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6-5-1868

A Letter of A. C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps

A. C. Van Raalte

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Hudson, New York, June 5, 1868

No. 43

A letter of A. C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps, explaining how he is promoting the cause of Hope College at this meeting of the Synod.

Original in the Archives of Hope College.

Hudson NY
June 5/1868

Revd Dr P: Phelps

Dear Brother,

I am informed that the Stated Clerk of the Synod of Chicago did neglect to send our credentials: that they had send a telegram without effect: Therefore different proposals what to do with the Chicago delegation are at last tabled under a Common Consent that the delegates must procure their own credentials.--

Six or seven documents in connection with New Brunswick Seminary are read an referred to the Committee on the Professorate: - the mind is so much fixed on that interest that yesterday was at once appointed the Committee on the "Professorate" only, and with this excuse, that the Committee could not loose time, on account of the great work to do.- For that reason the accepted Counsel report of Hope College was not to be allowed to go to the Committee on the Professorate:- and the report was not allowed a reading; today was appointed the Committee on Education to which the report of Counsel was committed. Rev. Thomson Chairman myself and some unknown persons: this I did expect: Ds Thomson had in hand that half of our proof, and told the Synod that it would be impossible to burden the Committee on the Professorate with such a volume Which would be at least double of What was in his hand: Abraham (Thomson) I suppose has send it to his brother. This Chairman is the right hand of New Brunswick and I suppose has his instructions: our report I think has been in high places. Dr. Porter (Pres of Synod that Year) shows by this appointment that he really is what I thought Him to be.- All the faces around show that there is some painful hidden matter behind the kindness and smiling handshaking. The title of the report did recieve disapproval by the Sec: See: those names of the Synodical Committee ought not to have been on it. President Porter Sprong at his feet, telling that He and Ganse was prevented to be at Holland: that they therefore not did deliver that report. - The animo and smiles did show enough. - I hear Synodical prayers for the School of the Prophets so dear to them and for the efficiency of that school etc, they forget that they have one in the West.

It is impossible to look over or through New Brunswick as far as in the West; and remembering what I saw in the South; I must say that we can not expect anything else of them, then what is in harmony with their historical education: The West is Some What a region in the moon: it is all uphill business. - A young Domine Said to Dr. J. Van der Meulon: But what you are doing in the West? if you would spend your money paid to the Theol. Professor towards the traveling expenses of the Theological Students then they could find in New Brunswick everything they wanted. Such straws shows the direction of the wind. -

I find the influential speaking material of the Synod to be: the Vice President Vermilye, Thomson and Gen Pruynt: the letter I experienced to be no friend of the Hollanders in Michigan.- I suppose they give me an opportunity of speaking in spite of the absence of credentials: I care more for the speaking than for the voting.-

Profs Scott and Crispell I have not seen yet. I am in the famely of Ds Benham with Ds J Van der Meulen an Ds Brown of Japan; this is a great pleasure to me. He is a noble man.-

Yours truly
A C Van Raalte

Please give a reading to Ds Oggel. I have no time now to write him.

4. in spite of the absence of credentials: I care more
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H. C. Kaatter

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Synod not disposed to do anything for
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43

Hudson N.Y.
Rev. Dr. P. Phelps. June 5/1868.

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would not be allowed to go to the Committee on the Professorate. and the report was not allowed a reading. - today was appointed the committee on education to which the report was committed. Pres: Thomson Chairman myself and some unknown persons: this I did expect: Dr Thomson had in hand that half of our proof, and told the Synod that it would be impossible to transfer the Committee on the Professorate without his name which would be at least a double of what was in his hand: Abraham I suppose had related to him this. This chairman is the right hand of the Board, and I suppose had his instructions: Dr Foster shows this appointment that he really is what I thought him to be. - All the faces around show that there is some painful hidden matter behind the smiles and smiling handshaking. - The title of the report did receive disapproval by the Sec. Sec: those names of the Synodical Committee ought not to have been in it. - President Porter sprung at his feet, telling that Mr. and Genl. was present; and the report did mention names of British men who had never been at Holland: that they

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Yours truly

A C Van Raalte

Please give a reading to Dr Ogden. I have no time now to write him.

68-06-05 [GS43]

Revd Dr P: Phelps.

Hudson N IJ¹

June 5/1868.

