

House
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TIMOTHY HARRINGTON CARTER

A Brief Autobiographical Sketch

(Transcribed from a photostatic copy of the original printed sketch)

A BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

prepared on request of my sons, and read at a family
gathering on my 90th birthday, Dec. 23, 1888.

Dear John,-- You ask me to make a brief sketch of my business life, and in a hasty way I will do so. But I will first say something of some articles of a business creed which I adopted very early in my career, and then give some account of my father and mother. My business creed was as follows:--

1. To be always guided by what was equitable and just in itself, whether in accord with external law or not.
2. In cases of doubt in my own mind, to go against myself; thus establishing in me the reign of justice.
3. To say or do nothing injurious to the reputation of others, unless compelled to do so by the laws of use and duty.
4. Never to take offence at candid criticism, but rather to seek it as a means of knowing myself.
5. To devote my life to the greatest use I could perform to Society.

In corroboration of this creed I will here make an extract from a letter to my brother Richard, written when he was a minor:--

"As to money, you can make enough anywhere if your health is good. The question is, How can you make yourself most useful to the community in which you live? If this is the place you really wish to find, Divine Providence will lead you to it; and that is the place, whether rich or poor, in which you will be most happy yourself and most useful to others."

My father, your grandfather, was born in Lancaster, Mass., the son of a farmer, and one, I think, of four sons. Before marriage, when a

young man, he went into the woods in New Hampshire, where land was to be had for little more than the expense of clearing, and cleared for himself a farm. Some thirty years after, I went with him to see it. It was then worth, with a small house upon it, about \$2,000. But when he came to be engaged to be married, my mother would not consent to leave the then really excellent circle at Lancaster and go so far into the woods; and he therefore never occupied his farm, but subsequently kept a store in Lancaster, and also had a factory in which was made potash and pearlsh. He was an upright, friendly, generous man, candid and sensible; his judgment was often sought by his fellow-townsmen, and very early he went by the cognomen, "the Judge." I have heard him say laughingly that he believed he was the oldest judge on the bench. My father was one of the Selectmen of the town, and one of the Committee in the settlement of Mr. Thayer as colleague with Mr. Harrington. He was in the Revolutionary army, and was stationed at Cambridge at the time of the Battle of Bunker Hill. He died at the age of eighty-five.

My mother, your grandmother, was a grand-daughter of the Rev. Timothy Harrington. I have heard her spoken of, by those who knew her when young, as being a beautiful person; and certainly her character was beautiful. Her sensibilities were very acute, and she was deeply religious. She was discreet and cheerful in her household cares, and enjoyed humor when impossible to wound the feelings of any one. Her perceptions of propriety required no study of rules. I do not remember of ever having known of an expression of anger as coming from her. All who knew her intimately loved her. Mrs. Judge Prescott, becoming early acquainted with my mother when residing at Lancaster, kept in affectionate intercourse with her through life. It was "dear Emily" to the last.

Her hair was a rich auburn, not a hair of which changed to the day of her death. A reply she made me when chiding her for grief has come into my mind a thousand times. It was simply, "Jesus wept." My mother was a woman of true refinement of character.

In 1807, at the age of eight years, I left home to live with an aunt at Petersham, Mass.,- a widow lady, by the name of Bridge, who the next year was married to Dr. Fisher and removed to Beverly, I going home for six months. At the end of that time I went to Beverly to live at Dr. Fisher's, where I remained until I came to Boston in 1815, into the book-store of Cummings and Hilliard, corner of Spring Lane and Washington Street, then called No. 1 Cornhill. My compensation was forty dollars a year and board from that time until I was twenty-one,- a usual arrangement at that time. Soon after becoming twenty-one I was taken as a partner into the business,- the firm then being Cummings, Hilliard, and Co.

