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JOHN ROBINSON

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# JOHN ROBINSON

TWO ADDRESSES DELIVERED IN THE PIETERSKERK IN LEYDEN  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNVEILING OF THE MEMORIAL-TABLET  
IN THE BAPTISMAL CHAPEL,

ON SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 8TH 1928

by

Prof. Dr. A. EEKHOF,  
of Leyden University

and

Rev. Dr. EDGAR F. ROMIG,  
of New York City



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## JOHN ROBINSON

Two Addresses delivered in the Pieterskerk in Leyden, on the occasion of the unveiling of the Memorial-Tablet in the Baptismal Chapel, on Saturday, September 8th, 1928

by

Prof. Dr. A. EEKHOF,      and      Rev. Dr. EDGAR F. ROMIG,  
of Leyden University                      of New York City

### Address of Prof. Dr. A. Eekhof:

On this interesting occasion, when our thoughts go back for more than three centuries, it is a pleasure and a privilege, and I trust it may also be an inspiration, to call to remembrance the life and work and influence of a man in whose honour we have reared a tablet in this church only a few moments ago — the Reverend John Robinson, the Pilgrim Fathers' Pastor. We have also visited the Jean Pesijnshofje, the place where John Robinson lived, taught and died; and now we are here again under the gothic roof of this cathedral, where is buried all that was mortal of him.

It is a good thing to look back, not always but sometimes, and to remember our ancestors or forefathers, for they have had much to do in the making of us. We are what we are in a great measure, because they were what they were. It may indeed be nothing more than a silly vanity which renders people inquisitive about their ancestors; but there is something deeper in the natural instinct which leads us to review the past and to take courage and inspiration from the name, the words and deeds of our fathers. For a man who is proud of the story of his forefathers keeps saying, though he may be not aware of it: there is something within me higher, better, than has yet appeared in my life. I am a child of a noble race.

And so the Pilgrims are our forefathers. For to be descendants of the Pilgrims it is not necessary to have a drop of Pilgrim blood in our veins. We are the real descendants if we have accepted their ideals and have been baptized in their spirit of heroism and faith. It is not necessary, as an American-writer has said<sup>1)</sup>, to have in our home the furniture that came down from the settlers of New England, if we only have in our hearts some of the furniture which was in the Pilgrims' souls.

Let us listen for a few moments to their calling voice and hear the message of their pastor John Robinson.

Who was John Robinson? Let me give you the data and facts of his outward life, and after that try to sketch for you the characteristics of his inward soul<sup>2)</sup>.

John Robinson was born about 1575 in England, in Nottinghamshire, very probably at Sturton-le-Steeple, where at any rate was his early home. Here he grew up in a Puritan atmosphere, with William Brewster, the postmaster of Scrooby, and William Bradford (later on the historian of the Pilgrim Fathers) as neighbours, nurtured amid a people who were willing to join with the Church of England in its doctrines and sacraments, but who could not approve of its ceremonies and outward apparel.

Where John Robinson went to school we do not know, but in 1592, when he was seventeen years of age, we find him admitted to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge. In 1597 he became a Fellow of this College, which he remained for a couple of years; in 1602 he was a priest in the Established Church of England. But as early as 1604 he was inclined to welcome a sphere of comparatively greater liberty, which spirit he found in St. Andrews Church in Norwich. For two or three years he enjoyed his ministry, perhaps as a curate, unmolested, but when the subscription to the order touching Nonconformity was enforced, the expression of his ideas and sympathies, his refusing the prelacy and ceremonies of the Church brought him into conflict with the authorities, the penalty being suspension from his office of preacher.

So John Robinson left the city, together with his wife Bridget

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<sup>1)</sup> Charles E. Jefferson, *Forefathers' Day Sermons*, Boston 1917, p. 4.

<sup>2)</sup> The best book on John Robinson is: Walter H. Burgess, *John Robinson pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers*, London 1920. See also: F. J. Powicke, *John Robinson*, London 1920.

White, to whom he had been married in 1604, and their two children, — in a manner already a Pilgrim, having the light but not knowing the way. At this time, however, although visitations of doubt and misgivings may have come to him, he did not entertain the least thought of separation, but gradually his mind cleared. He saw his way. Renouncing his ministry in the Church of England, he identified his future whole-heartedly with that of his separatist brethren in Scrooby, and gladly took the covenant to walk in the ways of the Lord, according to the primitive pattern of the first churches of Christ. He assisted Richard Clifton, the pastor of Scrooby, first; perhaps he became himself the pastor later on. And when the Pilgrims were driven from England, by persecution, prison and penalties, he joined them when they fled in 1608 and found a place of refuge in Holland, namely in the city of Amsterdam.

There were other English congregations in Amsterdam at that time. Among these however there was much contention and quarrelling; so John Robinson and a party of about one hundred persons, being afraid that the flames should break out in their community also, resolved after one year's sojourn in Amsterdam, to move to another city. The Magistrates of Leyden, and among them in the first place the secretary Jan van Hout, had on the 12th February 1609 answered the Pilgrims' formal petition for leave to settle in Leyden, by saying: that they "refused no honest persons free ingress to come and have their residence in this city, provided that such persons behaved themselves and submitted to the laws and ordinances". Accordingly the Pilgrims took up their abode in Leyden: "a fair and beautiful city", as Bradford says, "but made even more famous by the University, wherewith it is adorned and in which of late had been so many learned men". Consequently John Robinson came with the Pilgrims to Leyden in 1609, and he stayed here till his death in 1625 <sup>1</sup>).