Dear Brother,

I am informed that the Stated Clerk² of the Synod of Chicago did neglect to send our credentials: that they had send³ a telegram without effect: Therefore different proposals what to do with the Chicago delegation are at last tabled under a Common Consent that the delegates must procure their own credentials.--

Six or seven documents in connection with New Brunswick Seminary are read an[d] referred to the Committee on the Professorate: - the mind is so much fixed on that interest that yesterday was at once appointed the Committee on the Professorate only, and with this excuse, that the Committee could not loose time, on account of the great work to do.-⁴ For that reason the accepted Counsel⁵ report of Hope College was not to be allowed to go to the Committee on the Professorate: - and the report was not allowed a reading: - today was appointed the Committee on education⁶ to which the report of Counsel was committed. Rev. Thom[p]son Chairman⁷ myself and some unknown persons: this I did expect: Ds Thomson had in hand that half of our proof, and told the Synod that it would be impossible to burden the Committee on the Professorate with such a volume Which would be at least double of What was in his hand: Abraham T[hompson]⁸ I suppose has

¹ The IJ is Van Raalte's way of spelling NY for New York. This session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America took place in Hudson, New York, June 3-12, 1868. For the first time, the new name of the denomination is used. Even though the denomination was small, the church spent considerable time annually to conduct the business of the denomination. The RCA now consisted of 448 congregations and 49,508 members. (Minutes of the General Synod, 1868, 458.

² The Stated Clerk was ?????? His failure to submit the credentials was that none of the delegates from the Synod of Chicago of which there were only ten, could be appointed to the standing committees of the General Synod.

³ It is apparent that Van Raalte is under stress at this synod meeting and is writing in haste. There are more than the average number of misspellings and grammar errors in this letter.

⁴ The names of the members who were appointed to the Committee on the Professorate were Revs. William James Romeyn Taylor (Classis of New York), Anson DuBois (Classis of Schnectady), and William Duryee (Classis of South Bergen). The elders were on the committee were James Myers (South Classis of Long Island) and Robert H. Pruyne (Classis of Albany). *Acts and Proceedings...*, 1868, 368.

⁵ This is a reference to the board of trustees of Hope College, the Council. This is an example of another misspelling by Van Raalte in this letter.

⁶ Appointed to the Committee on Education were Revs. John B. Thompson (Classis of Westchester), Richard David Van Kleeck (Classis of Bergen), and Daniel McLaren Quackenbush (Classis of New York). The elders were Erastus C. Benedict (Classis of New York) and John Lyon (Classis of Orange). Three of the ten members of the committees on professorate and education were from the Classis of New York.

⁷ Van Raalte had difficulty in spelling the name of Rev. John Bodine Thompson correctly. He misspelled the name in his 7 April 1865 letter to Phelps also. Thompson was now pastor of the First Reformed Church of Tarrytown, New York. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 795. As noted above, Thompson was appointed chairperson of the Education Committee at this session of the General Synod. *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Synod... 1868*, 368. Thompson had to have been a busy man at this session of the synod because he was also the chairperson of the Committee on Hymnology. *Ibid.* 467-468.

⁸ Rev. Abraham (or Abram according to Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 792) Thompson is possibly a crucial player in the drama being played out at this time in the General Synod. Abraham Thompson taught in the

send it to his brother. This chairman is the right hand of New Brunswick and I suppose has his instructions: our report has been I think in high places.⁹ Dr. Porter¹⁰ shows by this appointment that He really is what I thought Him to be.-- All the faces around show that there is some painful hidden matter behind the kindness and smiling handshaking.— The title of the report did receive disapproval by the Sec: See:¹¹ those names of the Synod Committee ought not to have been on it. – President Porter sprang at his feet, telling that He and Ganse¹² was prevented to be at Holland: - and the report did mention names of [?] men who had never been at Holland: that they therefore not did deliver that report. – The animus and smiles did show enough. – I hear Synodical prayers for the School of the Prophets so dear to them and for the efficiency of that school etc, they forget that they have one in the West. –¹³

It is impossible to look over or through New Brunswick as far as in the West; and remembering what I saw in the South; I must say, we can not expect anything else of them, than What is in harmony With their historical education: The West is Some What a region in the moon: it is all uphill business. - A young Domine Said to Ds. J. Van der Meulen:¹⁴ But what you are doing in the West? if you would spend your money paid to

Holland Academy the year after he graduated from Rutgers College in 1857. During the year that he spent in Holland, Michigan, he would have gotten to know Dominie Van Raalte. After Thompson's graduation from New Brunswick Seminary, he succeeded Rev. Pieter J. Oggel as pastor in the First Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa. While pastor at First Reformed, he organized and became pastor of the English speaking Second Reformed Church.

