

**LETTERS ON THE TRUE
RELATIONS OF
CHURCH AND STATE TO
SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

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Letters on the true relations of church and state to schools and colleges by A. B. Brown & John Maclean

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A. B. BROWN & JOHN MACLEAN

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1858.

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LETTERS.

[The following letters are re-printed, in order that they may be sent to various persons who have not had an opportunity to see them. It is believed, that the questions discussed are of great moment to the interests of both religion and learning:—and that they merit the attention of all, and especially of those who have any thing to do with the direction of our literary institutions.

The first two letters were published in the Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh, and all of them in the Presbyterian Banner of Philadelphia.]

DR. BROWN TO DR. MACLEAN,

CANONSBURG, Dec. 7th, 1852.

REV. AND DEAR SIR.—I take the liberty of writing to you for the purpose of ascertaining your views in relation to the *new policy* which is coming to prevail extensively in our Church, with regard to education and educational institutions.

Were the advocates of Synodical colleges aiming to plant these institutions in those places only where no others worthy of confidence exist, there would be no cause for complaint. But since they seem bent on carrying out their favorite *scheme everywhere*—even in the vicinity of colleges that have always enjoyed the confidence and favor of the Presbyterian church, and which are under the direction of Presbyterians—

and since these institutions must be placed in a false position, and be robbed of many of those important advantages which they had earned by long years of faithful and zealous devotion to the cause of Christian education, it becomes a serious question, what are these institutions to do in these new and embarrassing circumstances?

It seems rather hard that the church for which they have done so much, should array her authority and influence against them.

We are determined, however, at all risks, to stand fast in the liberty which we have heretofore enjoyed. We would, at the same time, be greatly pleased to have the countenance and encouragement of other colleges similarly situated, and especially Princeton.

I shall venture, moreover, to suggest whether this evil was not brought upon us by an influence emanating originally from Princeton, and if so, whether a *counter influence* should not now be put forth *there*, for the purpose of arresting, if possible, the mischief? Our church has already been *saddled* with a number of sickly institutions that had no special claims either upon the church or the public, and which are likely to prove a heavy encumbrance, without contributing in return any substantial benefit.

Should you find it convenient, and deem it worth while to drop me a line expressive of your views and purposes in relation to this subject, you will greatly oblige.

Yours with great respect,

A. B. BROWN.

REV. JOHN MACLEAN, D. D.

DR. MACLEAN'S REPLY.

COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY,

Princeton, Dec. 11th, 1852.

MY DEAR SIR:—I have received your favour of the 7th instant; and in a few words I will give you my views in regard to the subject to which it relates, though I am fully aware that they are very imperfect.

Were the erection of colleges within the limits of our church a perfectly novel enterprise, I might have some doubts as to the best mode of founding and carrying on such institutions; but with all the light I have been able to obtain on this subject, I am decidedly of the opinion, that where colleges can be successfully established upon the plan of Jefferson, and of the one here, it is unwise to place them upon any other foundation.

What are the simple facts in regard to both the institutions named?

1st, They are perfectly exempt from any interference from the State authorities, so long as they continue to act within the limits prescribed to them in their respective charters.

2d, They are in the hands and subject to the control of Presbyterian ministers and laymen, as wise, and as judicious as any that could be selected by our church courts,—not to say better than most of our Synods could furnish. And these ministers and laymen are as much devoted to the interests of the Presbyterian Church, as any men could be.

3d, Sound religious instruction, according to our

doctrinal standards, is given in them, and as much probably as is given in any college in the country. There is no attempt to proselyte the youth who belong to other denominations; but as regards matters of faith and practice, the teaching is as full and as free as could be found in any college in the land. Not only are the doctrines of the Bible taught in them, but the Bible itself is a text book and a subject of study. Natural Theology, the Evidences of Christianity, and the Greek Testament, furnish matters of weekly recitation and instruction. Meetings for prayer, and for the reading and expounding of the Scriptures, are as frequent as in any institutions under ecclesiastical control.

4th, There has never been a time in the history of these two colleges, when their friends entertained any apprehension that they would be perverted from their original design, or taken from under their control. During the late struggles in the Presbyterian Church, which institution was regarded as being in the greatest danger, by the now strenuous advocates for colleges under direct ecclesiastical supervision—the *college* or the *seminary* in this place? The one under the care of the General Assembly, the other under the direction of a permanent Board of Trustees, who by their charter are authorized to fill all vacancies occurring in their body, with but one exception—the Governor of the State being ex-officio President of the Board.

5th, *Indirectly*, our church courts *have* a supervision of our two colleges. Reports are made to our Presbyteries and Synods, not indeed formally by our Trustees; but by some of the officers of the colleges, who are members of Synod or Presbytery: and more or

less notice of the condition of the colleges is always taken by these church courts, in their narratives of the state of religion within their bounds. Should our institutions cease to merit the confidence of the churches, our ecclesiastical courts would have it in their power to correct any abuses by simply calling the attention of the college authorities to them, and by adding, if necessary, a declaration, that if the abuses should not be promptly corrected, they will withhold their expression of confidence in the management of the institutions. Our colleges have no such command of funds as would enable them to live, if once deprived of the countenance of our churches and church courts.

6th, It is a fact not to be denied, that our two institutions have done more for the best interests of the Presbyterian Church than any other two colleges in the land; and they have a just right to expect that in their efforts to promote the cause of Christian education, our Synods and Presbyteries shall do nothing, and take no steps that will impair the good name or usefulness of institutions which have rendered them so great service.

In view of the above mentioned facts, I cannot see that it is for the interest of the church or the colleges, that the latter should be placed under the direct control of the former. There is not a benefit to be derived from a college directly under the government of a Synod or Presbytery, that may not be as readily obtained from one upon the plan of the colleges at Canonsburgh and Princeton. But there are *evils* very likely to result from the direct ecclesiastical government of colleges which cannot exist in the case of colleges on the other plan. I speak here of evils to

the church itself. The more important an institution becomes, and the more numerous its endowments and professorships, the greater will be the tendency to form parties, and to lay plans for securing to their respective adherents the more valuable posts. Such divisions and such scheming cannot fail to produce jealousy and distrust among the members. Hard thoughts and hard speeches will be very apt to follow the disappointments which must be experienced by one party or another.

So long as the institution is in a feeble condition, the post of Trustee or of a Professor may be regarded as a matter of little moment, and may be but little sought after; but let either of them become a post of honour, influence, or profit, and there will be no little contention as to the selection to be made.

The less Synods have to do directly with any other matters than those which relate to the government of the church and the proper guarding of its doctrinal instruction, the better for the welfare of the church. By confining themselves as much as possible to what is their more appropriate work, the better will they consult their harmony and usefulness.

Neither is it for the good of such colleges as can sustain themselves, to be altogether under the control of our church courts. Under the direction of a self-perpetuating body of wise and efficient Trustees, there is a far greater security for a full and fair trial of any system of instruction and government which may be adopted by our colleges, than there can be in one under the care of a Synod. Who does not know that the complexion of our Synods and other church courts is continually changing? New ministers and new