Most of the Pilgrims lived, as John Robinson himself did, in the neighbourhood of the Pieterskerk. In the Bell Alley (Kloksteeg) — so called because, when the tower of the church had come down in 1512, a bellhouse was built — John Robinson in 1611 bought a house for eight thousand guilders. This house was called "De Groene Poort" (The Green Gate) and stood on the spot where now

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<sup>1</sup>) See also: H. M. Dexter and Morton Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, Boston 1905; — John A. Goodwin, *The Pilgrim Republic*, Boston 1920.



the Jean Pesijnshofje is situated. Here in this house, quite spacious, as Winslow tells us, John Robinson lived with his wife and six children: Jannes (John), Bridget, Isaack, Mercy, Fear and Jacob.

How large was this colony of the Pilgrims? There may have been as many as three hundred persons before they went to New England. Here in de "Kloksteeg" religious service was held, for they did not worship with the other English congregation that met for service in the Bagijnekerk on the Rapenburg. The Bible, placed in the center, was read, and explained; attention was drawn by doctrine and exhortation to the edifice of the Church; perhaps the Psalms of Ainsworth were sung; the sacraments administered; the collection taken, and church matters, such as discipline, were attended to at the close of the service. John Robinson was the pastor, Brewster the elder and Carver the deacon.

During the week most of the Pilgrims worked in the Dutch factories; they were wool-combers, fustian-weavers, serge-workers. Bradford himself for example was a serge-worker.

The pastor John Robinson shepherded his flock, and such was the mutual love and reciprocal respect that existed between this worthy man and his flock, as Bradford tells us, that it might be said of them, as it once was of the famous Emperor Marcus Aurelius and the people of Rome, that it was hard to judge whether he delighted more in having such a people or they in having such a pastor. They loved him as a common father and Robinson said: "If ever I saw the beauty of Sion and the glory of the Lord filling this tabernacle, it has been in the manifestation of the divers graces of God in the Church, in that heavenly harmony and comely order, wherein by the grace of God we are set and walk here in Leyden".

And the people of Leyden, what did they think about the Pilgrims?

The Dutch in Leyden, either bakers or others, would trust them in any reasonable matter when they wanted money, because they had found by experience how careful they were to keep their word, and the Dutch employed them above others in their works, for their honesty and diligence<sup>1</sup>). Bradford and others always speak in terms of highest appreciation about their stay among the Hollanders in Leyden<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>1</sup>) *Bradford's History Of Plimoth Plantion*, Book I, Ch. 3.

<sup>2</sup>) *Bradford's letter to Isaac de Rasière, March 19, 1627*, in: *Bradford's History Of Plimoth Plantion*, Book II, [1627].

And yet, about the year 1620, the Pilgrims longed to leave Holland and Leyden. Why? Most of them were not, as we Dutch say, „hokvast”; further they were not used to the work in the factories, but to the plough and the axe; they were afraid of losing their native tongue and of having their children mixed up with the Dutch; the truce with Spain had come to an end and the drum was beating in the streets. So they wanted to move. But whither? After many inquiries and disappointments as to which country they should go to, a meeting was held in Leyden, and here it was resolved that the larger part should stay in Leyden and the smaller part should undertake the voyage to the New World. And Robinson, as he had promised, stayed with the larger part in Leyden.

When Friday, the 31st of July 1620, had arrived and the smaller part was ready to depart, John Robinson accompanied them on their way to Delfshaven, where the ship ‘Speedwell’ was ready to take them across the ocean, first to England and then to America. As they passed along the Vliet, *they* also looked back and saw from a distance “that good and friendly city of Leyden, their resting place for nearly twelve years, as Bradford says, but they quieted their spirits, as they knew they were pilgrims and looked not much on these things but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country”<sup>1</sup>). When they arrived at Delfshaven, doleful was the sight of that sad and mournful parting; to see what sighs and sobs and prayers did sound amongst them; but the tide which stays for no man, calling them away thus loath to depart, their reverend pastor John Robinson, falling down on his knees and they all with him, with watery cheeks, commended them with most fervent prayers to the Lord and his blessing. And the Hollanders of Delfshaven preserved the living memory of it, as a record of 1646 tells us<sup>2</sup>).

Robinson returned to Leyden and a few days later he wrote two letters in which he repeats the assurance of his intention to join them on the other side of the Atlantic, the first opportunity that

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<sup>1</sup>) See on the name „Pilgrims”: Albert Matthews, *The term Pilgrim Fathers*, Cambridge 1915 (Reprinted from the Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Vol. XVII).

<sup>2</sup>) A memorial window with this scene is in the Bagijnekerk in Amsterdam, presented by Mr. Edward Bok. For a picture of this window, and also a picture, supposed to be the departure of the ‘Speedwell’, see: A. Eekhof, *The latest discoveries about the history of the Pilgrim Fathers*, in: *Lectures on Holland for American Students*, Leyden 1924, p. 85—100.

presented itself. He says, that though he is constrained for a while to be bodily absent from them, he is with them in spirit.

Robinson kept up the correspondence with Bradford and Brewster in letters full of wise counsels concerning the way of peace in and among themselves.

