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A PLEA FOR
PROVINCIAL INDEPENDENCE
IN EDUCATION

A Letter with Reference to the Report of the
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of
Teaching on Education in Vermont ❀ ❀

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INDEPENDENCE IN EDUCATION

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,
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President John M. Thomas,
Middlebury College,
Middlebury, Vt.

My dear President Thomas :

Since I received in April last your copy of No. 6 of Vol. VIII of the Middlebury College Bulletin, I have been very busy, in part in connection with a visit which I made to the University of California, my own Alma Mater. While I was at the University of California, I frequently thought of the problem of Middlebury College, and took occasion to compare its conditions with those which I saw about me in California. The conditions are indeed very strongly contrasting, but the lesson, to my mind, is after all somewhat the same. Let me begin my statement to you by pointing out what the contrasts and what the analogies are, because they may tend to throw some light upon the problem which the Report of the Carnegie Foundation on "Education in Vermont" brings forward, and upon the merits of its recommendations regarding the colleges of Vermont.

The report of the Carnegie Foundation says:—

"There are only two consistent policies that a State can pursue toward institutions of higher educa-

tion. It can give its support entirely to the elementary and secondary school work and leave higher education to be supported by public philanthropy. This is the situation in most of the New England States. It is clear-cut; it is consistent; it is defensible both on the ground of public policy and of education. The other attitude is that assumed by the States of the central West, of the far West, and of the South; namely, that higher education is likewise a function of the State and is entitled to State support, but that the State will appropriate money to no institution that it does not own and control. This policy is also clear-cut and defensible, both educationally and on the ground of a wise public policy."

I myself am a Californian. I began my own undergraduate life just as the University of California began. I graduated from the University of California in 1875. As an alumnus, I have followed its whole development with enthusiasm. In my youth, as an undergraduate, I used to believe in the dogma which the Carnegie Foundation now repeats. I also very naturally used to believe that a western State University furnished the best solution for that problem.

But I early found that one of the principal difficulties of a State University in its early decades was due to the fact that it was then wholly under the control of the State. State ownership and control had its difficulties in California, as it has in many other States and countries. In particular a vicious connection between education and politics, and a tendency to express unfortunate rivalries in politics through unwise local policy, were dangers against

which the University of the State had constantly to guard.

The problems of California in the seventies of the last century were indeed very different from the present problem of the Vermont colleges, as the Carnegie Foundation carefully, but in an altogether too abstract and schematic a way, defines them. There is no simple scheme, there is no universal formula, for solving such problems. But what I have learned through my own lifelong interest in my own State University is that our problem of education has received such solution as has come to it in the present prosperous University, through the constant re-adjustment to the present situation as it arose from year to year, and to such a re-adjustment as has brought about a useful union of State aid and private philanthropy.

This summer, while revisiting my University, I lectured in a large hall which bears the name of a well-known private benefactor of the University of California. The University now has a good many such monuments of private benefaction. They are much prized. They stimulate the State to further acts of appropriation; they lead the rival benefactors to co-operate in constantly renewed efforts to benefit the State. The State is hereby guided in its own new endowment of the enterprises of the University. This is the natural result when a healthy State learns to co-operate with its private benefactors.

Of course there is no doubt that the State of

California both owns and, in a general sense, controls its State University. It is also true that this State ownership and control, in the case of the University of California, were at their worst in the days which I well remember in my youth, in the days, namely, when State control was too direct and complete.

The University of California later took a great step toward a practically significant measure of self-control, and relative independence, and in particular of freedom from constantly renewed legislative interference,—this step being taken in the form of an article which formed part of the new legislation which the State of California adopted in 1879.

This article of the constitution of 1879 gave the Board of Regents of the State University a certain limited, but valuable, autonomy over against the legislature. The funds already possessed by the University were preserved from immediate legislative interference, and the appointed Board of Regents, whose term extended over a good many years, and whose appointment was protected in various ways from partisan interference, received the opportunity gradually to form and somewhat independently to carry out educational policies of their own, similar to those which any board of trustees might undertake.

Of course I am not attempting to go into the details of a very complex history. The Board of Regents no doubt had their own political complications from year to year and from decade to decade.

In the course of time they gradually acquired a will and a way of their own, more and more suited to the needs of their province and of their public.

As a result, I do not think it would be right to characterize the present University of California as simply belonging to the "clear-cut" class of institutions which the Carnegie Foundation defines as institutions that the State "owns and controls". "The clear-cut and defensible" policy which the Carnegie Foundation conceives as the only one towards higher education which it can oppose to the other "clear-cut and defensible" policy of letting collegiate education wholly alone and of leaving it wholly in private hands, or to institutions supported by private philanthropy, is not a policy in terms of which one could adequately describe what has happened in the course of the long and complicated history of the University of California.