Mr. Cummings, a superior teacher, kept a young ladies' school, and Mr. Hilliard lived at Cambridge, having the care of a book-store and a printing office belonging to the same establishment; in consequence of this, the whole management of the Boston business very early devolved mainly on me. The business growing rapidly, I advertised for a clerk, and engaged Charles C. Little; subsequently I brought in Mr. Wilkins, and then Mr. Gray, as nominal partners, each in charge of special departments. My management of the business was very successful. When I went into the firm, the business was struggling for existence; when I left it, it was yielding some twenty-five thousand dollars a year profit. It was a specially designed enterprise of my own to establish our house as the leading law-publishing house of New England.

I will say here that while I remained at Beverly,- some five or six years in all,- I acquired considerable expertness in the use of

tools, making many little things to sell, such as bobbin looms, knitting needles, etc.; so that the ladies of the neighborhood got to coming to me to get various things made. I also made tea-pot handles for a silver-smith who made tea-pots; also wash-boards, with rollers instead of the fluted board, thus subjecting the clothes to much less wear. I also took wood to saw and split, on winter evenings, for next-door neighbors,- sawing and splitting and piling, in one instance, six cords at fifty cents a cord. In this way when I came to Boston I had fifty well-earned silver dollars. In Boston, during the early part of my apprenticeship, I worked late evenings, painting maps, making writing books, and folding and stitching pamphlets. I also made liquid blacking, and black and red ink. I did such extra work until the interests of the store demanded every minute of my time. On one of my business trips (to Baltimore), while an apprentice, I traded off and sold, at my own discretion, some twenty thousand dollars worth of books.

In 1827, having acquired a moderate fortune, I left the firm with which I was connected, desiring to enter upon some course of study, and thus make up for the deficiencies of my early education. Not knowing to what it might subsequently lead, I concluded to spend a year abroad and make there a trial of study. I began my studious course in Paris, but soon found it was too late to study; the time had passed when my mind could rest in elementary studies,- it was too active in planning and executing,- and I gave it up. Having returned to America, I set out to found another publishing house, thinking finally to retire from its active operations and be a silent partner. I took a lease for six years and six months of the estate on the corner of School and Washington streets, and at the expense of some seven thousand dollars fitted it up for a book-store and printing office. My brother Richard, not then of age, was with me, and

C. I. Hendree was my clerk. When all was in profitable operation, I sold to each of them one third of the business, becoming myself a silent partner,- making the firm name to be Carter, Hendree, and Co., establishing what is now called the "Old Corner Book-store."

All the capital, expenses, and risks of this enterprise had been mine, but I charged no bonus, and the young partners paid all their notes to me, as they became due, from the profits of the business; and in less than five years the business was yielding profits equal to thirty thousand dollars a year, with every reasonable prospect that it would before long yield a hundred thousand dollars a year, which I have no doubt it would have done but for the breaking up of the United States Bank. This event came upon the business community very unexpectedly, withdrawing from circulation the chief currency of the country, and causing wide-spread disaster.

Previous to this the business of the firm had become very large, \$290,000 being due them on the books, besides notes held in hand. In the failure which followed I was the greatest loser, having furnished nearly all the capital. Curious to relate, the failure occurred the year I was married. During that single year my fortunes were greatly varied. To begin with, I was worth more than one hundred thousand dollars, and had a handsome income; had purchased and furnished a house on Beacon Street (the one now occupied by Dr. Bigelow), was married, and established in housekeeping; and before the twelve months had gone I had sold all, broken up my new home, and was with my wife boarding at a friend's without charge.

I will now speak of some of the other branches of my business during this earlier period of my business life.

The first type-foundry established in Boston was mine; and in connection with it I also established the first stereotype foundry in New England. I placed my brother Charles at the head of this establishment, which was carried on under the firm name of T. H. and Charles Carter. The business outgrew a building I had erected for it in Harvard Place, and was removed to a larger building near the North Church on Salem Street. Here, having with Nathan Hale, Esq.,— for whom I wish to express esteem when I write his name,— purchased the right to use the Treadwell Power Printing Presses, we added machine printing to the establishment,— the first of such printing done in the city,— first by horse-power, and then by steam. Besides this Mr. Hale had a printing office of his own, and together we jointly owned still a third, run by water-power on the Mill Dam. Subsequently the establishment was removed to the corner of Devonshire Street and Spring Lane, where the third building was erected for it; and on the Salem Street land I built nine dwelling houses.