But although Robinson had the most earnest longings after them, the Lord determined that soon his place should be, not in the New Plymouth across the ocean, and not any longer in 'the Sion of the city of Leyden', but in the New and Holy City above. Five years after the departure of the Pilgrims John Robinson was called home on the first of March, 1625. Captain Miles Standish brought the news to the American Pilgrims in a letter, written by Roger White, the brother of John Robinson's wife. Let me quote the words, which speak to us of John Robinson's death <sup>1)</sup>: "It hath pleased the Lord to take out of this vale of tears your and our loving and faithful pastor, and my dear and reverend brother Mr. John Robinson, who was sick some eight days, beginning first to be sick on a Saturday morning; yet the next day, being the Lord's day, he taught us twice, and the week after, grew every day weaker than other, yet felt no pain, but weakness all the time of his sickness. He fell sick the twenty-second of February, and departed this life on the first of March. All his friends came freely to him, and if either prayers, tears or means would have saved his life, he had not gone hence. But he having faithfully finished his course, and performed the work which the Lord had appointed him here to perform, he now resteth with the Lord in eternal happiness". So far Roger White.

John Robinson died about the same time as King James I and Prince Maurice. He was buried in this Pieterskerk on the fourth of March 1625. The record says: „4 Maart, Jan Roelensz. Predicant van de Engelsche Gemeente by het Klockhuys — begraven in de Pieterskerk" (4 March, John Roelensz.<sup>2)</sup>, minister of the English Congregation that meet at (by) the Bell house, buried in the Peter's Church). We have it on the authority of Edward Winslow<sup>3)</sup> that the University and the ministers of the city accompanied him to his grave with

<sup>1)</sup> W. H. Burgess, *John Robinson*, London 1920, p. 302—303.

<sup>2)</sup> See on the spelling of the names by the Leyden Town-hall registrars: A. J. Barnouw, *Echoes of the Pilgrim Fathers' speech*, in: *Mededeelingen der Koninklyke Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Afd. Letterkunde, Deel 55, Serie A, No. 6, (1923) blz. 139—189.

<sup>3)</sup> Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, edited from the original texts*, London 1897, p. 179.

all their accustomed solemnities, bewailing the great loss that not only that particular church had whereof he was pastor, but some of the chief of them sadly affirmed that all the Churches of Christ sustained a loss through the death of that worthy instrument of the Gospel.

John Robinson's wife and children stayed in Leyden. We have his wife's last will, dated 1643, in which she bequeathes Robinson's Bible to her son John, who was at that time a doctor of medicine in England. She became a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Leyden, together with Stephen Butterfield and John Masterson, who even changed their names into Dutch<sup>1</sup>).

And now let us see what kind of a man John Robinson was. What about his personality and character?

John Robinson was in the first place a learned and well educated minister. As we have mentioned above, he studied at Cambridge, became a university-graduate and a Fellow of Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, and he was a student of Leyden University, where he received permission to enroll his name in 1615. Robinson, who was "versed in the Dutch language"<sup>2</sup>), heard the readings of the professors in the University and attended the lectures both of the Remonstrants and of the Contra-Remonstrants. He even conducted a public dispute, twice or three times with Episcopius, the Arminian professor, of which Bradford says, that Robinson put him to an apparent nonplus in presence of that great and public audience. He also says that Robinson was a learned man of solid judgment and of a quick and sharp wit; an acute and expert disputant, never satisfied until he had searched any cause or argument he had to deal in, thoroughly and to the bottom. — And he was ever desirous of any light; the more able, learned and holy the persons were, the more he desired to confer and reason with them<sup>3</sup>).

The extent and range of the writings of Robinson which have survived, afford ample testimony to his industry and scholarship. He was thoroughly well versed in the theological literature of his

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<sup>1</sup>) Bridget White's last will, and also the rare original signature of John Robinson, in facsimile. in: A. Eekhof, *Three unknown documents concerning the Pilgrim Fathers in Holland*, The Hague, Martinus Nyhoff, 1920.

<sup>2</sup>) H. M. Dexter, *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, p. 584.

<sup>3</sup>) Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, edited from the original texts*, p. 174—175.

day and a keen student of biblical and theological topics to the end of his life, as the three volumes of Ashton's edition of his works, and Burgess' "Chronological table" of his writings show<sup>1</sup>).

John Robinson was in the second place a faithful pastor. He was not only very courteous, affable and sociable in his conversation, but of a tender conscience and very sincere in all his ways: a hater of hypocrisy and dissimulation. With his best friends he would be very plain. When in 1623 he had heard about the killing of some poor Indians in America, he wrote on Dec. 19, 1623 to William Bradford: "Oh! how happy a thing it had been if you had converted some, before you had killed any", and Robinson adds: "I doubt not but you will take in good part these things which I write, and, as there is cause, make use of them". His letter of remonstrance does credit to his heart and shows his humane feeling<sup>2</sup>). His study was peace and union, as Winslow says, so far as might agree with faith and good conscience.

In the third place John Robinson was a broad-minded Christian. He often said, that if he might in England have enjoyed but the liberty of his ministry there, with an immunity but from the very ceremonies, and that they had not forced him to a subscription to them, and imposed upon him the observation of them, that he had never separated from it and left the Church of England<sup>3</sup>). Especially in the latter part of his life he rather studied union than division. He was professing and holding communion both with the French and Dutch Churches, yea, tendering it to the Scots; he even allowed hearing the godly Ministers of the Church of England, and allowed also private communion not only with them, but with all who were faithful in Christ Jesus in the Kingdom of England and elsewhere, upon all occasions<sup>4</sup>). He sought separation not from the Church, but from the world and the works of the world.