⁹ Although the meaning of this part of Van Raalte's letter is vague, there are signs that the influence of Van Raalte and Phelps is waning. In the report of the Committee of Education of which John B. Thompson was chair, there is this information: "This state of the finances [of the Board of Education of the RCA] results largely from the fact that the Board pays a large part of the salaries of the Professors in Hope College. This ought not so to be." *Acts and Proceedings... 1868*, 470. On the next page, the committee's recommendation was reported as follows: "4. They recommend that the Council of Hope College be instructed to take such measures as shall speedily relieve this Board and Synod from the support of its professors."

¹⁰ Elbert Stothoff Porter was elected president of the General Synod at the beginning of the session. *Acts and Proceedings... 1868*, 367. Porter is referred as Doctor because he received an honorary degree from Rutgers College in 1857. Porter also served as editor of the *The Christian Intelligencer*, from 1852 to 1868. From his vantage point as editor of the denominational weekly, Porter was knowledgeable of denominational affairs. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 663-664.

¹¹ John Limburger See was the longtime Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Education of the RCA from 1861 to 1881. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 729-730. The Board of Education held considerable endowed scholarship funds for students studying for the ministry. See the entry, "Education, Board of" in *A Digest of Constitutional and Synodical Legislation of the Reformed Church in America* by Edward Tanjore Corwin, (New York, 1906), 238-252 for a full summary of the work of this board and for information of the effective work on See. *Ibid*, 244.

¹² Hervey [sic] Doddridge Ganse was pastor of the West 23rd Street Church in New York City. It is unclear why Van Raalte referred to him because he was neither a delegate to the General Synod nor a member of the Board of Education according to the minutes of the 1868 General Synod.

¹³ Van Raalte is fighting an uphill battle because nearly all of the minister delegates would have been graduates of New Brunswick Seminary.

¹⁴ Van Raalte followed the Dutch custom of referring to Rev. Jacob Vander Meulen but first initial only. This practice is confusing to later genealogists or historians because there are two "J. Vander Meulens" in the RCA at this time. Both of them are sons of Rev. Cornelius Vander Meulen, founding pastor of the First Reformed Church of Zeeland. Jacob's brother was John Vander Meulen. This reference to "J. Vander Meulen" is to Jacob because he was a delegate from the Classis of Holland to this session of the General

the Theol. Professor towards the traveling expenses of the Theological Students then they could find in New Brunswick everything they wanted.¹⁵ Such straws shows the direction of the wind. -

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Yours truly
A C Van Raalte

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Synod, serving the First Reformed Church of Kalamazoo at this time. *Acts and Proceedings...*, 1868, 366 and Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 813.

¹⁵ History has proven this person wrong because presently most of the RCA ministers are educated at Western Theological Seminary while New Brunswick Seminary's mission come to be educating pastors in minority churches from many denominational backgrounds.

¹⁶ Dr. Thomas E. Vermilye, a longtime pastor of the Collegiate Church in New York City. See reference to Vermilje in the introduction of the 2 March 1865 document above.

¹⁷ Namely John Bodine Thompson.

¹⁸ Namely Robert H. Pruyn, an elder delegate from the Classis of Albany and member of the First Church in Albany. Van Raalte supplied the information that he was a general. Edward Tanjore Corwin said that he was "on many important Committees" of the RCA. Corwin, *Digest of Synodical Legislation...*, 559. Pruyn was a member of Rutgers College, Class of 1833. He served as the United States minister to Japan. William H. S. Demarest, *A History of Rutgers College 1766-1924*, (New Brunswick, N.J., 1924), 317. Pruyn was also a well-to-do person because he and his sons, by 1870, had given \$10,000 to Rutgers College. *The Centennial Celebration of Rutgers College, June 21, 1870, with an Historical Discourse, delivered by Hon. Joseph P. Bradley, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, U.S. and other Addresses and Proceeding*, (Albany, New York, 1870), 94-95.

¹⁹ This person was not an RCA minister unless Van Raalte has misspelled the name of a Reformed Church minister living in the Hudson area.

²⁰ The renowned Dr. Samuel Robbins Brown, missionary to Japan. Corwin's *Manual...*, 4th ed., 343-347. Van Raalte surely would have enjoyed meeting this man since Van Raalte was very interested in promoting the work of missions.

and April 10, '66
n. 30