As the wholesale business of Carter, Hendree, and Co., grew very large, they sold the retail department to Allen and Ticknor, neither of whom however would then engage in the business unless I also continued in it; so I became a silent partner in the firm of Allen, Ticknor, and Co., and subsequently sold my share to them.

The estate at the corner of Washington and School streets was the property of rich owners, who had determined to rebuild there as soon as certain expected changes took place; so that the utmost time they would give a lease of it was for six and a half years. But under that lease of six and a half years I put the estate into so profitable a condition, erecting brick buildings in the yard, etc., that they have kept it as I left it half a century ago, putting no expenditures of

their own upon it. When I took the lease they were getting but fourteen hundred dollars rent for the property; at the expiration of my lease it was yielding more than four thousand dollars income.

At the time of the failure of the firm I owned what was then called Phillips' Place, now covered by Houghton and Dutton's store. I purchased this estate with a view to building upon the upper part of it a chapel for the New Jerusalem Church, which I thought would prove just what their needs would require for a dozen years; and so it proved. The U. S. Supreme Court (Judge Story) wanted to hire it, and would have given a much higher price for it than I asked the New Church people; but it was not for a court of law or to make money that I built it, and I therefore declined a profitable offer before the court went to Temple Place. I will add here that at the time of organizing this New Jerusalem Church in Boston I, with another member, became responsible for any deficiency of income to meet its expenses, and for a considerable time I paid very largely for my seat in that church.

I also at that period owned five thousand feet of land, now occupied by the Boston Postoffice, on which I had erected a new building, which was subsequently sold to an insurance company, and by them sold for over one hundred thousand dollars more than I received for it.

In each of these estates there was a fortune if they could have been retained until the country had recovered from the panic brought about by the closing of the United States Bank; but both fell under foreclosures. I had also from twelve thousand to fourteen thousand dollars in real estate in Lancaster, all of which was lost.

In 1824, being then unmarried, I kept house on Beacon Street near Charles Street, with two sisters and a brother, pasturing my cow on Boston Common! Here I was burned out in the great Beacon Street fire,

in mid-day, most of my furniture being carried upon the Common, and in the afternoon transferred from there to a house in Colonnade Row on Tremont Street. On that eventful day I breakfasted at home on Beacon Street, and supped at home in Colonnade Row on Tremont Street.

In 1831, before the failure of Carter, Hendree, and Co., I obtained from the legislature an act of incorporation for a Book Manufacturing Company,-- the design being to have all the booksellers unite in the publication of such large standard historical and other works as none of them were ready to undertake alone, and to attract literary men to become interested as holders of stock. But the scheme so aroused the fears of certain publishers as to lead to violent opposition on their part; and as they carried their opposition to the legislature, they succeeded in securing a clause in the charter forbidding the publication of any work of less than five volumes. This prevented the full success of my enterprise, which was designed to benefit the entire country, and Boston in particular. A company, however, was organized and the amount of fifty thousand dollars paid in; but the continued contraction of the currency caused by closing up the United States Bank, together with the limitation clause in the charter, led to an early abandonment of the enterprise, which otherwise had the prospect of great success in many ways.

About this time I began the publication of the "United States Gazette," edited the first year by Theophilus Parsons, Esq., in which many of the early productions of Bryant and Longfellow appeared. Subsequently, with Mr. Littell as editor, I began the "Living Age," which to this time has continued a successful publication.

In 1834-35 I engaged in publishing books mostly for the young,-- nearly forty different volumes being written for that purpose by Jacob

Abbott, to whom many thousands of young and old are indebted. For these I must have paid him, as copyright, more than twenty thousand dollars.

In 1845 I took a fifteen years' lease of the estate I now own on Water Street, and within the term of the lease I made a purchase of it. Upon this estate, some twenty years later, I erected new buildings.

In 1846 I purchased a tract of land at what was then called Hall's Crossing, in the town of Newton, and proceeded to make various improvements and to erect buildings upon it. In a few years I called it Newtonville.

