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### Letter from A. C. Van Raalte to Christina de Moen Van Raalte

Albertus C. Van Raalte

Leonard Sweetman

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October 2, 1837

Utrecht, the Netherlands

A letter of A. C. Van Raalte, to his wife, Christina de Moen Van Raalte, "written in haste in a dark corner and while the disputation is going on," stating that Simon Van Velzen was elected chairman and Hendrik P. Scholte, secretary. Van Raalte was depressed with the difficulties in the synod. VR hopes that little Albertus has recovered from his cold.

One translation of the letter is located in the Calvin College Archives: the Van Raalte Collection, Box 8, folder 107. Another translation has been published by Leonard Sweetman in *From Heart to Heart, Letters from the Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte to His Wife, Christina Johanna Van Raalte-De Moen, 1836-1847*, a Heritage Hall Publication, 1997, pp. 15-18. The Dutch text is found on pp. 54-56.

*Hartelijk Geliefde Vrouw!*

De Heere schenke U de vertroosting des Heiligen Geestes welke vloeijen uit de verzegeling van het kinschap Gods opdat gij Uwe verluchting moogt vinden in den Heere en in de dingen die het koninkrijke Gods aangaan: Uwe groete heb ik uit de mond van de Jong ontvangen en met genoeg uwe welstand alsmede die van de geachte Familie Van Velzen vernomen: Van harte wensch ik dat Albertus van zijne verkouwenheid moge hersteld zijn; wat mij aangaat ik ben zwaar verkouwen doch weder eenigzins aan de betere hand: Van Velzen is wel. Nu nog iets wat de vergadering aangaat: Van Velzen is verkozen tot Praeses en Scholte tot Scriba, tot heden toe is er eigenlijk nog niet over de hoofdpunten gesproken groot en menigvuldig zijn de verschillende denkwijzen die zich openbaren, ik kan niet ontveinzen, dat de bezwaren mij dikwerf nederdrukken: k gevoel de Heere alleen kan de kerke behoeden bewaren en bouwen, voor 's menschen oog is het duister ja zeer duister! Ach mogt de Heere verzoening doen over de zonden zijns volks want om der zonden wille is de Breuke Sions zoo groot!

Wanneer de vergadering geeindigd zal zijn kan ik niet gissen het zal veel afhangen of de gemoederen geneigd zullen zijn, al de te behandelene zaken, in orde na te gaan. maar ik vrees daar sterk voor, weshalve het wel zouden kunnen gebeuren dat aanstaande Zaterdag de laatste zitting gehouden worden, doch indien de zaken regt ontwikkeld zullen worden, zal de vergadering ook nog wel aanstaande week duren: mogt de Heere schenken vereeniging van gevoel en harten maar gewis 's Heeren vinger zal merkelyk geopenbaard moeten worden, want bij den mensch wordt het onmogelyk: —

Volgens Uwe mij opgedragene last heb ik Daattjes

geschreven aangaande de komkimmers eten: ook heb ik haar Uw en mijn adres opgegeeven doch nog geen tijding ontvangen: maar nog meer bevreed het mij dat ik nog geen letterje van U ontvangen heb: dat begeer ik gaarne van U: Nu geliefde vrouw de Heere verlichte vertrooste en heilige U, en schenke U in den gebede aan deze vergadering te denken: zijt van mij en Br. Van Velzen hartelyk gegroet alsmede de gansche geachte Familie Zoen voor ons Albertus en Simon. Br. Van Velzen heeft geen tijd om te schrijven maar verzoekt t geen ten uwent ontvangen voor Hem zulks herwaarts te zenden.

De Heere schenke U het onderwijs van Zijnen heiligen Geest Amen!

*Uwhartelyk Liefhebbenden Man*  
A. C. Van Raalte<sup>2</sup>

geschreven in haast in  
eene donkere hoek in te midden  
onder het disputeren. —

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1. The "7" is missing in the original manuscript: "183" is the reading. There is no evidence of anything else having been written after the "3." That 1837 is the correct date, however, can be seen by the address to which this letter was sent and the address to which the letter dated 4 October 1837 was sent. Both are addressed:

Mejufvrouw C.J. Van Raalte.  
adres  
Mejufvrouw de Wed: S. Van Velzen  
agtergracht  
te  
Amsterdam

Therefore, the 1837 date seems reasonable.

