

VU Research Portal

Herman Bavinck's 'my journey to America'

Harinck, George; Eglinton, James

published in

Dutch Crossing
2017

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330](https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

document license

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Harinck, G., & Eglinton, J. (2017). Herman Bavinck's 'my journey to America'. *Dutch Crossing*, 41(2), 180-193.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl



Herman Bavinck's 'My Journey to America'

James Eglinton

To cite this article: James Eglinton (2017) Herman Bavinck's 'My Journey to America', Dutch Crossing, 41:2, 180-193, DOI: [10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330](https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03096564.2016.1235330>



Published online: 16 Feb 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 233



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Herman Bavinck's 'My Journey to America'

GEORGE HARINCK

VU University Amsterdam, NL

JAMES EGLINTON

University of Edinburgh, UK

This travel account was written in 1892 by Herman Bavinck, then professor of systematic theology at the Theological School in Kampen, following a *séjour* in North America. His account of this trip deals with (i) land and nature, (ii) American culture (intentionally viewed from the bottom), (iii) towns and cities, (iv) houses and home life, (v) the character of the inhabitants, and the (vi) social, (vii) moral, and (viii) religious lives of late nineteenth century Americans.

KEYWORDS Herman Bavinck, America, Canada, travel writing, nineteenth century

Introduction

This travel account was written by Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), professor of systematic theology at the Theological School in Kampen and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, following a *séjour* in North America in 1892. Bavinck's notes were first transcribed and published in Dutch by George Harinck in 1998.¹ On account of its elegant Dutch prose, wonder-struck perspective and reluctance to make value judgments concerning the 'foreign', Harinck's edition of *Mijne reis naar Amerika* was awarded the Koninklijke Bibliotheek's 2010 prize for outstanding Dutch travel writing.²

Mijne reis naar Amerika should be viewed within an historical setting where published accounts of foreign travel were relatively common. Bavinck's own colleague Abraham Kuiper (1837–1920), for example, also published a travel journal based on a voyage through North America that made many similar observations.³ Viewed against that backdrop, *Mijne reis naar Amerika* is useful as a further historical example of nineteenth

century Dutch opinion-formation regarding the United States of America and its still youthful culture. Predating Stead's *The Americanization of the World*⁴ by a decade, it also serves to indicate a rising European awareness of the American future.

My Journey to America (transl. by James Eglinton)

1. Travel is an art that one must learn.
2. Moving oneself easily, opening one's eyes, preferring observation [to judgment].
3. Observing, perceiving, and valuing.

Whenever one travels far, one gains stories to tell. That is especially the case when one travels to America - distant, great and powerful. The impressions [gained there] are so overwhelmingly numerous and rich that study is needed should one wish to sort and present them in an orderly fashion. I have endeavoured to do so, and following an initial overview of our⁵ journey, offer the following outline: (i) land and nature, (ii) culture from the bottom, (iii) towns and cities, (iv) houses and home life, (v) character of the inhabitants, (vi) social, (vii) moral, and (viii) religious life.

The journey. However long a journey of three months may seem to be, and really is, it is not long enough when travelling from England to America. On the 22nd of July, we went to Rotterdam en route via Harwich to London, and stayed there until the 27th of July. Then, we went to Liverpool and set out on the new and beautiful Dominion Line steamboat the Labrador to Quebec and Montreal in Canada. The journey across the sea was pleasant in many regards, as far as our two journeys are concerned. We did not meet the sea in its rage, we did not see its anger. (Seasickness – weak, slothful, listless, sickly, bleak, bored, miserable, irritated.) Only once have we felt how she can grow angry and furious, when she is goaded by the wind and throws up her waves. Now our only impressions of her are twofold: concerning her endless magnitude and width, and her ceaseless turning. The journey from Liverpool to Quebec is 2,600 [miles], to New York – 2,812 miles long, which is approximately 130 hours. That is quick to say, but one feels the length and the cost first, when one sees nothing but water – infinitely wide, everywhere – day after day, night after night. And with that the commotion, no single moment of stillness, always in motion, vigorous but never still, looking for peace, chasing it, but finding it nowhere; a picture of the disquiet of the human heart. The journey is so long that one grows bored in the last days, and gasps for land. It is an event, *ein Ereignis des Tages* [an 'Event of the Day'], when a ship, a bird, a whale, an iceberg is seen; and joy beams from all [on board] when, after days at sea, land finally comes into sight. *Overigens ist die ganze Sache etwas langweilig* ['Anyway, the whole thing is a bit boring'] (Dr Goebel),⁶ and no comfort from the boat, no pleasure from food or drink, no friendly treatment from the staff, no warm conversation between passengers can keep us from that monotony and irritation. It is so overwhelming, to have no firm ground beneath one's feet, always to be rocking back and forth. We are not marine animals. Quite simply, we were created [as] land animals. We need a firm base upon which to stand, and cannot live in the air. Thus at sea one learns to understand

the beauty of the promise: 'For the mountains may depart, and the hills be moved, but God's covenant is for ever fixed.'⁷