John Robinson was a Calvinist, no doubt about that; but he bewailed the state and condition of the Reformed Churches, who would not go further than the instrument of their Reformation. The Lutherans, he said, could not be drawn to go beyond what Luther

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<sup>1</sup>) Robert Ashton, *The Works of John Robinson*, Boston 1851. 3 vol.; — Champlin Budge, *New facts concerning John Robinson*, Oxford 1910; — Walter H. Burgess, *John Robinson*, p. 418—420.

<sup>2</sup>) W. H. Burgess, *John Robinson*, p. 280—281.

<sup>3</sup>) Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers*, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup>) Edward Arber *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers*, p. 177.



IN MEMORY OF  
**JOHN ROBINSON**  
PASTOR OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH IN LEYDEN  
1609 1625  
HIS BROADLY TOLERANT MIND  
GUIDED AND DEVELOPED THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF  
**THE PILGRIMS OF THE MAYFLOWER**  
OF HIM THESE WALLS ENSHRINE ALL THAT WAS MORTAL  
HIS UNDYING SPIRIT  
STILL DOMINATES THE CONSCIENCES OF A MIGHTY NATION  
IN THE LAND BEYOND THE SEAS

THIS TABLET WAS ERECTED BY THE GENERAL SOCIETY OF MAYFLOWER  
DESCENDANTS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA A. D. 1928.

FOTO RAMEAU

Memorial Tablet on the inside of the Baptismal  
Chapel in the Pieterskerk in Leyden,  
unveiled on Sept. 8th, 1928

said; and the Calvinists, they stick where Calvin left them. And Robinson himself charged his people before God and his blessed angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ, for he was very confident, the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word<sup>1</sup>).

John Robinson was in the fourth place, by no means the last place, a pious man, a noble soul, who wished to live for the glory of God and the good of many. His life in Leyden is proof of this; his letters and books are sweet with the fragrance of faith and courageous trust in the Providence of God.

This is not the place, nor is this the time, to discuss at any length the influence of Robinson's teaching on his age. That influence, as Mr Burgess shows in his book, was exerted mainly in three directions, namely: through his books; through the practical example of Congregational church-order which the religious societies at Leyden and New Plymouth afforded; and through the democratic ideals with which he had inspired his friends and connections.

Robinson and the Pilgrims were men of a limited field of action, but of unlimited and lofty ideals. They had courage, constancy, loyalty to their convictions; they fought for the principles of liberty to worship God. "We often take Liberty" as Dr. Rendel Harris says<sup>2</sup>), "for granted, without asking anything about the ancestry of the maiden. If we enjoy a measure of spiritual progress we must recognize the historical personalities that were involved in their attainment. Our comforts are the results of their toils, our ease the product of their scars".

One of those personalities is William the Silent, founder of Leyden University and of Holland's religious and civil liberties, but another one is John Robinson, the memory of whom is one of the strongest historical and spiritual ties which will hold Holland and Britain and America together now and for ever.

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<sup>1</sup>) Edward Arber, *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>) *The Leyden Pilgrim Messenger*, May 1922, p. 65, An International Journal edited by the Leyden Pilgrim Fathers Society, instituted in 1920, under the patronage of H. M. Queen Wilhelmina.

Address of Rev. Dr. Edgar Franklin Romig,  
Minister of the Middle Collegiate Church,  
New York City.

Ps. 48 : 9—14.

Among the ties of sentiment that bind the fellowship of this hour is one of common thankfulness to God. In commemorating, as we do now, a life that symbolizes to us the great things of the spirit, we should find it easy to clothe out feelings in the words of the Psalmist, "We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple" <sup>1)</sup>). In these hallowed surroundings and on this worthy occasion the thought may with naturalness become our own, "According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise . . . . Thy right hand is full of righteousness" <sup>2)</sup>). Thus again out of the treasury of the Psalter there comes to us an ancient text fitted to a present mood; and we cannot but be caught up by it into the ageless harmonies of thanksgiving.

In appropriating these verses of Holy Writ we are of necessity influenced by considerations of the nature of the thankfulness which they reveal. And we can do no more wisely at the outset than remind ourselves of its intensity — an intensity set off against a background of life in which gratitude played far too small a part. In ancient Israel there were many who, the moment special dangers of bondage under the Babylonian rule had been averted, fell back from thought of Jehovah, their strength and fortress, into their crowded and self-seeking lives, in utter forgetfulness. For them, in the ordering of things, this and other Psalms like it had to be written. So in every generation there have been those who, after the tumult and the shouting of momentous issues have died, have ceased to think either of the causes or the lessons of victory. For such it is ever necessary that thankfulness be preached. John

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<sup>1)</sup> Ps. 48 : 9.

<sup>2)</sup> Ps. 48 : 10.



Masefield rather involves us all in the guilt of too easy unmindfulness when, in telling of the Pilgrim Fathers, he writes, "A generation fond of pleasure, disinclined toward serious thought, and shrinking from hardship, . . . . will find it difficult to imagine the temper, courage, and manliness of the emigrants who made the first Christian settlement of New England"<sup>1</sup>). Because these words apply to us all in a greater or lesser degree, there is timeliness in our pausing now to give hearty thanks for just such knowledge as we have of John Robinson. For as we behold his life, from the day of his birth in the godly "toftstead"<sup>2</sup>) in Sturton-le-Steeple, Nottinghamshire, to the hour of his death in the fair city of Leyden, we find that there is not one square inch of the picture which does not have in it qualities of nobility. John Robinson was one of many good men of an age that produced heroes because of whose example it is easier for us to say, "For this God (whom he served) is our God forever and ever"<sup>3</sup>).

