

# THE MELYN PATROONSHIP OF STATEN ISLAND

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE  
NINTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
NEW YORK BRANCH

OF

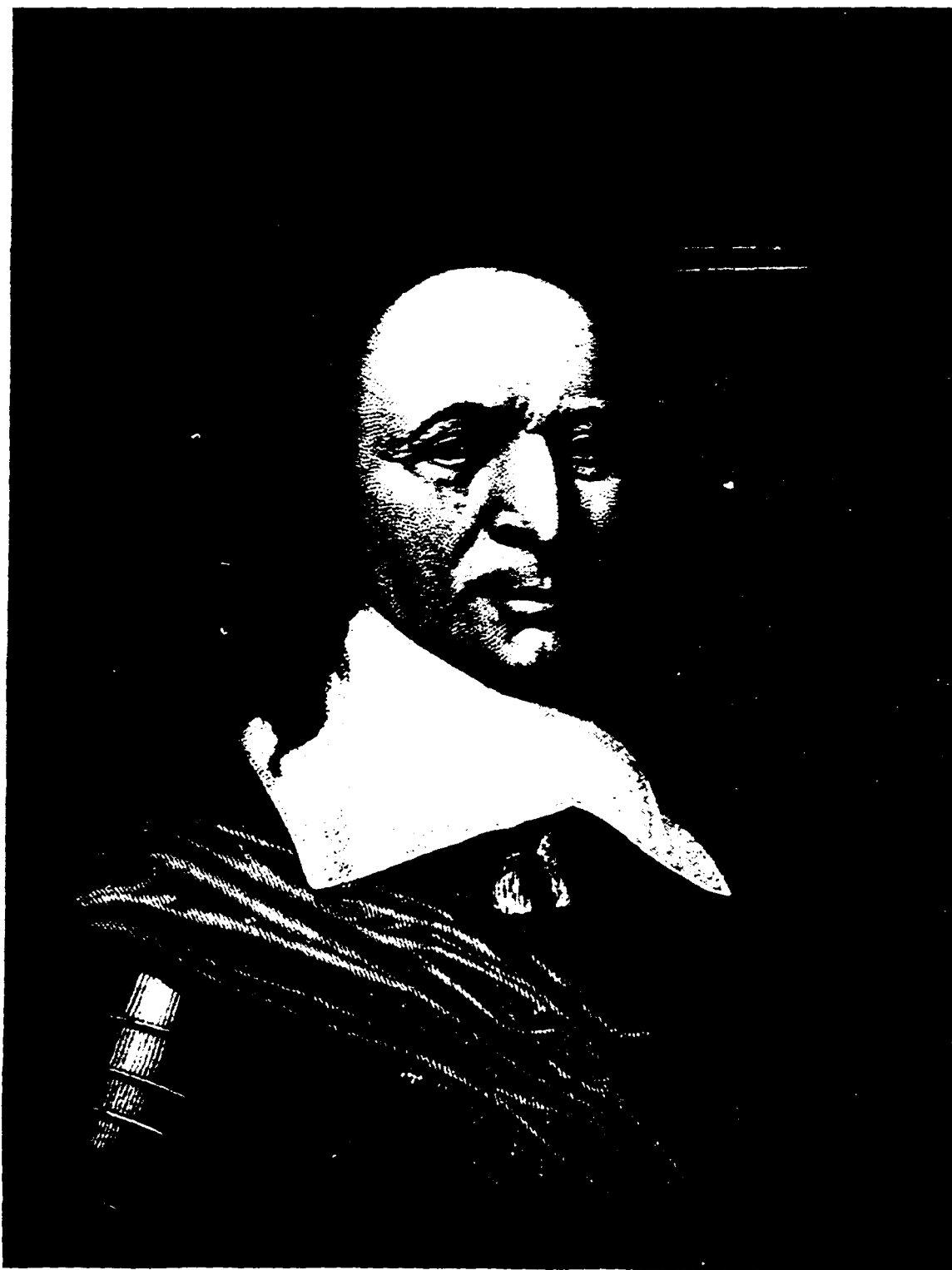
THE ORDER OF COLONIAL LORDS  
OF MANORS IN AMERICA

Held in the City of New York,  
April 29th, 1921

BY

WILLIAM CHURCHILL HOUSTON  
OF  
GERMANTOWN, PHILADELPHIA





*J. Dingier Junr*

Born, 1592. Died, 1672.