2. The letter bears a red circular stamp on the envelope which reads:

"UTRECHT 2 OCT." Another circular red stamp appears on the back side of the envelope which is not legible because the wax seal prevented the red circular stamp from making a complete impression on the envelope. What is legible is "A . . . 3 OCT." It is reasonable to assume that "AMSTERDAM" is the place in which this letter was received and stamped on 3 October 1837.

UTRECHT

4 October 1837

*Hartelijke Geliefde Vrouw!*

Heden morgen ontving ik tot mijne blijdschap eenige letters van U welke ik vurig verlangde, te meer omrede allen brieven ontvingen behalve ik: t smartede mij dat gij niet zeer opgeruimd verkeert, de Heere bestiere ook deze donkerheid vor U ten besten, het spore U aan tot nadere beproevinge voor U zelven voor den Heere, het dreive U uit tot den Heere, God doe het verstrekken om U te leeren in den donker op den Heere te vertrouwen: Uwe lichamelijke welstand wat mij verblijdende; de ongesteldheid van Albertus doet mij pijn aan de Heere herstelle Hem spoedig zoo het met zijn raad bestaanbaar kan zijn, Doch Zijne Wille geschiede, Hij doe met Hem t geen goed in Zijne oogen is want Hij is Zijn eigendom, De Heere geeve ons te berusten in Zijne wegen: —

Lieve Vrouw gij schrijft mij dat ik niet te zeer bedrukt moet zijn van wege de toestand der gemeente, vermits de trouwe des Heeren onveranderlijk is; wanneer ik de zaken aan de zijde Gods kan beschouwen, zoo geniet ik somwijlen eene verademing Hij toch doet zijn volk niet na Hunne zonden: maar zoo ik de heer schende verwardheid, vloeiende uit blindheid wantrouwen en hoogmoed, in de gemeente gadesla zoo wordt het mij bange: deeze dag is door 's Heeren goedheid iets bedaarder afgelopen dan de vorige doch t wantrouwen en misverstand is niet weggenomen: vloeit er iets goeds uit deeze vergadering zoo zal het des Heeren doen zijn.

Dat Zuster Naattje uit de stad is bevalt mij schoon: t verwonderde mij dat gij mij niet meldet of gij Zuster Chusje tot Uwe genoegen ontmoet had. —

Van Schoolte heb ik vernomen dat zijne vrouw heden bij Brand<sup>1</sup> logeert, gij zult wel doen zoo gij Haar eens opzoekt: —

Als ik eenigzins kan en de omstandigheden er toe leidende

# FROM HEART TO HEART

*Letters from the  
Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte  
to His Wife,  
Christina Johanna Van Raalte-De Moen,  
1836 – 1847*

*Edited by*  
Leonard Sweetman

*Translated by*  
Egbert Ralph Post  
Leonard Sweetman  
David Van Vliet

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writing from Hattem. On the basis of the chronology he gives for his travels during the course of the week, one is able to conclude that he wrote the first two-thirds of the letter in all probability on 8 May.

2. Family visiting is a pastoral act in Reformed churches. The pastor and an elder annually visited all the families in the congregation to support the family in their Christian faith, to encourage the family in the life of gratitude or the life of obedience to the Lord, and to "take the pulse" of the congregation relative to faith and practice.

3. Cf. Note 1 concerning the letter of 24 April 1837.

UTRECHT

October 2, 1837

*Dearly Beloved Wife,*

The Lord give you the comfort of the Holy Spirit which flows forth from being sealed as a child of God, so that you may find illumination in the Lord and in the things which concern the Kingdom of God.

I received your greetings by word of mouth from De Jong<sup>1</sup> and was pleased to learn of your well-being and also of the well-being of the esteemed family of Van Velzen.<sup>2</sup> I sincerely hope that Albertus has recovered from his cold. Concerning myself, I have a bad cold but I am getting better. Van Velzen is well.