Now there is this truth, too, to be observed concerning the character of the thankfulness set forth in this Psalm in such intensity. It is marked by a profound spiritual perspective. It is strong in its faithfulness to proportion. The ancient Hebrew singer in all his enthusiasm for praise could yet bid Israel to "Walk about Zion". "Go round about her", he cried, inciting to an understanding gratitude, "tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces". Physically and materially this was a summons to a complete survey of Jerusalem. Spiritually it was a call to thoroughness in contemplating the things that are unseen. The imagery is arresting in view of the theme of this hour. The name of John Robinson evokes thoughts of the spiritual Zion of which we to-day are citizens, that is to say, of the secured freedom that is ours by birthright. But there is an urgency in these venerable words concerning our spiritual estate, "Walk about Zion: tell the towers thereof, that is, all the towers thereof"<sup>4</sup>), for the fact is that in paying tribute to Robinson in the past, men have, unwittingly mostly, minimized the riches that is theirs in his personality, by

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<sup>1</sup>) *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, Everyman's Library, Introduction, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup>) Walter H. Burgess, *The Pastor of the Pilgrims, A Biography of John Robinson*, New York, Harcourt Brace and Howe, London, Williams & Norgate, 1920, p. 1. An indispensable work in this field.

<sup>3</sup>) Ps. 48 : 14.

<sup>4</sup>) Ps. 48 : 12.

seeing only portions of him; like beholding a ramparted city and fixing the eyes only on a single tower. Robinson has been claimed — may we say it — somewhat exclusively by those genealogically linked with the Pilgrims<sup>1</sup>). He has been exalted as a patron saint of Congregationalism<sup>2</sup>). He has been pointed to as the embodiment of Old England<sup>3</sup>). And so on. We are indebted to all who have helped to rescue him from the undeserved obscurity that was his lot up within recent years. Yet the time has come when, in appreciation of what he was, it behooves us to see him in the ample measure of his qualities; for he was indeed a man for the ages.

Thinking of him then, in this larger sense, we are reminded, first, that by his stand for the dignity and worth of the individual he served the cause of true democracy in church and in state everywhere. It need hardly be said that he was not an originator. Turn only to the last will and testament of his father, John Robinson, or of his mother, Ann Robinson, for evidence<sup>4</sup>), and you will discern strength and individualism as a family inheritance. Glance at the life of Cambridge when he was a student there and you will find him partaking freely of the strong Puritan meat and drink that came from such teachers as Wm. Perkins, lecturer in the church of Great St. Andrews, and his kind<sup>5</sup>). Look into the conventicles of the Separatists in Norwich, Gainsborough and Scrooby in the beginning of the 17th century and you will discover with what earnestness and intelligence thought was given to the rights and duties of the common man — as a New Testament teaching in matters of spiritual quest and witnessing<sup>6</sup>). But when John Robinson cast his lot with this latter fellowship he brought with him something of courage, sagacity and leadership that did much to make it the permanent influence it was in the weaving of history. We dwell admiringly upon the stark heroism of the founding of Plymouth Colony by the Pilgrims in the winter of 1620. Let us

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<sup>1</sup>) T. W. Coit, *Puritanism*, Appleton, N.-Y., 1845, p. 442, note 27.

<sup>2</sup>) *Works*, vol. I, p. LXXII.

<sup>3</sup>) Burgess, *The Pastor of the Pilgrims*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>) *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14, 15 and 16.

<sup>5</sup>) Robert Ashton, *The Works of John Robinson, Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers*, London John Snow, 1851, (hereinafter referred to as „Works”), vol. I, p. xv.

<sup>6</sup>) *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. xvii et seq.; also *Homes and Haunts of the Pilgrim Fathers*, by Alexander Mackennal and H. Elvet Lewis, Chapter I.

never let the picturesqueness of that high adventure obscure in our thinking the courage that was present, and sorely needed, in those earlier days in England, to hold, in the face of bitterness and contempt, to the faith that was in them. "They could not long continue in any peacable condition", wrote Wm. Bradford, "but were hunted and persecuted on every side . . . . Yet these and many other sharper things which afterwards befell them were no other than they looked for; and therefore were the better prepared to bear them by the assistance of God's grace and spirit"<sup>1</sup>). We may well add the reflection that it was easier for them to bear what they did because of the fearless leadership of one whose personal sacrifices in being a Separatist were as great as any man's. And it was because he was burning with conviction on the truth of the freedom of the spirit. "This we hold and affirm", he wrote, (to Bernard) in contradistinction to the hierarchical and prelatical idea of a church, which seemed to him a scorching blight, hindering life and growth, "that a company consisting though but of two or three, separated from the world . . . and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk in all the ways of God known unto them, is a Church"<sup>2</sup>). He enlarged upon the idea thus. "The Lord Jesus, as he is anointed by God with the oil of gladness above his fellows so doth he communicate this anointing . . . [to] every member of the body, and so makes every one of them severally kings and priests. And as there is not the meanest member of the body but hath received his drop or dram of this anointing, so is not the same to be despised"<sup>3</sup>). Here is clear and explicit language concerning the basis of real government — not novel we may well agree in a country like the Netherlands, with its traditional recognition of the sanctity of individual judgments and privileges — but fresh and vital for a new following that was to plant itself in the great New World. This is not the time for detailed references to Robinson's writing on this theme; but it needs to be said that there was balance in it. The individual had his rights in the government of the church, but it was because he had covenanted himself that he was thus honored. Here was no looseness, no irresponsibility. The sovereign purpose of covenanted fellow-

