

*THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING*  
*AND*  
*THE CASE OF MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE*

I venture briefly to call the attention of the Association to a case which seems to me somewhat typical of the undertakings which this Association, in my opinion, might well try from time to time to consider.

I.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has, in the course of its existence, done a great deal of unquestionable good. It has also caused a good deal of heart searching not only to the individual teachers in the various colleges and universities which have come under its influence, but also to those who are interested in the larger common problems of American academic life. The Carnegie Foundation is from its very nature not responsible in any obvious and regular way to existing academic opinion. It carries out the wishes of its founder as interpreted by a Board of Trustees whose powers are, comparatively speaking, autocratic. This board which inevitably represents the judgments of administrators rather than the judgment of teachers. Experience has shown that The Foundation is not very sensitive to the opinion of teachers. In a well-known case, when an eminent teacher whom we all value expressed a plain and not unreasonable opinion of some of its acts, the reply of the Carnegie Foundation, through its President, was a sarcastic intimation, which could only be [2] understood as meaning that some people ought to mind their own business. I do not believe in unnecessary controversy. I certainly do not believe in putting this Association in any position of general or unnecessary antagonism to the Carnegie Foundation and to its unquestionably important work. With many of its aims and undertakings we all not only feel but ought to feel strong sympathy. It is capable of doing a great work for the advancement of teaching. It is capable in many ways of raising the standards of our higher education. It has already done much which tends to that end.

But the limits of the possible as well as of the actual efficacy of the Carnegie Foundation, as an agency for furthering the cause of higher education, have already been shown in two ways. First, like any body whose interests are primarily administrative, it has shown a strong tendency to standardize our academic institutions. As our presiding officer has well said, its activities consequently raise a question which interests us all, namely, the question of the due "limits of standardization." Secondly, like any body who has to administer a large benefaction, its work raises the question as to how financial aid can be most wisely employed, without tending to pauperize any body of men or any group of institutions, and without interfering with the proper independence, both of individuals and institutions. Both sorts of questions are to my mind questions which interest an Association like ours.

An Association like ours is strongly interested in the proper “limits of standardization.” We do not want our institutions reduced [3] to a dead level, or required, by “external pressure,” to conform to rules and habits which may not prove to be well adapted to the cultivation of the traditions, of any one of the numerous distinct provinces upon whose intellectual and moral prosperity the organized educational life of our country must always depend. Now if you tell any body of administrators to undertake the work of raising the standards of academic education in America, you suggest to that body of men, by the very use of the word “standards,” the tendency to what I have just called standardization.

I myself believe that high standards are a blessing. I also believe that standardization is in general, and especially at the present time in this country, a tendency to something that is evil.

If you tell me as an individual to raise my standards, be those standards intellectual or moral, and if you show me the way by setting me good examples, or by getting me interested in the study of admirable models of mind, of character, or of life, you help me. But if you say: “So to. Let us standardize our ideals”; that is, “let us all take on the same standard as to our customs, as to our plans, as to our knowledge, as to our investigations, as to our naturally diverse opinions,” — if you say this, you interfere with my due liberty, you tend to make me what the classical Chinese scholar of the old type of Chinese cultivation is said to have been.

We all need standards. And if one is speaking of the moral law in its generality, we no doubt all need to have certain standards in common. But precisely in those regions of our life [4] where individual judgment and initiative are needed, we do not need the same standards. Whoever tries to force the same standards on us in these respects, tends to make us what the old-fashioned Chinese scholars are said to have been before the recent educational revolution began in their land.

Standardization is at the present time very much vaunted as essentially scientific in its nature. It is not scientific. It is Chinese, in the old-fashioned sense. Or perhaps, to use a phrase which the moment makes more familiar, it is militaristic. Perhaps every great and warlike nation needs to have its military preparations directed by the General Staff. Academic education should not be so directed. When such direction does beyond due bounds, it disgraces and degrades educational life. Any institution, or Foundation, whether benevolent or not in its intentions, becomes a just object for careful and considerable criticism, in case its nature or its tendencies show that it is liable to overemphasize the standardizing disposition.

As I have said, whatever Foundation has large control over financial resources ought to expect and should welcome close and constant scrutiny of the relation of its work to the motives which are prominent in forming the spirit of scholarship and of investigation, in guiding the lives and ideals of teachers, and in controlling their private and personal fortunes. I do not believe in any sort of anarchy, either in the administration of a college or of a university, or in the conduct of individual study, writing, and research.