For us it was a joy to set foot on dry land again. And what we first saw was a marvel. Between Labrador and Newfoundland we travelled through the Strait of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is called a gulf, but it is more than a sea, it is so large. Gradually, the Gulf becomes smaller and takes us onto the St. Lawrence River. A stunning river, broad, great, mighty, hemmed in on both sides by high banks and hills with very friendly villages here and there. (French origins and names of churches). The rivers of America are exceptionally beautiful. Everything is great and grand, graceful and noteworthy, it is all colossal. And there are also beautiful views, beautiful beyond description. The sunset, on the evening of Friday the 5th of August, was astounding. On the following day, Saturday the 6th of August, we arrived in Quebec by midday. The location is exceptional. The city is built on a protruding sharp rock, in the middle of the river. The boat stayed there for a few hours. We wandered around and beheld beauty as never before seen. We made our way to the easterly side of the St. Lawrence River and had, on the one side, the view of the elevated Quebec. Behind that, on the other side, in the west, the sun set slowly. A shroud of now heavier, then lighter, cloud hung before her. And through the shroud the sun threw her beams at the beautiful and electronically lit Quebec in a thousand-fold tints and colours and forms. Indescribably beautiful, unapproachable with the pen, that it might be turned into poetry; it is only to be enjoyed in unspoken wonder and silent worship. We have beautiful skies, but Canada's are more beautiful still.

From Montreal we travelled with the American Great Trunk Railway, through the tunnel of Port Huron (train travel in America), which goes on for more than half an hour under the sea, to Michigan, to the colony of Dutch [*Hollandsche*] settlers. The part of Michigan that we saw is good and beautiful land, but in terms of virtue pales in comparison to Pella, the colony of Scholte,⁸ and this also falls short of Orange City, the settlement of Rev. Bolks⁹ and Mr. Hospers.¹⁰ Michigan was all forest, in Orange City everything was prairie, endless grasslands, but nonetheless a fruitful, rich and beautiful foundation, with few trees, but still beautiful in its immense undulation.

We did not go further than Orange City, which is approximately half the way across the United States. That was the furthest point to the west. From there, we turned towards Milwaukee and Lake Michigan, moving slowly westwards. Our journey led us back to Toronto, where the Council was held.¹¹ Together with the delegates we visited Niagara Falls on Saturday the 24th of September, around three hours' journey from Toronto. A mental image of this waterfall cannot be given. At first it takes some effort, but how much more and longer one sees it, how much more it increases in greatness and grandeur. The Niagara gathers all the water from the four great Lakes of America (Superior, Michigan, Hudson and Erie, and leads over to Lake Ontario), and is colossally broad before the waterfall, and is very shallow (and comes to an end half a mile before the falls). The ground is rocky; it is as though the water itself is nervous, to bore through the rock it is forced over and along it. And that is where the current comes, tumbling, (playing, frolicking), springing, greeting, sparking over the thousands of rocks and along

the many (rocky) islets (especially the sisters). One can go or travel to these islands, and then there, for the first time, behold the waterfall.¹² Beyond this, the bottom immediately breaks off, and one sees a depth of (...) ¹³ feet. The water, as though it had been enraged by the rocks and islands, does not fall, but rather crashes into the deep with violence, furious, boiling, tumbling, and falls away in the water beneath, so deeply that the surface of the water below remains calm, so much so that one can take a boat very near the waterfall itself. The water forced under first comes back to the surface half an hour later (by the strong curve of the river, formed by the whirlpool) and has such power that it is unnavigable. The beauty is increased by the waterfall itself being broken into two great sections, the American part at (...) ¹⁴ feet wide, and the Canadian part, which is shaped like a horseshoe and is (...) ¹⁵ feet long. When we had seen the waterfall from above, we then finally viewed it from the other side. The Rhine Falls are beautiful, but Niagara is majestic beyond description.¹⁶ It was unfortunate that we did not have more time there.

At five o'clock we travelled by train to Albany, and after passing Sunday the 25th of September there we left on the Monday by steamer for New York, following the Hudson. The Hudson is the American Rhine, but is broader; it passes along hilly banks (the Catskill Mountains), with cities and towns on both sides, its winding curves propelling it, pushing it through the rocks. But here there are no days like those on the Rhine;¹⁷ romance is absent. America is too young. At six o'clock we arrived in New York, which is also beautifully located. To the East it is divided from Brooklyn by the East River, to the West from Jersey by the Hudson. And then both of these areas, Brooklyn and Jersey City, leap out in a great bend before us, and form a cordon around the actual New York, making up the New York Bay, while different islets (Long Island to the north, Staten Island to the south, and between them Ellis and Governors Islands) in the Bay have taken root, as it were, like faithful sentries around New York. That sight was especially beautiful, on the 5th October when we left the American coast from Jersey and set off by New York through the Bay into the ocean. Europe, yes, but also America has its beautiful and stirring natural scenes. God is great, also in America.