Original in the possession of The New York Historical Society, reproduced by permission.



This Monograph is compiled from the following authorities:

Brodhead's History of the State of New York.

New Amsterdam and Its People, J. H. Innes.

The Story of New Netherland, Wm. Elliot Griffis.

Saint Nicholas Society Genealogical Record 1916.

Collections of the New York Historical Society, 1913—Melyn Papers.

The Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts.

## THE PATROONSHIP OF STATEN ISLAND

In Brodhead's History of New York it is recorded that in 1630 it was obvious that the rural tenantry of Holland did not possess the requisite means to sustain the expense of emigration, and the associate directors of the West India Company thought that the permanent agricultural settlement of their American province could be best accomplished by the organization of separate subordinate colonies or manors under large proprietors. To tempt the ambition of such capitalists, peculiar privileges were offered to them. These privileges, nevertheless, were carefully confined to members of the West India Company. The Charter provided that any such members as should, within four years, plant a colony of fifty adults in any part of New Netherland except the reserved island of Manhattan, should be acknowledged as a Patroon, or feudal Chief of the territory he might thus colonize. Each patroon was promised a full title by inheritance, with *venia testandi*, or the right to dispose of his estate by will. These colonies were to be, in some respects, analogous to the lordships and seigneuries of Europe, yet all in general, subordinate to the West India Company.

Power to hold Manorial Courts was granted the patroons and none of the colonists either man or woman, son or daughter, man servant or maid servant, could be allowed to leave the service of their patroons during the period for which they might be bound to remain, except by the written consent of such patroon.

In case any patroon "should in time prosper so much as to found one or more cities" he was to have "power and authority to establish officers and magistrates there."

Their privileges also extended to the places of worship, as we are informed that when aristocratic fashions imported from England prevailed, there were in the Dutch Churches at Albany, Schenectady and other places, on either side of the old pulpit, "the Thrones" that is, seats elevated a little above the level of the others covered with rich curtains and meant for the special use of the family of the Lord of the Manor, or in a free town, the local magistrates. Here sat the Patroon and his wife, he occupying the one side and the lady the other.

The first to apply for Patroonships were Samuel Godyn, Samuel Blommaert, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer and Michael Pauw; the latter procured from its Indian owners the cession of the whole of Staten Island. In 1637, the directors at Amsterdam succeeded in purchasing from Michael Pauw his territorial rights as patroon, for which they paid twenty-six thousand guilders. By this arrangement, Pavonia and Staten Island became the property of the Company, and the annoyance which Pauw's independent colony had caused was at length stopped.

On May 12, 1638, Cornelis Melyn sailed from the Trexel as supercargo of the *Het Wapen Van Norwegen*, in the equipment of which the Van Rensselaerwyck colony owned one half share, and arrived at New Amsterdam August 4, 1638. He was so well pleased with the country that he soon returned to bring out his family to Manhattan.

It must have required powerful influence with the West India Company to induce them to authorize another patroonship, as very considerable friction had developed with those already established. Melyn, however, seems to have been able to command this, and perhaps it was due to the high standing of those associated with him in his enterprise that the grant was made, as the Very Noble Jongheer (Lord) Godert Van Reede, Lord of Nederhorst, on the sixth day of May, 1641, entered into a contract whereby he received in ownership the just half of the colonies acquired by Melyn, and in the same document there is reference to a colony of the Lord Count of Solms, which gives the impression that he too was interested. Later on, Hendrick Van der Capellen, Lord of Ryssel, appears to have taken a very lively interest in the affairs of Melyn and became a partner with him in his remaining half of Staten Island.