We all of us need internal control, the [5] spirit of genuine team play with our fellows and with our community, the willingness loyally to cooperate with the larger interests of our community. Whoever conceives the spirit either of research or of teaching as not involving this spirit of the willing service to the community on the part of each scholar, and of each teacher, and of each institution, conceives liberty unwisely. The spirit of genuine education is not in him.

But, after all, the only possible control of a man who is to live upon the higher levels of teaching or of study must be, in the main, an internal control. That is why we all value what we call "academic freedom." That is why we consider an undue exercise of administrative authority within any institution dangerous. That is why an Association such as our Association means to be, will always be interested in resisting, by the force of its opinion, and on occasion of its expressions, such measure of administrative authority.

But for this very reason, the activities of an institution such as the Carnegie Foundation, ought to be scrutinized, on occasion, with care by a body such as ours hopes to be. If the Carnegie Foundation is not to be a merely charitable institution, but a respecter of academic rights, it must expect, and, I repeat, must welcome criticism such as directly or indirectly has bearing upon problems of academic freedom. I hope, then, that we shall always bear in mind that one of the topics which this Association must frequently consider in its future work, is the relation of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to the provincial, to the institutional, to the individual interests of [6] those highly distinct and contrasting regions, colleges and universities, upon whose very variety and freedom, the higher life of our country always depends.

## II.

I venture on this occasion to call the attention of those present at this meeting of our Association to a pamphlet which, in large part, explains itself. The case is this: —

The State of Vermont was led to ask the Carnegie Foundation to undertake an investigation of the educational problems of that State. The views of the Carnegie Foundation, reached upon the basis of this investigation, are contained in the recent Report of the Foundation, which some of you will have seen, and which all of you can readily obtain upon request. So far as concerns the view of the higher academic education in Vermont, the matter is still to be considered at the coming session of the Vermont Legislature. A body called "The Educational Commission of the State of Vermont" has prepared and will make a report to the Legislature at its coming session. This report, as I understand, will not be wholly in agreement with the recommendations of the Carnegie Foundation, but will be undoubtedly influenced by what the Carnegie Foundation has said about educational policy. The report of the State Educational Commission, and the

action of the Legislature of Vermont, will also be largely concerned with the public schools of Vermont, primary and secondary. [7]

Of course the only way in which I suppose the matter to have any interest to this Association is the way determined by the relation of the action, both of the Carnegie Foundation and of the Vermont Educational Commission to the collegiate education of the State in question. The reason why my pamphlet deals solely with what I have called "The Case of Middlebury College," will appear from the pamphlet itself. I have no personal knowledge of the present condition and problems of the University of Vermont, — an institution which is very carefully considered and estimated in the Report of the Carnegie Foundation. Of the University of Vermont my pamphlet has nothing to say. And so far as Middlebury College is concerned, I have here no question to raise as to the opinion which the representatives of the Carnegie Foundation express about that institution. In fact, no question about the merits of any individual institution arises in my pamphlet, except in so far as I say that Middlebury College, which was founded in 1800, has done and is doing, with small resources, a creditable piece of work, under the strict limitations which are imposed by it, by its place as a country college in Vermont, and by its limited resources.

I ought to say that the President of Middlebury College made no effort whatever to bring the case of his college to my attention. He did not even suggest that I should write him any such document as I actually wrote. The relations to his college, and to a considerable body of friends of mine, alumni or teachers of Middlebury College, — the relations which led to this letter may serve to explain it. I have personal motives for taking [8] such an interest in the case of Middlebury College, as my letter to President Thomas indicates. But they are personal motives which do not, I believe, at all unfairly bias my judgment. At all events, the pamphlet, of which I lay some copies before you, is not a plea for Middlebury College, and does not undertake to advise the Legislature of Vermont as to what it should do for any one of its educational institutions. The one issue which my pamphlet raises, and which I should like to lay before this Association is thus: —