2. In terms of culture, this land, wide in a dizzying sense, is only four centuries old. It was precisely four hundred years ago that Columbus, having left the Spanish haven on the 12th of July, arrived in Columbia on the 14th of October. The Columbian Celebration is held everywhere in America, and was prepared in the last days of our stay. And since that time America has been a place for refugees and pilgrims, for thousands from Europe. While South America was populated from Spain and Portugal, the North was populated primarily by the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon race. And once again, the north of [the] Americas' United States [was populated] by Puritans, democrats, men of the people, and in the south especially by Episcopalians, aristocrats, monarchists. The power of the United States lies in New England (Yankee (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut)): the throne of power and energy. Reformed Puritans have left their mark on America. Our people and land have had their part in this. Hollanders, who were the first settlers there, founded New York. Numerous names were originally Dutch and still call this to remembrance (Harlem in New York, see Cohen Stuart¹⁸). Many families treat their descent from these old Dutchmen as a

badge of honour. In many families Dutch [*Hollandsch*] was still spoken until recently, or it was used for reading and prayer. 'Grandfather or grandmother still knew Dutch,' many told me. In Iowa I travelled with someone, Mr. A. van Stout, whose forefathers left the Netherlands for New Amsterdam in 1627. The Dutch Bible and Dutch books are still kept as heirlooms in many families. The descendants of these old settlers are now becoming the current day nobility, the aristocracy of America.

But the influence of the Hollanders is greater still. New research has brought this to the fore. Griffis¹⁹ and Douglas Campbell²⁰ in particular, have invested their strength in this. The founding of the monument to Robinson²¹ in Leiden is a prior reason for this. Earlier historians have traced the making of America in politics (social, religious) to England. However, [the reality] seems to be wholly different. England was never an example for America. Rather, first, many Hollanders were exiled to the eastern parts of England during the time of persecution, precisely the land from which most immigrants under the Stuarts left for America. And secondly, the Pilgrim Fathers sojourned in the Netherlands for fifteen years, sailing from Delfshaven to America in 1620. The oldest inhabitants of New England seem to have learned their industry, politics, freedom of religion, social establishment and diligence from the Dutch.

And finally, America has also been a refuge to thousands of Hollanders in this century. Michigan was purchased in 1847 by Van Raalte.²² One hundred thousand Hollanders still live in America: 20,000 in Grand Rapids, with twenty-two churches; farmers within a twenty mile radius of Pella and Orange City, with a great number in Paterson and Roseland, Holland and the surrounding area (the united states of the Netherlands). For all of these immigrants, the earliest history was one of suffering. I recall only those of Van Raalte: they arrived in the winter. Everything was forest, [long] hours and the expanse of miles. Everyone had to work. Wood had no worth; rather, it was the enemy. And when a section of forest had been cut down, the [sun's] rays shone through [and the clearing] became an oven. Numerous gasses arose. Many suffered and died, but Van Raalte inspired bravery. He preached on Sundays, after which everyone went back to work with renewed courage. And so they suffered and battled on, year after year. In time it became a flourishing colony. Many towns were begun. In the surrounding area Dutch is spoken and understood: New Zealand [Zeeland], Overissel [Overisel Township], Drente [Drenthe], Groningen – the united states of Holland. America has been developed like this throughout, by Hollanders, the English, Germans, by all manner of European nations. Deserts, forests and prairies are transformed into blooming and fruitful fields, upon which cities and towns are laid. In many places it is holy ground: the blood, tears, suffering and prayers of the forefathers have made it holy. And still the culture goes on. Emigration continues. America is so wondrously large. One can travel through it for days and nights on end. We do not understand its expanse. It is (...) ²³ miles wide, and (...) ²⁴ miles long (approximately as large as Europe, sixty times larger than England and Wales). A single province is far larger than the Netherlands. And it is a fruitful, rich land. It has everything, can provide for itself, and can exist independently. It has grain, meat, bread, gold, silver, iron, tin, coal, gas, petroleum, everything necessary for human existence. For who is willing to work, there is bread in abundance. There is indeed poverty,

but it does not need to be there. The people there are all thankful. They press on. They see a bright future. They have renewed faith and hope, the courage to face life, and the strength to live life. Not everyone there becomes rich. That only happens to a few, and that more by the increase of the price of land than by normal work. But everyone there has a piece of bread. Many there have bread, and many have also found faith in Christ.