Leaving aside the endless complications, and laying stress upon the best of the results which an alumnus of the University of California sees when he returns to his Alma Mater, it seems to me that what we accomplished in our large, growing, and wealthy State of California, as our State University grew, was, above all, this. We began with very high ambitions and very great opportunities, but we began, of course, crudely. We began by founding our University upon a single organic act which was intended to give the State sole ownership and control of its University. We knew that for this purpose we should need a State board of trustees.

We called the State board "The Board of Regents". At the outset the Board of Regents were so simply controlled by the State legislature that for some years they were obliged constantly to go to the legislature for each new appropriation. The result was that the University was long the battlefield of politics. Its development was impeded, its work was imperiled. Both its teachers and its presidents were too rapidly changed. It did not grow with the State. Its life was not representative of the education which the community needed.

As the years passed, we discovered various ways in which the life of the University gradually became more and more representative of its community, more and more plastic to local influences on the one side and to the influences of the great eastern Universities on the other side. The best about our educational life was long deeply influenced through the medium of educational leaders by the example and influence both of Harvard and of Yale, and of the New England colleges generally; although I remember that two or three of the older southern institutions, as well as Cornell University, influenced us. But a great deal of what we needed and of what in the end we got for our University, had to be invented in California, and had to be adjusted to local conditions. Such a problem as this could never have been solved by the University of California if it had ever consistently followed the one policy which the Carnegie Foundation supposes to be the "clear-cut" policy of State ownership and control.

As our alumni have grown older and more numerous the University has come to be not merely a State institution, but what is much better, a distinctly Provincial Self-Expression. What the returned alumnus of the University of California finds, when he makes a visit such as I have just made, is an embodiment of the life of what in my boyhood did not yet exist, the true Province of California, the self-conscious community that now constitutes that new State, which, although now only in its second or third generation, has found itself, and needs a University to express its characteristic types of mental life and its characteristic relations to the interests of the nation.

Such a University could never have been made by simply holding to the "clear-cut" policy of State ownership and control. In various ways the State has effectively restrained its own ownership. This has aroused inevitably independent support, endowment, and public opinion of the alumni of the University. And as it has done this it has stimulated, not tied up, private philanthropy. The State and its people have formed a co-partnership in the conduct of their University, which is as ill-described by the formulas used on page 14 of the Report of the Carnegie Foundation on "Education in Vermont", as the government of the British Empire would be described by the "clear-cut" formula that Great Britain is a "monarchy," and that the Empire is an extension of Great Britain.

Nothing is more hopeless for helping people to

understand the real conditions of the educational life of a province than the disposition to "standardize" methods of education and modes of institutional control,—a disposition for which, I am sorry to say, the Carnegie Foundation, at present, especially stands.

It of course becomes a mere college professor like myself to speak respectfully of the Carnegie Foundation, since circumstances over which he has no control and to which he has never been able either to give or to refuse his consent, have made him more or less indirectly dependent upon that Foundation for a pension, and for an accompanying interference with the free educational development of the academic institutions of this country, which he is powerless to influence, but which he does not on that account approve, or view with confidence.

As a fact, speaking as a humble academic officer, but still preserving a certain freedom of judgment under the present conditions of our academic life, I can sincerely and frankly say that I view with great respect much of the work which the Carnegie Foundation has done for us all. I appreciate that much of that work is guided by very judicious and very judicial motives and is the outcome of very careful study of educational conditions.

But this I must also unhesitatingly say: Whenever anybody, and in particular, whenever any State or province of the Union hands over a problem to the Carnegie Foundation for scrutiny and judgment, such person or State or province ought to remem-

ber what the personal equation of the Carnegie Foundation is. It is a foundation fond of "clear cut" formulas; that is to say, of hastily chosen abstractions. And in particular, as I believe, this formula about the two policies which are the only two wise policies, between which every State in the Union ought to choose in guiding its educational life, is a formula due to such a hasty and distinctly unwise abstraction.

I have ventured to mention the thoughts that came to me in my recent visit to the University of California as merely suggesting a generalization which you will, I hope, allow me to put into your hands. I am very glad to say that I have not the power to inflict formulas upon people, which constitutes, in my opinion, one of the dangers of the influence of the Carnegie Foundation. What little about educational matters I happen to know has been derived from a fairly close contact with a few institutions, and with a few educational enterprises. What this experience has taught me I can best express by saying, in the form of a precept: "When you undertake to plan for the wise guidance of a special province of this country, plan in any case to have your province develop for itself in accordance with its own traditions, and with a full sense that every State and every province of this country best serves the whole country when it grows most in accordance with its own soul and in the light of its own experience of what is best in its past, in its own spirit, in its traditions, in the consciousness and patriotism of its

villages, of its country population, and of its best days.