However this may be, he was granted permission with a Patroon's privileges July 2, 1640, to found a colony on Staten Island and was acknowledged as Patroon. When on his way to take possession his ship with his people, private means, cattle, goods and all implements necessary for agriculture, was on August 13, 1640, taken by the Dunkirk pirates. This compelled him to return to Amsterdam. February 18/25, 1641, his grant was renewed, whereupon with the help and assistance of the West India Company, he sailed later in this year with forty-one persons to colonize Staten Island, arriving August 20, 1641.

On January 19, 1642, Director William Kieft issued to Melyn the following patent, confirming his grant of Staten Island:

"We Willem Kieft, Director General and Councillors in behalf of the High Mighty Lords States General of the United Netherlands, His Highness of Orange and the Hon. Managers of the General Privilege West India Company, residing in New Netherland: Make known that on this underwritten date we have given and granted as we are giving and granting by these presents (by virtue of a certain Act, dated July 1640, conceded by said Lords Managers) to Cornelis Melyn the entire Staten Island, situated on the Bay and North River of New Netherland, excepting so much land as appertains to a farm which by us Director and Councillors before mentioned had been granted and given—before the date of the before mentioned Act to David Peterse De Vries of Hoorn, which land has also been occupied by him, David Peterse; all under express condition that he, Cornelis Melyn, or those by virtue of the present entering upon his rights, shall acknowledge the said Hon. Heeren Managers as their Lords, under the Sovereignty of the High Mighty Lords the States General; and hereto obey their Director and Councillors as good inhabitants are bound to do; providing he, Melyn, or those entering upon his right submit in whole and in part to all such charges and requisitions as—in accordance with the exemptions of New Netherland—have been already levied or shall yet be levied by the Managers; consequently constituting in quality and by virtue as expressed before, said Cornelis Melyn, in our stead, real and actual possessor of the aforesaid parcel of land; granting him by these presents, perfect power, authority and special order to take possession of, cultivate, inhabit, use the said Staten Island—except the said farm—as he may do with other his patrimonial lands and effects, without we, the grantors, in the aforesaid quality are reserving or retaining any the least share, claim or authority in the same, desisting of the same in behalf of as above."

In addition to his Staten Island possession Melyn held a tract of land in Manhattan at what is now the corner of Stone, Pearl and Broad Streets. His house there was a modest one, designed for use in troublesome times; it was apparently two stories high and in all probability built of brick. It is shown in a map of the city in 1652.

THE EAST RIVER SHORE NEAR THE "GRAFT," 1652.  
Enlarged from the Justus Danckers and Visscher Views of New Amsterdam.



- |  |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| AA. Houses on the Marckveldt.            | G. Hend. Hendricksen Kip.             | M. Cornelis Melyn.                               |
| BB. " Marckveldt Steegh and Bever Graft. | H. Anthony Jansen van Vees.           | N. Capt. Tochem Pietersen Kuyter.                |
| CC. Rear of the "Five Houses."           | I. Hendr. Jansen Smit.                | O. Sibout Claessen.                              |
| D. Brewery of West India Co.             | J. Hendr. Willemsen, baker.           | P. Cornelis van Tienhoven (aft. Jacob Steendam). |
| E. Old Church.                           | K. Houses of Tennis Craie.            | Q. Adriaen Vincent.                              |
| F. Old Parsonage (Hendr. Jansen Smit.)   | L. Jacob Wolphertsen van Couwenhoven. |  |

Reproduced from Innes' "New Amsterdam and Its People" by permission of The New York Historical Society.



During the seventeen years in which Melyn held the patroonship of Staten Island he suffered innumerable hardships and his life was a continuous succession of misfortunes. Upon his arrival at Staten Island he immediately began to build houses, to plough land and to do everything conducive to establishing a good colony, begrudging neither money or labor. But thereupon he met with a second unexpected disaster owing to a war with the savages which commenced in New Netherland. His houses, farms and everything were burned and his cattle and some of his people killed so that he was obliged to flee for his life and to sojourn with his wife and children at the Manatans until 1647.