3. This cultivation still carries on. There, everything is unpolished, a work-in-progress: nothing looks tidy, finished or ready. And in everything there is the impulse to work. Meadows, houses, cities, towns – everything is marked by its newness, by its state of becoming. A city like New York, old and European, is more or less an exception in that regard. The further one travels westwards, the more one encounters that newness and incompleteness. Idle hands are ne'er to be found, but nothing is complete. The meadows are often covered in weeds – there is no time for weeding, and not enough hands to cover endless fields. They are divided by rows of rough tree stumps, upturned tree roots, pieces of wood angled against each other, and first in the more recent time by wire. The houses, first made of logs in the settlers' time, are still made of wood, even in the large cities. The pavements are wooden and coarse. Even in the middle of the city the roads are still often rough, gritty, sandy or made of clay, and cannot be crossed in the rain. However, to the extent that the residents of the street become wealthier (as they must pay for the roads in the form of taxation) these are making way for beautiful roads of cedar wood, of gravel and stones, and especially of asphalt. The more recent cities and towns are all planned in the same square shape. The streets form straight lines and crisscross in equally straight lines. They have no names other than 1st, 2nd, 3rd street. This is not so in the older cities and the oldest parts of New York, but the newer cities are (almost) all planned in this way. One can feel at home there very easily. The streets are broad and spacious, but there is something monotonous about it all. The cities are all systematically, methodically developed, then constructed. Nothing has grown; rather, everything is made. All the cities are the same in build and design. Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Washington – everything is the same. They have no history or poetry. Further to this, all the cities have in common that the area for business, and the area where the businessmen live, are separate. It is completely the norm that the businessmen do not live in or above their stores. The houses [buildings] in the business area are only for business; intended as shops, stores, offices. But the people live outside these areas in individual houses. And these boulevards are beautifully laid out. Every day, in the mornings at six or seven or eight o'clock, the gentlemen go to their businesses, and return in the evenings at six o'clock, and then the majority of the shops are closed, and there is nothing more to be done. The residential houses are beautifully built. In the business area the houses [buildings] stand close to each other, but on the boulevards each house stands separately, each has its own yard, and before and behind each, and on both sides, is surrounded by a well maintained, clean, fresh patch of grass (lawn), and sometimes also by flower beds (cemeteries). The houses are very different to ours, in terms of interior design and build. First, they all resemble villas, and all have larger or smaller verandas. Following this, they are all, accordingly, lighter, happier, livelier, more varied than our houses. And finally the division and design of rooms is wholly different to our own.

Hallways running through the entire house are unknown. Sometimes one does have a hall (vestibule) with the stairway leading up, and the parlour next to it. After this there are always two rooms, a sitting room and a bedroom; and after this another two, a dining room and a bedroom, and after this a kitchen, a maid's room, and so on. The houses are very comfortable and practically designed. One can also enter the sitting room from outside, and immediately one is in the house. The outside corresponds to the inside: furniture is usually far lighter in colour than ours, carpet, chairs, tables, ceiling and walls are all light yellow. It is striking and less sombre, chic, simple in style, compared to our own. Comfort is catered for, particularly so by the chairs. In each room there are rocking chairs, upon which one can place oneself in a free and easy manner, women included. Sometimes an entire company can sit in ceaseless rocking back and forth, a symbol of the restless and nervous American nature: certainly comfortable, but not gracious or charming. The bedrooms are outstanding, with large and wide bedframes, superbly set out and covered. Only the pillows disappoint.

4. The people who live in the west are indeed remarkable. People are always the most important thing. 'The study of mankind is man.'²⁵ And among the peoples, the American people are assuming a greater and greater place. They are already noteworthy because of their background. The Anglo-Saxon, and thus Germanic, element forms the foundation and chief ingredient of this. But how many other peoples have exercised influence, and what number of other elements has been taken in! Not to speak of the blacks, emancipated since 1865 and currently increasing in number and strength, and of the Chinese, who are becoming wealthy in America: the Americans themselves are a mixture. English, Scots, Irish, Dutch, French, Germans, Italians, Swedes, Norwegians – all the peoples of Europe have added something of themselves to the American character. The first thing to catch one's eye in this character is certainly the activity, the energy, the youth and freshness, which stands as a wonderful contrast to the old and more sedate Europe. The American people does not yet have a past – it is only four centuries since its discovery, and only one century since its independence – but everything bears witness to this: it has a future. In this regard it is the exact opposite to Europe, living off the past, and despairing at the future. It is young, fiery, brave, full of verve, full of enthusiasm and vivacity, full of optimism and enterprise. It knows no concerns or limitations. It conquers everything. An example says more than a multitude of assertions: after the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, several days after the fire, someone set this notice on the heap of rubble that had been his building: 'wife and energy safed [*sic*], office continued.' The American spirit is all 'go-ahead', everything is 'in a hurry', everything is restless, everything is drive and pursuit. Boston sleeps, New York dreams, Chicago is awake. Chicago is *the* wonder-city, two million inhabitants, a wilderness for fifty years, burned down in 1871, and rebuilt shortly after. Under the influence of the climate and the work, the men there are all more or less gaunt, thin, taller than they are wide, dry skinned, quick to grey, angular, but muscular. There are few handsome men, but more and more beautiful women. American is the land of the woman. Here, the cause of emancipation was first advanced. Not only do they enjoy every possible freedom and distinction, they also enjoy the first place everywhere, always have priority when travelling, in the street