“And, above all, do not standardize your educational procedure. If you consult a Foundation that is instituted for the regulation, and, as far as possible, for the control of a large body of institutions that need aid, and that are willing to get it by accepting such control, then beware of the advice which expresses the habits of those who persistently dwell upon the fact that they are ‘outsiders’ and are therefore ‘unprejudiced.’

“Learn from their wisdom. For nobody can for a moment doubt that the Carnegie Foundation stands for a great deal of wisdom and of official advice. But remember that all this advice is likely to be tainted with two defects. First, it is the advice of professional standardizers; second, it is the advice of those who have the habits of officialism and of the inevitable defects of officialism. Such defects imply no degeneracy, either intellectual or moral, in those who show them. They are the natural outcome of the habit of trying to carry on such enterprises as a Carnegie Foundation is. That Foundation has done great good and will do much more. But when it is asked to advise the State of Vermont, then be wary of accepting its ‘clear-cut’ formulas. Such are the formulas that officialism and the love of standardizing will always give you”.

On the other hand, if I might suggest from my own poor experience another and more positive precept, I would put it thus: “Whatever the formulas may be,

'clear-cut' or not, a State can gain something from co-operating with its higher education.' That is as true of the State of Vermont as of the State of California. But each State must co-operate in its own way, and every wise co-operation will mean some sort of union between private and public philanthropy, between the public spirit and the public opinion of the day and the control of the State. When a new western State, like my own State of California, tried to found its State University, the beginnings were confused. The influence of a few great creative personalities, the example of a few great institutions in other States gradually guided the new institution into something wiser and effective. The "clear-cut" formula of State control was tried, only to be modified by the complex but persuasive influence of traditions, most of which, I suppose, have no adequate expression in statutes. Private philanthropy and State aid gradually learned to live together. The wealth and the population involved were large at the outset, and have been very rapidly increasing since I graduated in 1875. But when, as an alumnus, I return, I find the State and the people, the legislature, and the various forms of private philanthropy, engaged in the sort of team play that is essential to the educational life of the State.

If hereupon I may venture to make the leap from California, with its recently acquired provincial consciousness, to Vermont, with its venerable traditions and its population that, to the sorrow of all of us, does not increase as it should, I should say

that whatever the State of Vermont can do for higher education, higher education so far as the State possesses it, is, even with a very modest endowment, a very valuable asset; while, so far as the State intends to increase it, it forms a very valuable kind of investment.

Now why does such higher education form a valuable asset for Vermont as well as for California?

In answer to this question, I may well lay aside all the usual praises of cultivation and of learning, which the college professor is supposed naturally to have upon his tongue's end. Let me here say nothing about why learning is a good thing, and about how the higher education helps in an individual man. For the State, whether it be California or Vermont, so long as it is any State of this our American Union, let me say this:

“Higher education is good because it helps the State to be a province with an independent life of its own, with a consciousness of its worth, of its uniqueness as a member of the family of States. Even a small group of college graduates help Vermont, as a larger group of the University of California have helped California, to be conscious of itself. And every New England State has a very precious heritage of traditions, a very precious variety of civilization to preserve, to bring to its own consciousness, and to contribute to the common life of the Union. Does Vermont want to keep its own self-consciousness, or would it prefer to be blotted out of the intellectual and spiritual life of New England? If, at this

moment, when our population tends to become more and more altered by the invasion of foreign types, and alienated from its old home, if Vermont still means to keep herself alive and awake, higher education is one of the ways of accomplishing this end. It is a very precious way to a very precious end. The experience of mankind has shown that. Your college graduates may be teachers, or they may enter other callings. As far as possible, you want to keep them in your State when you have trained them, and you want to train a reasonable number of them in the State, and in the ways and in accordance with the traditions of the State.