During the last fifteen or twenty years of my life, being in possession of an ample income for myself, I have devoted my time and means largely to helping my sons to settle in business, to which they can testify.

This, John, gives you some idea of the general run of my business life before your day. Of the last thirty years you yourself have been an observer, and therefore need no account of it from me. In running over these points of my life history, I myself am surprised that I should have been able to accomplish so much, carrying to fruition so many enterprises depending for their success on capital. I have attributed my success largely, under Providence, to the fact that the common good was my aim. I never sought property to multiply luxuries for myself, but as a power of usefulness.

The object of human life, John, is not to accumulate property, but to form character, and to learn to co-operate with Divine Providence. True riches are accumulated by efforts to benefit others, without seeking reward. The greatest happiness possible to man comes through doors that humility alone can open.

As I remarked in the beginning of this sketch, the rules of business that I have held up to myself have been good-will, equity, and justice. Equity is a great word; it is the equilibrium of every element in every case,- the end of all law.

My final destiny, John, will be determined not by the opinions of men, but by what I am; and so will it be with you. It is not in man to guide himself; and daily do I ask that my thoughts and my steps may be guided.

P.S.— When I read the closing words of Johnson's "Rasselas," — "No life is pleasing to God that is not useful to mankind," — they made a deep impression on me, and helped me in the formation of a settled resolution to devote my life to the greatest usefulness I could render to society; and when I became acquainted with the New Church Dispensation, it seemed to present to me an unlimited field of usefulness. My occupation was that of Publisher, and I had a Type and Stereotype Foundry and a Printing Office of my own, as well as a rapidly growing income. Looking to the scholars of the church to watch over the translations, I formed the design of publishing all the theological writings of Swedenborg, as well as his three principal scientific works, in respectable but economical form and style adapted to the masses. I intended to distribute many copies of these writings myself, and so to dispose of the plates that after my death this work might be continued.

I began by buying up all the unsold copies of Swedenborg's Works already printed in America, and reducing the prices,- namely, "The True Christian Religion" and "Conjugal Love," printed in Philadelphia; "Heaven and Hell," in Baltimore; "Divine Providence" and "Divine Love and Wisdom," in Boston,- at the same time negotiating for lower prices than hitherto on those imported from London. I printed "Heaven and

Heil" in three forms,-- one edition as low as thirty-seven cents retail; published "Noble's Appeal" and "Noble on Plenary Inspiration;" issued a prospectus of a Semi-Monthly Paper; began the first series of New Church Tracts, and republished nearly all the smaller works; and started a bookstore designed to be devoted to the publication and sale of Swedenborg's Writings and collateral literature, which was the origin of Mr. Clapp's establishment.

While I was preparing to begin the reprinting of the larger works, a club of scholars of the New Church was formed, who engaged to furnish revised translations of "Conjugal Love" and the "True Christian Religion." This club consisted of Theophilus Parsons, Caleb and Sampson Reed, Warren Goddard, T. B. Hayward, and Gilman T. Worcester. After proceeding some time with the printing, it was found difficult to keep the press in copy unless each work should have some one man devoted wholly to it; and therefore Mr. Goddard took charge of "Conjugal Love," and Mr. Gilman Worcester of the "True Christian Religion,"-- each devoting his entire time to the work, for which I paid them respectively five hundred and eight hundred dollars.

About a year after the publication of these books the United States Bank suddenly withdrew its circulation, in effect depriving me of more than a hundred thousand dollars and an annual income of more than ten thousand. My operations, however, had given fresh impulse to the whole work, and a club was formed in Boston which provided for the printing of the "Arcana," "The Apocalypse Revealed," and some smaller works.

When the New York Printing Society started, it was said by some that I opposed it, which was untrue. I only remonstrated against their taking up, first, the works just stereotyped by me and Mr. Clapp, of which the

market was full, for which there was therefore no occasion or excuse.

It was not with me a question of property, but of principle.

I have expended over fifty thousand dollars in ways I deemed for the interest of the New Church, and not consciously a dollar or a word adverse thereto.

E. H. CARTER.