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<sup>1</sup>) *Wm. Bradford's Journal*, quoted in Burgess, *The Pastor of the Pilgrims*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup>) *Works*, vol. II, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>) *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 140, 141.

ship was that the will of God might be accomplished. And hence, when translated into politics, the idea became this — that the State, as the corporate body typifying the commonweal, was supreme, for it was the representative of the will of God as manifest through his servants bound together for a holy end. "Whereas you are to become a Body Politic", Robinson wrote to the New England planters in 1620, "using amongst yourselves Civil Government, and are not furnished with persons of special eminency above the rest . . . let your wisdom and godliness appear, not only in choosing such persons as do entirely love and will promote the common good . . . not beholding in them the ordinariness of their persons, but God's ordinance for your good"<sup>1</sup>).

We are living today in a world in which democracy is much spoken of, but not too often understood or realized. It is certain that no one type of government, ecclesiastical or civil, can alone claim to be democratic. Ecclesiastically, for example, we may conceive of a democratic or an undemocratic Congregationalism. So we may conceive of an undemocratic or a democratic Episcopalianism, the test being the place accorded the average member of the fellowship in the counsels of his church. So, in politics, there are republics in which little of democracy obtains, and monarchies in which there is much. It is hard to say what John Robinson's preferences would be in the churches and governments of the world were he living now. This we know: he would live and sacrifice for the rights of the common man and his obligations in the presence of a sovereign God. In this respect he belongs to all men everywhere who believe in that freedom, whose strength lies in the covenanted will of its many possessors.

We are reminded also that Robinson, by his recognition of truth-seeking, not only as a right, but as a solemn and persistent duty, brought enrichment to thinking. If Mr. Chesterton's dictum be accepted that philosophy is "thought that has been thought out"<sup>2</sup>), then John Robinson was a philosopher. Whether we dub him thus or not, however, he was ever one to "prove all things and hold fast that which is good"<sup>3</sup>). From the time he was forced to leave the church

<sup>1</sup>) *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>) Recalled from an article in the *New York Times*, circ. July, 1928.

<sup>3</sup>) II Thess. 5 : 21.

he loved, because he could not honestly subscribe to the canons of her king-controlled bishops, he was singularly free of the kind of partisanship which sways so many men into grooves of obdurate and unreflecting opinion, shuts out light, and makes for unwholesome sectarianism. Unhappy as he must have been at the injustice done him, whilst he humbly sought to do his duty in Norwich, and dogging him all his days, so that of all men he was most prevented by "the powers that be" from joining the Plymouth Colony<sup>1)</sup>, he could yet, more and more, revise his earlier, rather narrow, ideas against fellowship in worship with members of, or hearing the work of preachers of the Anglican Church. It is said of some men that the only thinking they engage in is to rearrange their prejudices. This was not so of John Robinson. It seems strange that any one ever should have doubted the authenticity of his remark that "he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of his Holy Word"<sup>2)</sup>, for it is only one of many of his utterances on the same theme. For example, on the subject of inter-communion, Robinson frankly wrote of a broadening of his views: "My judgement . . . I have set down in the first part of the book, unto which I bind no man further to assent than he sees ground from the Scriptures . . . Had my persuasion in it been fuller than ever it was, I profess myself always one of them, who still desire to learn further, or better, what the good will of God is"<sup>3)</sup>. In another connection he showed eagerness to be one of those who "both interpret things in the best part they reasonably can, and seek how and where they may find any lawful door of entry into accord and agreement with others," and continues to say, "I have still opposed in others, and repressed in mine own people, to my power, all sour zeal against, and peremptory rejection of, such as, whose holy graces challenged better use and respect from all Christians. And in testimony of mine own affection this way, and for the freeing of mine own conscience, and information of other men's, I have penned this discourse"<sup>4)</sup>.

It would be an unpardonable omission for us to overlook the

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<sup>1)</sup> Vid. *John Robinson* in art. *Pilgrim Fathers*, D. Macfadyen, Hastings *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

<sup>2)</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. xlv, note.

<sup>3)</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 102, 103.

<sup>4)</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 353.

circumstance that is more and more challenging careful scholars that Robinson's growing openness to truth must have been under the influence of the spirit of this noble university-city of Leyden. Think of the straightforwardness of the magistrates' reply to the request of the little church to settle here, to the effect that "They refused no honest persons free ingress to come and have their residence in the city, provided that such persons behaved themselves and submitted to the laws and ordinances"<sup>1</sup>). Think of the cultural estate into which Robinson came here, "Junius and Lipsius, Grotius and Arminius, Scaliger and Vossius, Daniel Heinsius and the geographer Cluverius were in Leyden, or had recently died, when the Pilgrims entered it", we are led to recall<sup>2</sup>). Rembrandt was here, making his first promising sketches in the rude loft of his father's grist-mill<sup>3</sup>). The literature printed in Leyden was disseminated throughout Europe<sup>4</sup>). And Robinson's own works found circulation because the Pilgrim Press was tolerated by the Leyden authorities<sup>5</sup>). Think of the cordiality with which he was permitted to enter into the disputations at the University<sup>6</sup>). Think of the friendship freely given him by the professors, so that, to use Winslow's words, "When God took him away from them . . . by death, the University and ministers of the city accompanied him to his grave with all their accustomed solemnities, bewailing the great loss that . . . all the churches of Christ sustained by his death"<sup>7</sup>). All praise to Leyden ever in the front ranks among the world's seats of learning, — for its openness to ideas — that it thus encouraged Robinson in his own generation. The echoes of its own untrammelled voices can be heard as we consider this typical word of Bradford's concerning him, "He was never satisfied in himself until he had searched any cause or agreement he had to deal in, thoroughly and to the bottom; and we have heard him sometimes say to his familiars that many times both in writing and disputation he knew he had sufficiently answered others, but