and at home. In order to be respected in America, it is enough simply to be a woman. A woman's word counts in a court of law. They can charge their tempters and compel them to marriage or payment of damages. The law cares for her after the death of her husband. They have the right to vote in school affairs, sometimes also for the mayor and [city] council. And this process seems only to have begun. Perhaps later the right to vote for Senate and Congress and President will also follow. They wield the most influence in societies. The movements against smoking and drinking are largely led by women. Numerous posts - in the telegraph service, the post, the education system - are filled by women. They enjoy a freedom that is unknown here. They travel, cycle, practice gymnastics, hold meetings, make public addresses, preside, administrate and govern to a high degree. They distinguish themselves from the men by their beauty. Of a slim, high stature, well-formed (and elegant), free in their movements, with a white colour, dark brown hair, dark eyes and eyebrows, they make - in contrast to the men - a striking impression. They also do not do much. They often have no understanding of housework. Raising children is not their work. The writer²⁶ of *Our Country*, the second edition, page (...) ²⁷ (Boissevain I, 113),²⁸ says: 'There is little reverence, and therefore little authority, in many American homes, except that which is exercised by children over their parents.'²⁹ American children often distinguish themselves by a freedom that differs little from rudeness. And as such, women can live for their bodies or their souls, for the societies and unions of which they are glad members. They love this all the more because American servants have a bad name. They are not all dressed as ladies, but wish to be treated as such. A high salary, good food, regularly going out, and doing little work, are their demands. Many families eat in restaurants, or allow themselves so to be served.

5. However much the American is industrious, he is not indifferent to food and drink. He eats three times a day, but also [does so] well and more than well. Even the most modest man can live well there. The daily and normal provisions are good and cheap. Meat, milk, eggs, cake in all variety of forms is within everyone's reach. All the immigrants who suffer poverty [despite] hard work here live plentifully there. Wine (beer) and strong drink are not used at all in the gentlemanly circles of the west, [where] it is seen as something base. But the consumption of candy is increasing. A hot meal is eaten three times a day. Each meal consists of meat, vegetables, potatoes, all sorts of fruits and sometimes six or seven kinds of tart (cakes, pies) from a variety of desserts; coffee, tea, chocolate, and many kinds of cooled drinks. The most wonderful shops in America are the drugstores, the pharmacies, where not only medicines, but also cigars, sweets, candy, pies, soda water, ice cream, vanilla ice, and so on, and so forth, can be found. Going there is gentlemanly, but a saloon is stigmatised. The saloons are also shunned. They are not inns where one can rest. [Rather,] they are counters where one can only stand, drink, and leave again. The entire notion of visiting, sitting in convivial [gezellige] company,³⁰ is unknown there. Just sit at the counter on your (office) stool, and then move on!

6. Social life also lacks the convivial intimacy [gezelligheid]³¹ that we possess here. Many, having come here, mourn that momentous loss. (Women, however, feel more at home than men. The men complain about the (...)³². Women had more money to

idle away, and found it pleasant [*gezellig*].) Work, eat, sleep – this is the substance of American life. There is no time left over for convivial friendship [*gezellige omgang*] and conversation. The rich have their parties, of course; resplendent in abundance and opulence. Americans particularly love the theatre, visiting it in great numbers. Dancing and playing are also very much enjoyed, and are also found in Christian, Presbyterian circles – even amongst ministers. But the middle classes have few convivial [*gezellige*] pleasures. However, hospitality is a virtue practiced by Americans in the widest sense. A stranger is welcome everywhere. The best is always set before him. A bedroom is made available to him for weeks on end. The most glorious recreation and excursions are prepared for him. It is as though everyone does his best to give a stranger such a favourable impression of the people and land, the nature and culture. The Americans feel that although much coarseness and lack of refinement clings to them, they are trying, as it were, to cast this off and to conquer [it]. The transition from barbarity to the highest culture is thus amazing. The Americans can, in a certain sense, make this transition because they have neither traditions nor prejudices, no default condition, no conservatism to overcome. Electric light and electric trams, an exception here, are already normal – and notable, more so in the west than in the east – there. New York and Chicago still have horses, but Grand Rapids has its electric cars. One even finds electric light in Pella and Orange City. Everywhere nature is suddenly giving way to the highest culture. Both limits thus often converge: dirt roads in the most proper neighbourhoods, electric light in the simple houses of Pella, and so on. And this is also so with regard to education. [Education] is highly regarded: in America they feel that they are behind in this regard, and now want (by force) to place themselves on a par with Europe. The school buildings look beautiful. No expense is spared. Rich people regard it as an honour to establish colleges. The educational system comprises the grammar school, the high school (*Hoogere Burgerschool* with some Latin), the colleges (preparatory study for university), and the universities with four faculties and the theological seminaries. In general education is carried out more [widely] than in our own country. The natural sciences play a greater role. The years of study are no less numerous, but nonetheless one has the impression that the breadth [of study] is greater than the depth and thoroughness, and that the *multa* falls short of the *multum*. The building of knowledge there is [erected] more hastily than deeply: it is broader than it is high. There is something forced about it, something inflated, a kind of so-called ‘learning’. A travelling companion in Iowa made me aware of the important role of the state in education, and said: ‘therefore we Americans can talk about everything and understand you, when you discuss issues in your own field as a theologian, and so on.’ The interest in education is strengthened by the desire for freedom and independence: every American wants to be free, independent, researching and seeing for himself. The reading of newspapers is wondrous (Boissevain, 183)³³: here, most people do not read a newspaper, or only (for example) Gideon,³⁴ or some read a newspaper in a group of five, whereas in America everyone reads his own newspaper, and the newspapers, majestic in size, love everything up-to-date, share everything (sensational stories, interviews, everything public), from the most banal to the most important; they keep the people informed. The libraries, the public libraries,

also contribute to the development of the people. Every place of any importance has its own library, which was sometimes established and maintained by particular gifts, or sometimes by the city council, and which is available to all (without distinction), free of charge. Science and knowledge are popularised in every way possible. An abundant precocity is the consequence of this. The honouring of strict scientific research is not advanced by this. There is a democracy that even denounces the aristocracy of geniuses and spirits. That said, it bears witness to a force of will to work on one's own self, to a mighty striving for the highest [standard], to an exceptional initiative and energy.