In 1650, Melyn, who states that his power and capital had been much diminished, availed himself of the growing interest in New Netherland to induce Baron Hendrick Van de Cappellen of Ryssel, one of the Committee of the States General and several Amsterdam merchants to form an association for the colonization of Staten Island and its neighborhood. A ship called the "New Netherland's Fortune" was purchased, in which Melyn states he brought such a splendid multitude of people, consisting of farmers and farm laborers, the like of whom it was averred had never yet been seen (to arrive) in New Netherland. At this time he was in bitter controversy with Stuyvesant, who availed himself of the ship's having put into Rhode Island on its voyage, to seize it and thus vent his animosity against the Patroon. As the vessel was owned by Van de Cappellen and the association in Holland, the action against Melyn failed, but the ship and cargo were confiscated and sold. The Patroon now went to Staten Island, where apprehending further trouble he fortified his colony and established a Manorial Court.

In 1655, fresh trouble with the Indians occurred, and Staten Island, where ninety colonists were cultivating eleven flourishing bouweries, was desolated. Fifteen or sixteen persons were killed and fifty-one in number went into captivity and Melyn was compelled to raise a ransom of 1400 guilders for himself, his wife, son and son-in-law to escape being burned alive in a fire which had been already prepared and was burning. In 1657, Staten Island and the country in its neighborhood continued to feel the effects of the Indian massacre of 1655 and Melyn leaving New Netherland, from the authorities of which he had suffered so much injustice, moved to New Haven, Conn.

where he took an oath of allegiance to the English on April 7, 1657.

At Amsterdam on June 13, 1659, Melyn for a consideration of 1500 guilders surrendered the patroonship of Staten Island by executing a deed which reads as follows:

Upon this thirteenth Day of June 1659, Mr. Cornelius Melyen (who untill this time hath been Patron, & hath had Jus Patronatus of ye Colony of Staten Island scituated in ye mouth of ye North River in New Netherland) for himself, his heirs & Successors acknowledgeth to have bargained & agreed with the Lords ye Directors of ye privileged West India Company at their chamber here in Amsterdam freely & most amicably by these presents (Vizt) That he consenteth to desist deliver over, transfer & Transport all ye Pow'r, Authority, Highness, Jurisdiction, preheminencies, prerogatives, Profitts, Emoluments, Liberties, & exemptions belonging to him in quality of Patroon & belonged to him until now in upon ye lands & Colony of ye sd. Staten Island with ye following dependencies & appendencies thereof none excepted by him procured, according to ye Resolutions, Acts, articles, freedoms & exemptions & other instruments as likewise by ye letters of conveyance made over especially unto him by Willm. Kieft Governor of New Netherland, & other letters of concessions, which may have been granted concerning ye same, none excepted, which he also agreeth to deliver up unto ye abovementioned Chamber, as well here as in New Netherland as many as are yet in his custody & possession are made to cease Expressly upon ye following conditions. Vizt. That ye abovementioned company & chamber shall in New Netherlands make restitution of all such Sum or Sums of money, which were produced from certain his houseings & Lotts scituated & being upon ye Manhatans in New Amsterdam neer ye ffort (which were sold by Governor Stuyvesandt by Execution in behalf of Daniel Michiels master of ye Ship ye New Netherland's Fortune) shall be restored to him again in New Netherland by sd. Company & chamber for ye sd. Moneys or so much thereof as yet may be found to remain with ye sd. company.

And moreover that ye Just Sume of fifteen hundred guilders shall be forthwith paid him, & likewise that he shall enjoy ye Freedome & exemption of ye Custome both here & in New Netherland of ye value of about one thousand guilders Stock of Merchandise, being necessary utensels for cultivating land & permitted, wch he should think fitt to carry wth him into New Netherland.

