This situation in the Netherlands does not only require that they have a Teacher who can dispute with his opponents in all circles, but it should give them a strong stimulus to develop the finest education and increase the number of students. We know that it is not knowledge or learning that makes the converts, but God's Spirit, and that the most simple instruments are often used by Him to that end; but God teaches us other things in this, not that we should not strive to find the best gifts of knowledge and education. However, I trust that in ten years time we will find the gymnasium, etc., flourishing.

Just like with us, the foreign missions here are moved forward by the abundant gifts of churches. But there is a lack of missionary zeal, which is so necessary for the missionary himself. It is like with us: there are not enough workers. There is, for example, only one missionary on Java. Even though the fruits and the number of missionaries were disappointing, still they decided to continue—although there were some who discouraged this—and look forward to the development of such a missionary spirit. Some people considered this work to be more dependent on unique apostolic talents, than the ordinary ability to be responsible for churches. That is why it was considered a lost case, unless such a spirit would be found. These ideas were quickly coupled with discouraging thoughts about the work that still needed to be done at home and the disappointments and efforts involved in the missionary work. These considerations always hurt me deeply, because it is so easy to rest in the joy of congregational life! And seldom is this work being taken on while renouncing the world and sacrificing the self, so that our hearts rejoice, the need for prayer is created, family life is lit up and the congregation is inspired.

To my satisfaction I noticed that two provinces are working to make one or two Ministers available for domestic missions, like already is happening in Zeeland.

On the whole it has been one of the most pleasant experiences in my life and a source of thankfulness to attend this Synod Assembly. It was also very enjoyable to know that the Synod, after having investigated the old-Holland Church in America was convinced that it kept to the doctrines, discipline and worship, and has expressed their brotherly union and recognition, and decided to keep fraternal contact as with the churches in Scotland.²²

When we could push the Synod a little more, so that it would inspire a revival among the churches, like happens in America, England or Scotland, it would be twice as useful. In that case an Annual Assembly would also no longer be feared, but looked forward to.

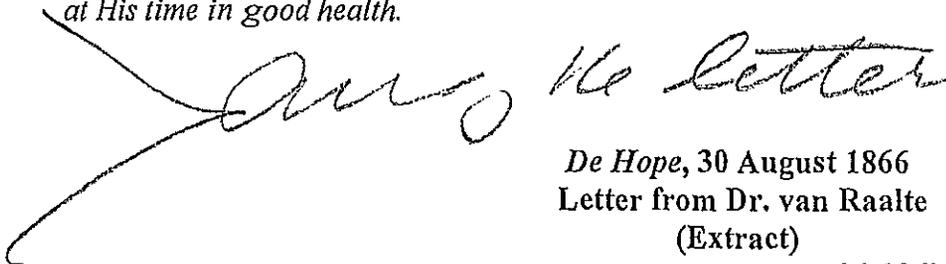
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During my stay in Amsterdam I saw the drained Haarlemmer Lake. It is worth the effort to see those beautiful farms there. To have such a victory over water is a manly matter. The size of the area is, I estimate, 18 by 10 miles. The Separatist churches have two sizable congregations there. This lake was drained with the use of three pumps, each with 300 horsepower. It was a sweet surprise to see the devouring wolf changed into a milk-producing cow. Plans are now on the way to dig a canal from the North Sea via Haarlem to Amsterdam and the Y-Lake, to enliven the trade from Amsterdam through an easy route to the North Sea. But that spirit of speculating in bonds, which made the Stock Exchange a lottery, should first be diminished.

On that Sunday during the Assembly I had to preach in Amsterdam, in the new church on the Keizersgracht; that church can probably hold 1500 people. During the week I also preached in Zaandam, in a nice church with an attentive audience. Many asked after their American friends, and it was a pleasure for me to tell them a few things. This place is very neat and decent, and we in Holland might follow their example by planting more trees and surround the houses more with lovely foliage. There are many calls to preach, and by God's goodness I love this work. It is such a wonderful thought that God might desire to use my trip to convert some people. Through lack of time and my obligation not to overwork myself I can already see that I will not be able to accept all calls. Tomorrow I plan go to Putten, God willing, where I will talk with future emigrants and hope to preach.

The country is generally depressed. Trade is blocked because of the bankruptcies of banks and trade houses, mainly caused by the threatening war. They suffer more from uncertainties in trade than in war. The cattle plague is only troubling South Holland and Utrecht, but hits sometimes very hard. Somebody told me that eleven farmers had lost 350 cows together. Cholera is spreading even further, especially in South Holland. Also in Amsterdam, although that is not yet documented, but in the neighborhood where I stayed three persons died of it. It is generally worse than can be read in the papers. These circumstances impede many matters and depress numerous people. Yes, it would be terrible when you were hit, but did not feel pain! But we all know that blessings nor judgments can bring sinners salvation, without the powerful influence of God's Spirit. This pouring-out of the rain of God's Spirit is what the world, what the Netherlands, need. So why should we not, each for himself, and all for each other, pray more fervently for this Spirit of God, whom God has promised to give through His Son?

Be so kind as to give my greetings, my sincere greetings, yes, my greetings of love, to all at your prayer meeting. I do not forget my people, even not when surrounded with so many sweetnesses. . . . Greet our friends who ask after us, especially the church council and the Ministers who preach in my place. . . . May God our Lord keep you and bring us together again at His time in good health.



The letter

De Hope, 30 August 1866
Letter from Dr. van Raalte
(Extract)

Middelburg, July 30, 1866

Many families in the Netherlands wear mourning clothes for the beloved ones who died

the emigration movement and am glad that my children are at the other side of the ocean.²⁰ O, that all of us be grateful for this. Truly, for as long as you do not forsake God, it is far better for a human being to live in American than to live in the old, densely populated countries. With sincere greetings.

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