Now something about the meeting: Van Velzen was chosen as chairman and Scholte<sup>3</sup> as clerk. Up to the present time there has been no discussion of the main issues. The different points of view which come to expression are numerous and are expressed frequently. I cannot disguise the fact that the difficulties often make me depressed. I feel the Lord alone can guard, protect and build the churches. In the eyes of people this is mysterious! Very mysterious indeed! O that the Lord would propitiate the sins of his people for sin is the cause of the great fractures in Zion.

I cannot guess when the meeting will end. Much will depend on whether consciences will be inclined to examine in an orderly manner the matters which are on the table. But I am very much afraid with regard to that. For that reason it could happen that the final session will be held next Saturday. If the matters are dealt with properly, however, the assembly may last through the whole of next week also. May the Lord effect unity of feelings and emotions. Of course, the Lord's finger must be revealed in this, because humanly speaking it is impossible.

In accordance with your instructions I wrote Daatjes about eating the cucumbers. I also have given her your and my address, but have not received even a note. What surprises me

even more is that I did not receive a note from you. I greatly desire this from you.

Now, my beloved wife, the Lord enlighten, comfort and sanctify you and grant that you will remember this assembly in your prayers.

Hearty greetings from Brother Van Velzen and me and also from his entire esteemed family. Kiss Albertus and Simon for us. Br. Van Velzen does not have time to write but requests that you forward whatever post you receive for him.

The Lord grant you the instruction of his Holy Spirit. Amen!

*Your dearly loving husband,  
A.C. Van Raalte*

Written in haste in a dark corner while the disputation is going on.

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1. De Jong — Perhaps this is Dirk De Jong, a baker, who was an elder in the Separated Church of Krabbendam and who proclaimed the gospel as a layman (oefenaar) in many places in the Netherlands for several decades. Cf. Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Immigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, Vols. 1 and 2, Robert Swierenga, general editor, and Adriaan De Wit, chief translator, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985, p. 108.

2. Cf. Letter dated April 24, 1837, Note 1.

3. Scholte — Hendrik Peter Scholte was one of the ministers who were leaders of the Separation (Afscheiding) from the Hervormde Kerk which began in 1834. He was born in Amsterdam on 25 September 1805 and died in Pella, Iowa, USA, on 5 August 1868. His parents were middle-class people who were well-to-do. His father served as an elder in the Reformed Lutheran congregation. Hendrik Scholte, however, made confession of faith in the Hervormde Kerk, and went to Leiden to study theology where he came under the influence of the poet Da Costa through attendance at his Sunday evening Bible readings. With Brummelkamp, Scholte attended the worship services in Leiden which were led by Le Febure. One other influence exerted on

Scholte during his school days was that of T. Van Rozenburg who introduced Scholte to the "thought pattern of the free churches."

In 1833 Scholte was ordained as a pastor in Doeveren where he attracted large crowds from the entire area known as the Land of Heusden. Soon the congregation in Doeveren was forced to add a gallery to the church building. This attracted the attention of the church officials to the young pastor.

Scholte did not read the questions which were prescribed for use in the worship service which was preparatory to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Evangelical Hymns which were given to the churches for use in their worship services Scholte did not use. Scholte, moreover, publicly gave witness to the deviation from the truth which the Hervormde Kerk tolerated in the preaching of the pastors. To make clear what the result of this would be, Scholte pointed to the judgments of God which were visible already in war and pestilence. This attracted the church leaders' attention.

De Cock sent copies of his brochures to Scholte who entered into correspondence with De Cock. When De Cock was deposed, Scholte expressed his horror concerning this outrage. In October, 1834, Scholte visited De Cock in Ulrum and preached there during a week-day worship service without obtaining the permission of the moderator to do so. The following Sunday Scholte was denied permission to preach in the Ulrum Church building. He therefore held a worship service in a field behind the parsonage of the church. The Classical Committee of Heusden, after notification from higher authority, suspended Scholte from his ministry without any previous warning on 29 October 1834. Scholte knew where the path he was walking led. Therefore, along with virtually the entire congregation of Doeveren, he signed the Act of Separation on 1 November 1834. This act declared that the signatories were no longer willing to live under a governing body which placed human decisions above the Word of God. The Executive Committee of the Provincial Synod of North Brabant on 10 December 1834 suspended Scholte from his pastoral office. He was oppressed constantly, and, therefore, moved to Gorinchem. He continued to preach in Doeveren and saw people from Gorinchem in the worship services. In 1837 he accepted the call of the Separated Congregation in Utrecht to serve as pastor there. The days of disputation were not ended, however, as Scholte played a significant role in "The Amsterdam Dispute" during the Synod of the Separated Congregations which ended in Scholte's suspension as a pastor of the Separated Congregations. This led to his emigration to North America in 1847.