The institution called Middlebury College, — a hill college of the type which the New England of the foretime use to produce and prize, but which modern conditions do not, at the moment, altogether and largely encourage, — Middlebury College is interested in what the Legislature of Vermont decides to do in consequence of the Report of the Carnegie Foundation upon Education in Vermont. This Association has, of course, no interest in considering the future fortunes of Middlebury College. I have, therefore, no intention, in mentioning this matter in this presence, to plead the cause of Middlebury College. Moreover, the Report of the Carnegie Foundation, in this instance, is made at the request of the State of Vermont, and therefore involves no sort of interference with affairs which lie at or beyond the proper scope of the investigations and of the recommendations of the Carnegie Foundation. Apart from the one matter that I call your attention, there is no reason whatever to complain of the spirit in which this Report of the Carnegie

Foundation is conceived, and expressed. The Report of the Carnegie Foundation was made after careful investigation, contains a hearty recognition of the merits [9] and of the difficulties of Middlebury College. And so far there is indeed nothing in this case which calls for criticism on the part of this Association, or which concerns any principles in which we are interested.

The one point about the Report of the Carnegie Foundation which could interest this Association is a point which my little pamphlet emphasizes. The Carnegie Foundation proposes a principle, which, as it thinks, ought to be used by the State of Vermont in deciding the issue now before it. The issue is local. The academic fortune of Middlebury College interests its own very limited body of friends. I do not ask you to think of those fortunes of Middlebury College, by and for themselves, at all. I do not lay this case before you either for the sake of any friends of Middlebury College or at the request, either of the President of Middlebury College or of anybody else.

But the principle which the Carnegie Foundation uses in dealing with the case is advanced by the Foundation as an universal principle. I believe that principle, in precisely the formulation which the Carnegie Foundation gives it, to be a principle opposed to what I call a wise provincialism in education. I believe that the relations between educational institutions and their various local communities, their various provinces and their various States, are relations which can only prosper in case a wise spirit of liberty, a genuine tolerance of local, of provincial, and of legislative variety and liberty are encouraged. I believe that the Report of the Carnegie Foundation on Education in [10] Vermont does not recognize in any adequate way the sort of variety and of liberty which are here in question, and which are necessary to the highest sort of academic development in this country. Therefore I propose that this Association should give some attention to the case which I thus lay before it.

### III.

Some of you may at once say that so special, and local, and, as you may add, so relatively insignificant a matter cannot interest an Association like ours.

I reply: The question about Middlebury College is indeed local, and not of great significance. The principle is large, and the interests which such a principle, if applied in a thorough-going way, might at any time affect, are all momentous interests. Let me show in a word what I have in mind when I say this. Suppose that the practical problem of the moment were whether Harvard and Yale and Cornell and John Hopkins University, and the University of Virginia, and the University of Wisconsin, and all of the Western state universities, were or were not, in future, to be required to have precisely the same official relations to the respective states in which they are located, so that no difference whatever might be allowed in the forms and degrees of state control or in freedom from state control, to which each one of those institutions was henceforth subject. Suppose that the precise principle which the Carnegie Foundation states as the principle

for dealing with all such cases, however important they are or however various they otherwise are, was the principle which was henceforth to guide the educational life of this whole country, then the principle of [11] the Carnegie Foundation would be, if I rightly understand its official expression, this: "Either the State must completely own and control an institution, or it must leave it wholly to private benefaction." If this principle is to be followed, then there must be no compromise, no free union, no local diversity of the degrees and forms of State control and of private benefaction. Were that the issue, would not this Association be interested in considering it a little? Would not this question of the limits of standardization concern us? Should we not like to consider in this field some "limits of standardization?" Middlebury College and Vermont do not naturally interest, in their individual capacity, this Association. But is this Association not interested in the relations between State control and private benefaction which such a case as this brings to mind? Are not such relations amongst the most various and the most delicate with which academic life has to deal? If one remembers the Scottish universities and Oxford and Cambridge, and the different universities on the continent of Europe, does not one see how necessary variety and a certain relative academic freedom of ideals and a corresponding variety of legislature and administrative policies, have been to the universities of the past? Does not one see how momentous such problems are?

And when we find the Carnegie Foundation disposing of such momentous and delicate problems by means of the formula which it proposes, and when we remember what the Carnegie Foundation is, and what its official acts have already been, and what academic [12] influences are inevitably expressed in its policies, have we not all of us some interest that, if this Association is to consider any academic questions whatever, and to offer any criticisms whatever upon topics of general concern, it should form and express an opinion about interests so vast as these, and about decisions which might at any time become of practical importance for any and for every American academic institution?