7. This striving is underpinned by a powerful moral feeling. Obviously, in America not all that glitters is gold. New York and Chicago (the city of scoundrels, rogues and knaves) are, in their slums, cesspools of unrighteousness and are in no way inferior to London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin in that regard. But nonetheless, a mighty moral feeling lives in the American people, a high ethical consciousness. The puritanical sense of the first settlers continues to have effect. As Calvinism has found little acceptance there, Arminianism (through Methodism) has gained mastery over the American spirit. The American is too aware of himself, he is too much conscious of his power, his will is too strong, to be a Calvinist. In addition to this, he has been too successful. He succeeds at whatever he does. He sees no limit to his might. Calvinism finds acceptance among a people who have been saved by [God's] council and action, that, despairing in itself, can only be saved by God's grace. But the Americans know no suffering; their struggle for independence against England, the war of the North against the South, were times of bravery, triumph and the unfolding of power. Americans are not pantheistic; they are far more deistic, intellectualistic and moralistic, and all of that through experience [as the source of knowledge]. That moral consciousness is powerful and inherently strong. In America there is a strong longing to improve the [individual] human, humanity, the world and destiny. They do not think much about the past, but far more about the future. There is faith, hope, a wonderful optimism, a strong altruism. They believe that things can be better, different, that every person on earth can have a reasonably good life. The issues facing Europe are not known there: there is no overpopulation, there is enough space, the land is fruitful and can supply with abundance, poverty is not necessary, whoever wants to work can eat and live, there is no high taxation, there is no army or navy that devours wealth, there is no established church living off a bursary, there are no monopolies or privileges for a certain social class, there is the greatest possible freedom and equality. The door is open to all for an existence that is both civil and worthy of a human. However, many are self-defeating. Evil fancies and desires block the way. Now, far more strongly than in Europe, a battle is waged against these, and all particular sins. There is no shortage of unions, which endeavour to combat a special sin or misery. Tobacco and drink are fought against with particular vigour. In many circles both are forbidden in the strongest possible terms; their use is placed on a par with a non-Christian life. But however excessive that is, it does not stop there. Other sins are also opposed. All powers are called upon, mobilised and armed against the enemy. Everyone is a member of a union, sometimes of different unions simultaneously. Every union has its orders, ribbons, distinctions, titles. How democratic: the Americans attach a lot to this. In

Illinois there is a group of men who call themselves the University of Illinois, and who, for a couple of dollars, will award a degree in a particular science.

Secret societies in particular play a large role. The age of publicity is also the age of secrecy. There are dozens of these [societies]. The Freemasons is only one example. There are also the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Labour, and so on, and these societies wield enormous power. Many workers' unions are affiliated to them, and do not buy, for example, wares or cigars (and so on) from certain vendors, not to work past eight o'clock, not to work for an employer who rejects certain conditions, and so forth. All of these [societies] intend the betterment of society. Sin and misery are combated against mightily. Works of mercy are many. Every state takes outstanding care of its poor, its wretched, its mentally ill. The psychiatric institutions look magnificent. The poor in America have a better life than here. They receive exactly what other citizens receive, not only bread, but also meat and cake.

8. And as regards religious life – it is beyond doubt that [all this] leads to great superficiality. The contrast of sin and grace is weakened. The new birth and the work of the Holy Spirit are shoved into the background. The preaching mostly deals with morals. Election and justification, the entire religious element either falls short or is altogether missing. Preaching is not the unfolding and ministering of the word of God; rather it is a speech, and the text is simply a hook. The religious life, in its entirety, has a different character to our own. Religion does not master the people; the people master religion, just as they also master art and science. Religion is a matter of amusement, of relaxation. The church buildings make this clear. The churches have much that is better than ours: they are cosy [*gezellig*], welcoming, warmed in the winter, without a pulpit; but it is also the case that they could be used as theatres without a single alteration. Light in colour, with red carpets, light-hearted, lively, clear, fresh – precisely the opposite of that solemn, dignified, sombre, serious [character] found in our European churches. And as the church is, so is the religion. Religion there is an amusement. The preacher is the most in-demand [person], who knows how to speak in the most exciting way (short, varied, lively, theatrical: Rev. Parker,³⁵ Rev. Pankhurst,³⁶ Talmage³⁷): spirited but shallow, enjoyable, peppered with humour. And this preaching is interspersed by songs, by choirs, by solos, by vocal and instrumental music. Through this, the idea of 'church' has almost entirely been lost. Churches are religious societies. Membership by birth and death is not counted. The number of those participating in the Lord's Supper is counted. There are so many sects and unions of churches that the idea of 'church' is totally gone. *The church does not exist there. There is no established church. All [churches] are equal. Individualism thus also reigns on ecclesiastical terrain.*