Scholte did not go to Michigan where Van Raalte established the colony in Holland. He, rather, joined with Hendrik Barendregt who led a group of Dutch emigrants to New Orleans. This group planned to move north to St.



Louis from where a decision would be made concerning the "new home" of this group. Scholte found that Iowa was a place far better suited to Dutch people than Michigan. In Marion County, Iowa, at the end of August and the beginning of September, in 1847, the "caravan" of Netherlanders began to build Pella: the new city which was named for the city of refuge in the Transjordan to which early Christians fled when they left Jerusalem due to oppression.

Scholte played a significant role in the establishment and development of Pella. Scholte rejected overtures to become part of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. Scholte in the early years of Pella did not deviate significantly from the confessional position of the Reformed churches, but he did not wish to become bound to an organization which could influence in an unacceptable manner the church of Christ in Pella. Ultimately he was not able to hold the church in Pella together. He left the church he had established. Only a small number of people remained with Scholte as loyal followers. Within a year of Scholte's death that congregation dissolved.

Scholte's most significant work, perhaps, was his work in establishing Christian weekly publications by means of which he was able to educate and shape the community of Christ. He used these vehicles to bring the lordship of Christ to bear upon political life in the new country. Here, too, Scholte proved to be an erratic leader. He championed the Democratic party for years and in 1860, suddenly, he switched parties. He became a delegate to the national convention of the Republican party which nominated Lincoln for President. After the election, Lincoln nominated Scholte as ambassador of the United States to the Netherlands, but, as happens so often in political life, the nomination got lost in the political moves and was never processed.

In the weekly papers, Scholte published Bible studies which provided meaningful guidance to God's people. In only one area did he publicly deviate from his Reformed background: chiliasm.

Although Scholte planned to visit the Netherlands once more in 1857, the plans did not materialize. In 1868, on 25 August, he complained about a pain in his side and within a few moments he died. He was sixty-two years and eleven months of age. Only a short time before he died he sang lustily the metrical version of Psalm 68, verse 10, that wonderful stanza which has encouraged God's suffering people through the years: "Give Praise to God with reverence deep; he daily comes our lives to keep and kindly bears our burdens. Our God upholds us in the strife; to us he grants eternal life and saves from all that threatens."

Cf. "Scholte (Hendrik Peter)" *CHRISTELIJKE ENCYCLOPAEDIE VOOR HET NEDERLANDSCHE VOLK*, Vol. V. Kampen: J.H. Kok, N.V., n.d., pp. 93-96.

UTRECHT

October 4, 1837

*Dearly Beloved Wife,*

This morning I was pleased to receive several letters, for which I had been longing fervently, especially because everyone had received letters except me. I was sorry to learn that you are not very cheerful. May the Lord direct this darkness so that it is for your welfare. May this spur you on in further trials before the Lord. May this drive you to the Lord. God grant that it may teach you to place your trust in the Lord in times of darkness.

I was pleased to know that you are physically well. Albert's illness caused me pain. May the Lord grant him a speedy recovery if that is consistent with His will. But His will be done. May the Lord do to him what is best in His sight for Albert is His possession. May the Lord enable us to be at rest in His ways.

Dear Wife, you write that I must not be too concerned about the situation in the congregation because God's faithfulness is unchangeable. When I regard things from God's point of view, now and then I enjoy relief. He does not deal with his people according to their sins. When, however, I observe desecrating disorder flowing into the church out of blindness, distrust and pride, then I become fearful. Today, through the goodness of the Lord something turned out to be more satisfying than the previous time. The distrust and misunderstanding, nevertheless, have not been taken away. If something good emerges from this meeting that will be the result of the Lord's action.

That sister Naaltje is out of the city pleases me very much. I wonder, however, why you did not inform me if you had a delightful meeting with sister Chusje.

I take it from Scholte that today his wife is lodging with Brand. You would do well to call on her.