Since this is the case, when the question arises, How can the State best use some portion of the funds at its disposal for the purpose of keeping academic education alive within its own borders, it does not seem right to me to say: "We can use our funds in this way only if we follow the advice of the Carnegie Foundation, which knows what all States of the Union ought to do about education, but which does not take a natural interest in provincial varieties and in provincial independence." Your wise way is to say: "Have we not some form of educational institution of our own, the product of Vermont provincial conditions? If we have this form, cannot we keep it alive by co-operating with it somewhat as it is? If the State can keep it alive and will foster its special type of usefulness, with due regard to the interests of the day, and with a still more pious regard for the traditions of the past, will not the State gain by such

a policy?" If somebody says, in the usual fashion of the lovers of officialism and of standardizing methods: "The State can do this only if the State wholly owns and controls this institution," then, President Thomas, I should wholly agree with your pamphlet of last April in the assertion that the history of academic education in other countries as well as in our own is against any such false simplification of the problem as such an objector to State aid urges. The right way to keep alive the State's best, is not always simply to abandon it to the mercy of those who are perhaps not sufficiently awake as yet to its needs or sufficiently wealthy to meet them. Again, the wisest way for the State to help, very probably, will not be to send some board of State officials to repeat the various stages of State miscontrol, through which many western State institutions have passed. The wisest way for the State to live up to its own ideal life is to make a wise use of the academic resources that it already has, with the prudently advised aid adjusted to what is worthiest in the traditions and in the ideals of the State's existing institutions.

I give my opinion for what it is worth. You well know that personal friendliness to you and to your college and to my colleagues of your college, whom I have so pleasantly learned to know, affects my mode of expressing the views to which experience has led me. But I am in no wise ashamed of this friendship, and I am sure that it does not in this case in the least corrupt my judgment. You have

an institution which the Carnegie Foundation wisely praises as a typical New England college with an admirable history and traditions, and with an administration that deserves confidence. You make an extremely modest application to your legislators that they will not be wholly guided by advice of the Carnegie Foundation, so far as that refers to the "clear-cut" policy about higher education which that Foundation recommends. I wholly agree with the spirit, and, so far as I have any right to speak about the topic, with the letter of your recommendation. I speak in the interest of the Vermont tradition and ideal. I speak after reading the proceedings that took place at the time of your centennial celebration at Middlebury in 1900. I speak in the name of the New England country town, of the New England country college,—of some of the dearest ideals which our whole country knows. They were kept alive of old by New England farmers and clergymen, by those who did so much to determine the cultivation of our new West, by those whose memory will always be cherished by every American patriot. So that in my opinion you are right to propose a method whereby the State of Vermont may wisely aid such an institution to keep something of its own independence, not by merely giving itself over to private benefaction, as not by simply accepting mechanical State control.

I insist that whatever the letter of the law may be, no State University of the West wins its highest development until it gets a certain measure

of freedom from mechanical legislative control and is effectively owned not merely by the State but by some reasonable organic union of State guidance and of private philanthropy. Such union is possible.

And I use no undue disrespect when I say of the formula used in the report of the Carnegie Foundation regarding State control of academic education, what my dear friend and colleague (now deceased), William James, was so fond of saying about such formulas when they were used by philosophers. The formula of the Carnegie Foundation about the only two consistent policies that a State can pursue is, in William James's favorite phrase, "a vicious abstraction,—a barren piece of intellectualism". I add in my own name the objection which I now repeat: "This formula of the Carnegie Foundation is a very natural but unconsciously misleading expression of a spirit of officialism, and of standardization, which today forms one of the dangers that dwell in the higher regions of American educational life." I hope that we may still return in some respects to the freedom of the province. I hope that we may keep alive our own provincial institutions and memories, with the wise but not too systematic, and not hopelessly fettered, independence in the adaptation of means to ends.

You are altogether at liberty to use this letter in any way that you please. I have no business whatever to meddle, either in the affairs of Middlebury College, or in the educational life of the State of Vermont, or with the deliberations of its legislators.

But the very contrast between these recent impressions of a returned Californian after a visit to his old home, and the impressions that come to me when I visit your beautiful town, and meet my colleagues of your company,—this very contrast, and the unity of ideal which it suggests, may justify the length of this communication and may make it possibly interesting to some of your legislators, in case they want to see how a western man—a native of a Californian mining town—views your problem of Middlebury College as it is today, and as the report of the Carnegie Foundation brings it to your State legislature. The Carnegie Foundation represents a vast range and minuteness of wisdom about educational matters, which I certainly do not possess, and which—being but a teacher of philosophy—I would not wish to possess if I could. My life has taught me this lesson: a typical American province, such as your venerable Vermont long since was, such as my new California has within my own lifetime become,—such a province is worth preserving. Your legislature will do well to appropriate something towards the preservation of Vermont's most precious ideals and traditions. These are embodied in its institutions. I know that Middlebury College actually embodies an important portion of these ideals. A wise State aid given to a valuable institution, under suitable safeguards, is certain to be profitable. The mere listening to advisers who deal with educational life in ways that would reduce us all to a dead level, would help neither California nor Vermont.

With sincere friendship,

Yours in this good cause and in all good causes,

JOSIAH ROYCE.

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