But against this, one can say: what American religious life lacks in depth, it wins in breadth. The distinction between faith and unbelief, as we have here, is unknown there. (We are so astoundingly [focused on] principle that we forget the practice thereof). There are indeed unbelievers, but they are not organised, they do not make themselves known in their own party. The Democrat and Republican Parties deal with issues wholly outside of belief and unbelief. The fundamental, the spiteful [element] in this battle is lacking. They do not deny each other salvation or heaven. To be against the anti-Revolutionary

Party (against Dr. Kuiper³⁸), against Groen,³⁹ against the free Christian school, here that is taken immediately as opposition to God, Christ, and the Bible. This is not so in America. There are Christians who are Republican and Christians who are Democrats. There are those who are for, and against, the common school. Some are for, and against, free trade. All of that is outside of 'Christian'. The 'Christian' [approach] is, to a certain extent and in a dualistic manner (theology is not taught at the university; science is separate from faith) next to all the other terrains of this world. All more or less come under the influence of, and are shaped by, the Christian faith. The state is still vaguely Christian. Prayer remains customary in the primary schools, where the Bible is also still read. The Sabbath and holidays are celebrated nationally, and recognised in the busy cities. Days of prayer and thanksgiving are issued by the government. The Columbian Celebration from 9th – 12th October is opened with a demonstration of gratitude in the churches. There is no liberal party that systematically follows the principles of the Revolution and fights the faith. An orthodox [Christian] is a pariah here, an outsider, unenlightened, but in America this is not so. Gospel preaching on the streets is heard with deep silence. There, one does not think of mockery, of ridicule, such that as that of the common ruffraff here. The delegates of the Presbyterian Alliance in Toronto were not only received with distinction, they were also hosted by the city mayor and the governor. The interest in churchly and religious matters is exceptional. Sunday schools, home and foreign mission, and all sorts of work in God's kingdom enjoy a level of interest that is unknown here. They are issues alive in the heart and mouth. The meetings of the Alliance were attended by great numbers of people for eight days. When mission was dealt with, the speakers had to speak in two churches. And the women's union for mission was attended by a crowd of 1,200 women. It is held as an honour by the richest families, if their son becomes a missionary. A very significant lady wished that her only son would dedicate himself to this. Young men and women are no less interested [in mission]. At present there is a union, the Christian Endeavour Society, which began as small, but has now spread through the entire English-speaking world and requires its members to be Christian always and everywhere, and to attend the prayer meetings it organises. The English-speaking world lives for the heathen, and sympathises with its missionaries. It carries the whole heathen world in its heart. Arminianism and Methodism are no less committed in this regard. There is much twaddle in this. But we would do better to carry over the good found therein and to imitate it, than simply to judge everything. The students in particular, in their morality, stand far above those of Europe's universities. This is consistent with the whole principle of formation. The universities are not in the big cities; rather, they are in small, remote places. They form scientific colonies. The students live there in one or more great buildings and are under supervision. A chapel is attached to every school. There is a daily gathering, prayer meeting, the reading of the Bible, singing, prayer, a short address. They are treated as students, not as lords, and receive a particularly practical formation. Religious and moral sensibility is cultivated. Drunkenness and lust are unknown. The manner of living is sober and healthy.

Having seen so much that is good, one shrinks back from critique. May American Christianity develop according to its own law. God has entrusted America with its own

high and great calling. [May America] strive for it, in its own way. Calvinism, after all, is not the only truth!

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to the Uitgeverij Vuurbaak for granting permission to publish this English translation of the work.

