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Letter to C. P. McIlvaine

Sylvanus Thayer

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Gen. Joseph Henry Thayer to Bishop C. P. McIlvaine

South Braintree
Oct. 27, 1860

Rt. Rev. Charles P. McIlvaine

My dear friend,

Your letter from West Point was received with thrilling interest of things past. There are none to which my memory wears oftener or with more satisfaction than our former relations & "joint existence" at W. P. The manner in which you refer to my Superintendence & your most kind & flattering allusion to me at the close of your sermon to the Cadets move me deeply. Whatever may have been the merits of my Superintendence in my own opinion or that of others I am ever mindful how large a share was due to the support & assistance I rec'd. from my coadjutors & from yourself more than any others & I especially remember the able memorials & papers addressed to the Sec'y of War of which you were the______man. If we failed to accomplish all we designed & originally hoped & to bring the Institution up to the beau ideal at which we aimed I console myself in some degree by the reflection that it was not through our fault but owing to outside inaction & opposition which we were unable to overcome. During the period in question no Chief Engineer and no Sec'y of War save Mr. Calhoun had any just views of the worth & interests of the Institution. What could be expected from such men as Gen. Macomb & Secretary Barbour.

I was highly gratified to learn from the Newspapers that the Prince honored you with a visit - a sure proof of high respect & admiration.

After my farewell to you in 1852 at your mountain home overlooking the beautiful valley of the Miami I said to myself as I went away, Oh! that I could pass the remainder of my days on these heights near as possible to the Bishops Mansion so that I might see his face daily & hear his preaching on the Sabbath & this has been my beau ideal since whenever I have built castles in the air.

Your old faithful & most affectionate friend,

S. Thayer

NOTES: Sylvanus Thayer (1785-1872) born Braintree, Mass. Educated at West Point where he taught (1808-1812). Served in War of 1812 at Lake Champlain and elsewhere. From 1815 to 1833 Superintendent of West Point and known as the "Father of the U.S. Military Academy." He retired in 1863 as a Brigadier General. John Caldwell Calhoun (1782-1850) Congressman, Secretary of War, Vice President & U.S. Senator had, in the first quarter of the 19th Century backed both McIlvaine and Thayer. The Prince was Albert Edward, who had honored McIlvaine both in Ohio and at West Point; a friendship ending only when McIlvaine died in 1873. James Barbour (1775-1825) had been Secretary of War in 1825.