<sup>1</sup>) *Leyden Documents Relating to the Pilgrim Fathers*, by Dr. D. Plooi of Leyden and Dr. J. Rendel Harris of Manchester, Brill, Leyden, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>) *Homes and Haunts*, p. 99; — *The University of Leyden*, published by S. C. Van Doesburgh, Leyden, 1928, pp. 20, 21; — *Tercentenary Studies*, N. Y., 1928, art. by E. F. Romig, ch. I.

<sup>3</sup>) Rembrandt von Dr. Hans Jantzen in *Volksbücher der Kunst*, Leipzig, 1913, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>) } *A Well-nigh Unknown Imprint of the Brewster Press at Leyden*, by Prof. Dr. A. Eekhof, in *The Leyden Pilgrim Messenger*, May, 1922, vol. I, p. 86—96. One of

<sup>5</sup>) } numerous valuable contributions by the same scholar.

<sup>6</sup>) *Works*, vol. I, p. xxxii.

<sup>7</sup>) Winslow's *Narrative*, quoted in *Works*, vol. I, p. lx.

many times not himself, and was ever desirous of any light, and the more able, learned, and holy the persons were, the more he desired to confer and reason with them”<sup>1)</sup>.

Then again, John Robinson, by his humble acknowledgement of the leadership of Christ in the thought and conduct of men, freshly interpreted to his own and succeeding generations the meaning of Christianity. This is said in no theological sense. Dispute though he might, on moot questions of doctrine, Robinson had the heart of a child in his personal devotion to the Master. “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly”<sup>2)</sup> was a cherished and heeded counsel for him in all his walk. It was that which made him the beloved pastor he was, “a physician”, as Ainsworth called him, “whose receipts are not after the common sort, for advice about . . . health . . . or friendship, a man worthily revered of all the city (of Norwich) for the grace of God in him”<sup>3)</sup>. That, too, it was which led Thomas Blossom to write of him, in 1625, “The loss of his ministry was very great unto me, for I ever counted myself happy in the enjoyment of it, notwithstanding all the crosses and losses otherwise I sustained”<sup>4)</sup>. It was that again, his loyalty to the great Teacher, which led a follower, years after his death, to say, “He was comfortable to his people. He was much beloved of them, and as loving was he with them, and entirely sought their good for soul and body”<sup>5)</sup>. Yet it would be insufficient for us to conclude with this gentle pastoral note. Christ was not simply the pattern to him in the quiet ministries of life. He was the claimant to lordship in all situations. The dignity and stability of the church, a democracy, lay in the fact that it was at the same time a monarchy, with “the Lord Jesus . . . King . . . alone, upon whose shoulders the government is and unto whom all power is given in heaven and earth”<sup>6)</sup>. The basis for his unhesitating insistence that in the new colony in America each individual must yield to the common good in the slow growth of

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<sup>1)</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. LXIX.

<sup>2)</sup> Matt. 11 : 29.

<sup>3)</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. xvii, note.

<sup>4)</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. LXVII.

<sup>5)</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. LXIX.

<sup>6)</sup> Cf. *Works*, vol. II, p. 40.

a body politic, and that greater than the prosperity of some is the peace of all, lay for him in the writings of the New Testament as illuminated by the spirit of Christ. The rebuke which he administered to the colonists for their harshness to the Indians on a certain occasion was again consistent with his earnest heeding of the counsel of Christ. "Concerning the killing of those poor Indians", he wrote, in an epistle that has something in it to search the souls of so-called civilized nations even in our day, "how happy had it been if you had converted some before you killed any . . . . Where blood is once begun to be shed, it is seldom stanch'd of a long time after. It is . . . . a thing more glorious in men's eyes than pleasing in God's or convenient for Christians, to be a terror to poor barbarian people, and, indeed, I am afraid lest by these occasions, others should be drawn to affect a kind of ruffling course in the world"<sup>1</sup>). How reminiscent these words are of those once spoken by the Galilean, "I am not come to destroy men's lives but to save them"<sup>2</sup>). Time does not permit that more be said concerning this crowning and most fundamental thing in Robinson's character, his "bringing of all things", to use Paul's words, "into subjection to Christ". We have turned over and over in the past to that part of Winslow's letter which tells us that Robinson charged the departing half of his flock "before God and his angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ"<sup>3</sup>). Well were it for us to-day to give heed, by reflecting on Robinson's life, to the corollary that we do follow him as far as he followed Christ, which following, we may be sure, will leave no field of our thought and life untouched for good.

I would remind you in conclusion of a timely verse in the Psalm of thanksgiving chosen as the basis of this discourse. "Tell the towers of Mount Zion", the Psalmist urged his people, — the word "tell" meaning to count, to estimate, to survey, to appraise. We have been seeking to tell in that sense the many-sided elements of strength in John Robinson's life. But in the following verse of the same Psalm there occur the words, "That ye may tell it to the generation following"<sup>4</sup>). "Tell" here is used not in the sense of "count"

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<sup>1</sup>) Winslow's *Relation* in Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrims*, quoted in Bryant's *Popular History of the United States*, vol. I, p. 409.

