

## Some third-hand information about Kuyper's conversion

[The following letter was found in a type-written copy among the papers of M. C. Smit in the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto. Presumably the original is in the Dr. H. Colijn Archive at the Free University, Amsterdam.]

Letter from: P. H. A. van Krieken  
Huize Zonneweelde, Looydijk 158, [name of town left off]  
Addressed to: His Excellency Dr. H. Colijn  
Minister of State, The Hague

Dear Sir,

I was delighted to read in the *Utrechtse Nieuwsblad* that on 29 Oct. 1937 a commemoration is to be held of Dr. Kuyper, and because I come from Beesd and was born in 1868 I heard a lot about him, since my Aunt Maria Hartman was his maid for five years and experienced his whole turnaround [omkeering] and also knew Pietje Baltus as friend and always visited her conventicle [gezelschap] on Sundays, who told me everything that she went through with him, and I knew the elders who sat with him in Church Council.

His first round of visits that he paid as pastor in Beesd was announced

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to Pietje Baltus: Rev. Kuyper is in the neighborhood and will soon come to you too.

She says to that neighbor lady: That rascal might as well stay away, I don't care for him; [Laat die aap maar wegblijven, ik heb er niets mede op] I've heard so much already of his superficial doctrine, I won't have any of it.

But hardly had the neighbor left when the Lord asked her whether that was the way to treat a human being who was created for eternity, and she confessed her guilt before the Lord. [en zij mocht voor den Heere in de schuld komen]

In a moment Rev. Kuyper was standing in her house, with his elder, and spoke to her by name, Pietje: How are you? I am the [new] minister and thought I'd pay you a visit.

He started talking to her about a pile of potatoes he had seen in the yard and whether it had been a good harvest, etc.

She says to Dominee Kuyper, for that is what he was called: "It's been good . . . but that isn't really what you just wanted to talk about, is it? We are created for eternity and that is what I would like to talk about with you for a moment."

And the Lord had taken away her prejudice against him and she spoke to him about the things one needs in order to be able to live and die comforted. [om getroost te kunnen leven en sterven]

And that she could, [En dat kon zij] and it lasted a full hour, without him saying a single word. It was a foreign language to him.

And when he said goodbye she thought: that's the last I've seen of him.

And the next day he came back, alone, to talk with her again about those things that are needful.

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He stayed for two hours and showed great interest in the conversation, and from then on, if Madam [Mrs. Kuyper] did not know where he was, my aunt had to go and call him at Pietje's.

But it seems he could not process it all and became overworked OR had a nervous breakdown [Maar hij scheen dat niet te kunnen verwerken en werd overspannen]. The congregation heard him preach very differently than before, and they said: Dominee goes to Pietje Baltus a lot.

And he studied till 4 in the night and then Madam had to use sweet words to coax him out of his study and to come to bed, because every morning at 7 the barber would be at the door to give him a shave, and he had ordered that himself, otherwise he would not be able to get out of bed.

And so he got more and more overworked. It happened more than once when they were at table that he suddenly got up from his chair and exclaimed loudly: Maar de Heer zal uitkomst geven / Hij die 's daags Zijn gunst gebied, etc.<sup>1</sup> and he did that with such a loud voice that Madam and Aunt shuddered with fear [dat Mevrouw en Tante een rilling door het lichaam ging van angst]; and then he would sit down again in quiet thought.

He sensed himself that things were not going well, for he ordered a plumber to install a shower in the kitchen, and then he would go and stand with his head and naked chest under that spray, and aunt had to pump and pump to have enough water, and then he would calm down somewhat again. He also wetted his wrists a lot.

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<sup>1</sup> Metric version of Ps. 42:8; approx.: But the LORD will send deliverance / He who daily favours me.

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And then he went to England and when he came back from there he was somewhat better and like an apprentice he began to read and write a little bit every day and at last also to preach once in a while. And then he began to say to the congregation that he had ignorantly shown them the wrong way, and that he had come to a different understanding; that one had to be born again to enter the kingdom of God, and he openly asked them in church to forgive him.

And the bond between Pietje and Dr. Kuyper grew ever stronger and Pietje was not able to let him go in praying for him. And when she had asked the Lord to take him over from her because she could no longer hold him up [ze kon hem niet langer opdragen], the Lord did a miracle for her. He took him from her and worked on him Himself.

And then she began to love him, because she had to believe that God loved him, for the Lord worked in him with His Spirit and on Sundays everybody heard from the pulpit that there was something good in him for the Lord. [dat er wat goeds in hem was voor den Heere]

And then the Lord made it known to Pietje that Ds. Kuyper would get a call and would leave. And after half a year he left Beesd for Utrecht. And now both are already in heaven, the mother and her spiritual son.

He was a family man without fault, my aunt says; nothing escaped his eyes at home and in the congregation. He went after everything. His zeal knew no bounds. He would trudge in high boots through mud and muck to visit his people in the field and talk to them. [Orig.: Het was een onberispelijk huisvader, zegt mijn tante, niets ontging zijn blik in huis en in de gemeente. Hij ging overal op af. Zijn ijver kende geen grenzen. Door modder en bagger liep hij heen met de hooge laarzen aan om zijn volk in het veld op te zoeken en met hen te spreken.]

He was very generous in giving away things. He had a pair of new

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boots made for him and they were a bit too tight when he tried them on and just like that he gave them to his poor elder Krul. And he also had a big house with a big garden and an apple orchard. These he shared literally with the poor among his parishioners. My aunt said that he had fun when he had shaken a lot off with a hook and then they could hardly carry the bag, it would be so heavy.

And when he sat in the consistory he would constantly be writing during the discussions, and then the elders thought he was taking minutes himself, and afterwards it turned out that he had been working on a book.

Many times the enemies wanted to draw out Aunt to hear if Dr. Kuyper had ever tried to make a pass at her, [of Dr. Kuyper haar ook wel eens wilde aanhalen] because she was a very good-looking girl. She has assured me that he never once gave her occasion. [dat hij nooit of nimmer geen aanleiding gaf aan haar] She looked up to him very much and always talked highly of Ds. Kuyper, and he could be very sweet with his wife. And he was also crazy about [hield dolveel van] his children.

When his father ordained him he said that he had discovered a Calvinistic spirit in his son and that it would come out too, and he was right.

I was the first in Beesd to be called "doleerend" and I joined the Reformed Church in Geldermalsen. And many pastors have administered the Word in my house, also the young Abraham Kuyper. And now I may also believe, with joy, that the Lord by grace has incorporated me among that sect that is spoken against everywhere (Acts 28:22) and I also hope that His Excellency may belong to those happy ones and understand what it says in 1 Peter 2:2, and may also find comfort in the words from 1 John 3:14.

And so I have had the privilege of sharing a few things about the man

whom I have always esteemed highly, with all his faults.

Respectfully,

P. H. A. van Krieken

Looydijk 158

Huize Zonneweelde

[P.S.] Altogether I have gone to school only two years, which your Excellency can see from my mistakes.

NOTE: Some of the expressions in the original are written in the "tale Kanaäns," an argot common among the pietists. K. Schilder, A. A. van Ruler and others have analyzed that language. My translations are at best approximations. J. Kamphuis has written critically about the influence of Pietje Baltus on Abraham Kuyper. —H. Van Dyke, 15/09/08