As likewise that himself, his family & his people wth him shall be transported over thither with their own ships or ships hired at ye charge of the company according to ye Prsent use. Also that he for ye future as a free Coloneer & inhabitant for himself & his Successors shall hold & possess as free & legal estate, ye lands houses & lotts, which he hath there in ye sd. Colony, & hath hitherto made use of & which he yet shall be able to improve (& by others not possessed) they shall enjoy ye Succession thereof or by will, writings, donation or gift, agreemt. or otherwise may dispose thereof, as according to ye Articles of Privilege & Exemptions granted to Patroons & Coloneers. That likewise his eldest son being capable (& ye sd. Colony having need of a Schout, & one to be appointed thereupon) shall be preferred before any other by ye aforesd. Company & Chamber. And

Finally that by ye present Governor Steuyvesandt shall be shewed & maintained a perfect Amnestia of all Strifes, hatred & differences, which formerly may have risen between them; as well in respect of ye Company as their own private concerns; ye same hereby to remain forgiven & forgotten & for ye future they to be good friends & to respect & acknowledge each other in his quality & to demonstrate all reasonable Assistance. To ye performance of all ye premises He Cornelius Melyen bindeth himself & his estate movable and unmovable, present & future none excepted to ye Submission of ye Court of Holland & all laws & Judges as well in New Netherland as herein this Countrey—In Witness whereof this is underwritten by ye undernamed Lords & Committee of ye West India Company thereunto authoriz'd by ye Lords their fellow brethren on ye behalf of ye aforementioned company & chamber by special Commission dated ye tenth of April last past, & by ye aforesd. Cornelius Melyen at Amsterdam ye day & year aforesd. was underwritten & signed. Edward Man as Direct. Abraham Wilmerdonck as Directr H: Bontemantel as Directr Cornelius Melyen late Patroon of Staten Island in ye presence of me as Notary, H: Schaef No. P.

It agreeth with ye original signed agreement  
being in my Custody

In Witness

H: Shaef Noy Public

Examined this with ye Dutch agreemt.  
& find it to be a true translate to  
ye best of my understanding as Witness  
my hand

Jacob Leisler

Also by me

vera copia

George Turfry

Endorsed: A Copy of ye Translate of ye Agreement of Melyen with ye  
West India Company Examd Pr

Mr. Leisler

It has been surmised that the name Melyn was derived from the town of Malines, about twenty miles southeast of Antwerp in the direction of Maestricht, from which it is not far distant. Of the family we know nothing and the particulars of the boyhood of Cornelis are unfortunately very few. A biographical sketch of him in the New York Saint Nicholas Society Genealogical Book of 1916 gives the following.

He was a Belgian by birth, and was baptised at Antwerp September 17, 1600, and on November 13, 1606, guardians were appointed for him, his father having died November 9th, and his mother in October of that year. He was at school from 1606 until January 1613. On September 15, 1618, he announced his intention to see foreign countries. In 1626 he was in Antwerp to attend the necessary formalities in connection with the closing of his father's estate. Subsequently

he moved to Holland and engaged in trade there, as in the Van Rennselaer Bowier Manuscripts he is referred to as being formerly a "leather dressed at Amsterdam." He is next heard of in May 12, 1638, when Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, in a letter to Director Kieft refers to him as a supercargo. Upon other occasions he was engaged by Van Rensselaer in his enterprises and it may be inferred that it was through his influence as a member of the West India Company that Melyn succeeded in interesting those men of wealth and station who became connected with him in his colonization scheme.

Cornelis Melyn owes his prominence in the history of New Netherland to his persistent opposition to the arbitrary power exercised by Kieft and after him by Stuyvesant. He was one of the first men in the new world to champion the rights of the people and his earnest endeavors in their behalf brought down upon him the wrath of these two directors, who were the last to represent the authority of the West India Company in New Amsterdam.

About the time that Melyn established his colony on Staten Island, the good feeling which had prevailed between the Dutch and native Indians became seriously disturbed. Melyn, however, was not molested for a considerable time, perhaps his immunity was due to the numerical strength of his colony, but in 1643 the savages made that determined attack upon his people which has already been referred to. The uprising was of such a general and serious character that in this appalling crisis Director Kieft was compelled to summon the people a second time in council. They accordingly elected from among themselves a representative body styled "The Eight Men," of which Cornelis Melyn was a member.