Notes

- ¹ Herman Bavinck, *Mijne reis naar Amerika*, ed. George Harinck (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1998).
- ² “Mijne reis naar Amerika” van H. Bavinck beste reisverhaal’ (<http://www.kb.nl/nieuws/2010/mijn-reis-naar-amerika-van-h-bavinck-beste-reisverhaal>), accessed 25 March 2015.
- ³ Abraham Kuyper, *Varia Americana* (Amsterdam: Hōveker & Wormser, 1899).
- ⁴ William Thomas Stead, *The Americanization of the World* (London: The “Review of Reviews” Office, 1902).
- ⁵ Bavinck travelled with his Kampen colleague Prof. D. K. Wielenga (1842–1902).
- ⁶ The source of this quote is unknown.
- ⁷ Isa. 54:10.
- ⁸ H. P. Scholte (1805–1868), a Secession preacher who led a group of seven hundred immigrants to Iowa where they founded Pella (1847).
- ⁹ S. Bolks (1814–1894), a Secession preacher who led a group of immigrants to establish Overisel, Michigan (1848), and who became the preacher in Orange City in 1872.
- ¹⁰ H. Hospers (1820–1901), appointed leader of Orange City in 1871.
- ¹¹ The Fifth General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance, held in Toronto (21st–30th September 1892).
- ¹² Bavinck placed this sentence within brackets.
- ¹³ See note. 13.
- ¹⁴ See note 13.
- ¹⁵ See note 13.
- ¹⁶ Bavinck had visited the Rhine Falls, in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, in 1887. Valentijn Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921), 136.
- ¹⁷ In 1887 Bavinck travelled along the Rhine. See note 12.
- ¹⁸ Martinus Cohen Stuart, *Zes maanden in Amerika*, deel I (Haarlem: Kruseman and Tjeenk Willem, 1875), 29–44.
- ¹⁹ William Elliot Griffis, *The Influence of the Netherlands in the Making of the English Commonwealth and the American Republic* (Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske & Co., 1891).
- ²⁰ Douglas Campbell, *The Puritan in Holland, England and America. An Introduction to American history*, 2 vols., (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892–3).
- ²¹ John Robinson (1585–1625), English theologian and preacher for a group of English Congregationalists in Amsterdam and Leiden. He encouraged the emigration of his congregation to America; the majority of them, the Pilgrim Fathers, emigrated in 1620. Robinson intended to follow them, but died in Leiden. In 1891 an American-led initiative saw the erection of a memorial to Robinson in Leiden.
- ²² Albertus Christiaan van Raalte (1811–1876) was a Secessionist preacher and leader of a group of Seceder emigrants who founded a colony in 1847, the centre of which was the present day Holland, Michigan.
- ²³ See note. 13.
- ²⁴ See note. 13.
- ²⁵ From Alexander Pope’s 1734 poem, *An Essay on Man*: ‘The proper study of mankind is man, know then thyself, presume not God to scan.’
- ²⁶ Josiah Strong (1847–1926), a Congregationalist preacher and leader amongst the Social Gospel movement. See *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (Baker and Taylor for the American Home Missionary Society, 1885). Bavinck cites a later edition of this book (1891).
- ²⁷ See note. 13.
- ²⁸ Charles Boissevain, *Van ’t Noorden naar ’t Zuiden. Schetsen en indrukken van de Vereenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika*, vol. 1 (Haarlem, 1881), p. 113: ‘Gisteren had ik na den eten een gesprek met een vader van vele zonen. De jongens gingen op ongedwongene, eenigszins ongeneerde wijze met hem om. Ze waren niet brutaal, volstrekt niet; maar jongens van 12 tot 14 jaar behandelen hun vader als waren ze academievrienden die met hem gestudeerd hadden. De vader was wellicht een weinig beleefder jegens de jongens, dan zij jegens hem, ’doch komt van mijn meerdere beschaving en ervaring’, zeide hij lachend.’ English: ‘Yesterday after dinner I had a conversation with a father who had many sons. The lads carried on with him in an easy going, to a certain extent spontaneous, manner. They were not rude, absolutely not; but boys of 12 to 14 years old treated their father as though they were friends who had studied with him at the academy. The father was perhaps more polite towards them than they were towards him, ‘never mind my superior refinement and experience,’ he said, laughing.’
- ²⁹ Strong, *Our Country*, Jurgen Herbst, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 103.

³⁰ Here, Bavinck uses the word *gezellig*, for which no direct English equivalent exists. It denotes a feeling of personal warmth in the company of others.

³¹ See note 28.

³² This word is illegible.

³³ Boissevain, *Van 't Noorden naar 't Zuide*, vol. 1, p. 183. Boissevain devoted a chapter to the press in America, and compiled a list of newspapers and magazines available in New York.

³⁴ *Gideon* was a weekly Christian newspaper in print since March 1875, published by J. Wierema te Brielle. It was read in Secessionist circles (*afgescheidenen*).

³⁵ Joel Parker (1799–1873) was a Presbyterian pastor and celebrated revivalist preacher in New York.

³⁶ Charles Henry Pankhurst (1842–1933) was a Presbyterian pastor and social reformer. He rose to prominence in New York after preaching against the corruption of the police there in 1892.

³⁷ Thomas De Witt Talmage (1832–1902) was a renowned Presbyterian pastor in New York.

³⁸ Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) was the leader of the anti-Revolutionary Party, founder of the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, and a Reformed pastor.

³⁹ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) was a jurist and classicist, statesman and publicist. He was the father of the anti-Revolutionary movement in the Netherlands.

Notes on Contributors

Prof. George Harinck is Professor of the History of neo-Calvinism at the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* and at the *Theologische Universiteit Kampen*, and Director of the *Historische Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme*. His most recent books include *Varia Americana: in het spoor van Abraham Kuyper door de Verenigde Staten* (2016) and *Aan het roer staat het hart* (2015). He has published widely on the history of neo-Calvinism, and on Dutch Protestant history from 1800 onwards. He is the co-editor of *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (2014).

Correspondence to: George Harinck, VU University Amsterdam, NL. Email: g.harinck@ubvu.vu.nl

Dr. James Eglinton is a Meldrum Lecturer in Reformed Theology at the University of Edinburgh. Prior to this, he was a postdoctoral researcher and then a senior researcher at the *Theologische Universiteit Kampen*. He is the author of *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (2012), translator of the forthcoming book *Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers* (2017), and the author of numerous articles on Dutch neo-Calvinism. He is the co-editor of *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (2014).

Correspondence to: James Eglinton, University of Edinburgh, UK. Email: james.eglinton@ed.ac.uk