<sup>2</sup>) Luke 9 : 56.

<sup>3</sup>) *Works*, vol. I, p. XLIV.

<sup>4</sup>) Ps. 48 : 13.



but of "recount", not of "rate" but of "narrate". Applying this to the things John Robinson has come to stand for in our thinking, we find that the burden is placed upon us squarely of sharing in the knowledge that is ours, of making sure it shall have meaning and effectiveness with our children and our children's children. We are here this day, a group of Dutch, English and American people, commemorating with thanksgiving the life of a knight whose sword was the Spirit, and affectionately claiming him as having kinship with us all. I think we can never estimate too highly the value to our own three nations, in a special way, and to the world in general, of such a recognition as this to-day, which constrains us to feel the bond we have in Robinson and in the Pilgrim tradition. But this is not enough. The religious liberty for which he stood — with other great thinkers of his day, in England and in Holland, the mother-land of tolerance, will only continue to be a possession of men as it is guarded. It is for us so to teach, so to live and act, that it may grow stronger and more permanent, until it abides, not as a theory but as a fact, throughout the whole wide world. Democracy, again, is not an inevitable ordering of life, appearing with civilization as the flower with the stalk. Wherever it is to-day it has been, and is being, sacrificed for and shared. If it is to belong to the next generation this must continue with new strength. The duties as well as the rights of the individual must be inculcated if "government of the people, by the people and for the people" is not to perish from the earth. Likewise with truth seeking. It has only infrequently been a popular thing as the passion of men. Obscurantism can easily sway multitudes, even to-day. In this great university-center it is a privilege and an honor for me to plead that we of the colleges and universities may more and more realize our comradeship one with another in a great international enterprise for the furtherance of science and the spread of the benign fruits of learning in the world<sup>1</sup>). And what more shall I say? We are not an ecclesiastical group here. Yet we would be false to the spirit of him whom this impressive tablet commemorates did we not pause

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<sup>1</sup>) In connection with the Tercentenary Commemoration of the Founding of the Reformed Dutch Church in America, held in New York in June, 1928, recognition was made of the fact that Ionas Michaëlius, graduate of Leyden and first domine in Manhattan, was also the first European university man to settle in the middle colonies of America. Under the auspices of the Institute of International Education the following Dutch and American universities participated: Leyden, Groningen, Amsterdam, Harvard, Columbia, Rutgers and N. Y. U.

again to give thought to the Christ who gave him authority. It is He, the Saviour, who is needed in the ventures of this age as He was in the stirring days of the Pilgrims. It is He without whom all democracy and all knowledge are vanities only to pass away. Whatever the creed we profess, whatever the name or sign we bear, it is given to us this day, as we render homage to the good pastor who taught and died here, to dedicate ourselves and the nations of which we are a part to a new adherence to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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## CEREMONY AT LEYDEN

In a service which brought together a large company of English, American and Dutch people there was unveiled in the Pieterskerk, in Leyden (Holland), on Saturday, September 8, a memorial tablet in honour of John Robinson, pastor of the congregation of English Separatists who, as the "Pilgrim Fathers", in 1620, founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. The memorial, a striking design in sandstone, was placed upon the wall of the baptismal chapel of the church, overlooking the place where Robinson was buried in 1625. The short ceremony of unveiling took place at 3 p.m., at which time greetings were spoken by H.E. the Dutch Minister to the U.S., Dr. J. H. Van Royen, H.E. the American Minister at The Hague, Mr. Richard M. Tobin, Dr. H. M. van Nes, of the Theological Faculty of the University of Leyden, and Mrs. Henry Mather, a descendant of Miles Standish, who represented the general society of *Mayflower* descendants, the donors of the memorial. At 3.30 o'clock the company proceeded to the court known as the Jan Pesynshof, where John Robinson lived and taught during his residence in Leyden, and where he died. There, as the choir sang the anthem, "When that the Lord did turn again," it was not difficult to feel the spirit of the men and women who in the early days of the seventeenth century, harried out of their homeland, found asylum and religious freedom in Holland. The formal religious service was in the nave of the Pieterskerk, at 4 p.m. The invocation was spoken by the Rev. Dr. Irwin Brown, pastor of the Scots Church in Rotterdam. Prof. Dr. A. Eekhof, of the Theological Faculty of the University, whose contributions to the history of the Pilgrim Fathers within recent years have made him an authority in that interesting field, then gave an address on the life and work of Robinson. The Rev. Dr. Edgar Franklin Romig, minister of the Middle Collegiate (Dutch Reformed) Church, of New York City, and a director of the Leyden Pilgrim Fathers Society, preached the sermon, emphasising the things of universal appeal in Robinson's life and teachings, his influence upon democracy, his spirit of truth seeking, and his courageous interpretation of the meaning of Christianity. The benediction was pronounced by Dr. Wm. Thomson, pastor of the English Presbyterian Church, of Amsterdam. After the service tea was served in the Senate Chamber of the University a venerable room, suggesting in its portraits of men like Scaliger and Arminius, one-time professors in the institution founded by William the Silent, the stirring professors of the century that produced the Pilgrims. H.M. the Queen of the Netherlands was represented at the services by R. A. Baron van Hardenbroek van Lockhorst.

*A New York minister who was present, in:  
British Weekly, 20 Sept. 1928.*