Two days after their election the Eight Men met, at Kieft's summons, "to consider the critical condition of the country," and it was resolved that hostilities should be immediately renewed against certain of the Indian tribes. The Eight Men soon met again and Cornelis Melyn was their President. Shortly thereafter it was determined to address the College of the XIX and the West India Company on the deplorable condition of the country. This document to the West India Company bearing date of October 28, 1644, though drawn up under circumstances of great provocation contained much vituperation of Kieft and his advisors, and proved to be a source of much trouble to Melyn, who was considered, and probably with justice, as having been its author.

Although the proceedings of the "Eight Men" were conducted with secrecy, and though Kieft does not appear to have been aware for a considerable period of the communication of 1644 to the West India Company, there seems to have been early manifested a bad state of feeling on his part towards Cornelis Melyn, which displayed itself in many petty annoyances towards the latter. In 1645 he was charged by the fiscal agent with having sold wine to the Indians but nothing seems to have come of the affair.

Melyn had at this time leased about two acres of ground from the officers of the company, covering the site of the present Trinity Church and the northern portion of the churchyard, and extending to the river bank. This he employed in raising grain, evidently for his family use. On the 31st of May, 1646, Kieft and his council raised some petty point of encroachment on the Company's property and ordered that "he may cut his grain," and then deliver up the Company's ground in the same condition as in the Spring.

On May 11, 1647, Peter Stuyvesant arrived at New Netherland to take over the authority from Wm. Kieft. When he took the direction from his predecessor, the whole community was called together to witness the ceremony. Kieft thanked the people for their fidelity to him, which it is stated he much exaggerated in hopes that the commonalty would unanimously thank him, but Jochem Pietersen Kuyter, who was one of the Eight Men, Melyn and several others, spoke out boldly that they would not thank him as they had no reason to do so.

The contest between the prerogative of the provincial government and the popular sentiment of the commonalty was reopened soon after Stuyvesant was installed, and Kieft's reckless administration was made the subject of a formal complaint to his successor. Kuyter and Melyn were particularly active in this and petitioned that the members of his council should be examined on searching interrogatories, which embraced the whole provincial policy from the imposition of the Indian tribute in 1639. The evidence thus obtained they proposed to use with effect in Holland.

Stuyvesant immediately took alarm. If the administration of Kieft were now to be judged at the demand of the people, his own acts might have to pass the same ordeal. He therefore chose the side of Kieft, and looked upon Kuyter and Melyn, not as members of the former board of "Eight Men," but simply

as private persons. Convening a special council Stuyvesant, without waiting for the advice of his associates, announced his authoritative opinion that it was treason to petition against one's magistrates, whether there was cause or not; and the petition of the two "malignant" suspects was rejected.

Instead of Kieft and his council, Kuyter and Melyn were ordered to be examined as to the origin of the Indian War. The contentions of both sides were duly presented and in a few days the prejudged case was decided, and on July 25, 1647, sentence was pronounced. Stuyvesant wished Melyn to be punished with death and the confiscation of his property, but the majority of the Council modified the director's severe opinion and he was sentenced to seven years banishment and to pay a fine of three hundred guilders, and to forfeit all benefits derived from the Company. Kuyter was sentenced to three years banishment, and to pay a fine of one hundred and fifty guilders. The right to appeal to the fatherland was denied by Stuyvesant, who said, addressing Melyn, "If I were persuaded that you would divulge our sentence, or bring it before their High Mightinesses I would have you hanged, at once, to the highest tree in New Netherland."

In the office of the Title Guarantee & Trust Company, New York, there hangs a picture, painted by John Ward Dunsmore, portraying the departure of the *Princess Amelia* which left the shores of New Netherland August 17, 1647, for Holland. Out on the river is seen the waiting ship flying the flag of the Dutch West India Company and on the shore are assembled two noteworthy groups; in the one on the left are Peter Stuyvesant and members of his Council, together with the ex-Director William Kieft, who is departing for home having with him a fortune estimated at four hundred thousand guilders. On the right are the Skipper and the banished citizens, Kuyter and Melyn, together with the latter's young son. They bore themselves proudly, however, saying that they went as good Patriots and Proprietors of New Netherland. While the artist has been obliged to draw very freely on his imagination, he has given a graphic picture of a very stirring event, and depicts the historic commencement of a voyage which was to have a most disastrous ending as the *Princess Amelia*, navigated by mistake into the Bristol Channel on September 27, 1647, struck upon a rock, and was wrecked on the rugged coast of Wales. Seeing the approach of death Kieft's conscience smote him and turn-



"THE PRINCESS AMELIA"

Reproduced by permission of the Title Guarantee & Trust Company of New York

ing toward Kuyter and Melyn he said, "Friends, I have been unjust to you, can you forgive me?" Kieft and eighty other persons, including the son of Cornelis Melyn, were drowned; Kuyter clinging to a part of the wreck on which stood a cannon, was thrown ashore; Melyn, after having floated hither and thither at sea for about eighteen hours, was driven on a sand bank from which he reached the main land in safety.

As both Kuyter and Melyn were more concerned for their papers than anything else, they caused them to be dragged for and on the third day, Kuyter succeeded in recovering a small box of them, which he carried to Holland.

Kuyter and Melyn proceeded to Amsterdam and laid their case before the State General ignoring entirely the Dutch West India Company. So successfully did they plead their cause and so much influence did they exert that William Prince of Orange sent a letter to Stuyvesant under date of April 28, 1648, informing him that Melyn and Kuyter had received permission to return to New Netherland, and he was not to molest them. An act was passed by the State General suspending Stuyvesant's sentence, citing him to defend it at the Hague, and granting to Kuyter and Melyn full enjoyment of all the rights of colonists in New Netherland.

The Dutch West India Company angered by the loss of their ship expressed themselves somewhat differently, saying that they "greatly regretted that while so many fine men were lost, two rebellious bandits should survive to trouble the Company with their complaints."

Armed with these documents Melyn sailed in the winter of 1648-1649 and returned to Manhattan. Anxious that his triumph should be as public as his disgrace had been, he demanded that the acts of their High Mightinesses should be read and explained by the "Nine Men" to the commonalty, who were assembled in church within Fort Amsterdam. A hubbub arose, but after an exciting debate the point was yielded, and the mandamus and summons were read to the people. "I honor the States and shall obey their commands," said Stuyvesant. "I shall send an attorney to sustain sentence." This was all the answer he would give. The members of the council explained their conduct as they severally thought best. Van Dincklagen frankly acknowledged that he had erred, but the rest of his colleagues would give no satisfactory replies. The director and secretary positively refused to give the written answer which Melyn demanded.



Encouraged by the results of the application of Melyn and Kuyter to the States General, the jurist Adriaen Van der Donck in conjunction with several other opponents of the administration at New Amsterdam, prepared on July 6, 1649, the historic document known as "The Remonstrances of New Netherland" which was carried over to the fatherland by a deputation including Van der Donck and Melyn.

The remaining years of Cornelis Melyn's life in New Netherland were marked by continuous quarrels with Stuyvesant. Before long he was charged with distributing arms and ammunition among the Raritans and the South River Tribes, and with stirring up the Nyack savages against Stuyvesant. The Council accordingly passed a resolution that the director should be attended by a body-guard of four "halberdiers" whenever he went abroad.

Later on he was thrown into prison and subjected to many hardships, and finally as we have seen, sought under British rule that protection which had been denied him by the Dutch authorities in the New World. He was a man of indomitable will and unquestioned courage, and fought undaunted against every disaster until death had carried off those who had so valiantly stood by him in Holland, and his own means were sadly depleted. He had a superior education and the "Braeden Raedt" (Broad Advice) the authorship of which has been conceded to him, marked him as possessing considerable literary ability. We know nothing of his life at New Haven except that he was living there as late as 1662, after which he is known no more.

