

**LETTERS TO THE HON. WILLIAM
PRESCOTT, LL. D., ON THE FREE
SCHOOLS OF NEW ENGLAND:
WITH REMARKS UPON THE
PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649543717

Letters to the Hon. William Prescott, LL. D., on the Free Schools of New England: With
Remarks upon the Principles of Instruction by James G. Carter

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Cover @ 2017

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JAMES G. CARTER

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LETTERS

TO THE

HON. WILLIAM PRESCOTT, LL. D.

ON THE

FREE SCHOOLS OF NEW ENGLAND,

WITH

REMARKS UPON THE PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION.

Boston
BY JAMES G. CARTER.

Would you have a man reason well, you must use him to it betimes.
LOCKE.

BOSTON:

PUBLISHED BY CUMMINGS, HILLIARD & CO.

HILLIARD AND METCALF PRINTERS.

1824.

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, *to wit:*

District Clerk's Office.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirteenth day of August, A. D. 1824, and in the forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, Cummings, Hilliard, & Co. of the said district, have deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, *to wit:*

Letters to the Hon. William Prescott, LL. D. on the Free Schools of New England, with Remarks upon the Principles of Instruction. By James G. Carter.

Would you have a man reason well, you must use him to it betimes.

Locke.

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also to an act, entitled "An act supplementary to an act, entitled 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

JOHN W. DAVIS,
Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.

TO THE

HON. WILLIAM PRESCOTT, LL. D.

SIR,

THE deep interest you have ever evinced in whatever affects the political and moral condition of our country, has induced me to believe, you would not look with indifference upon any effort, however humble, to improve an institution of such vital importance to our happiness, dignity, and prosperity; as the system of free schools. The important relation you sustain to the first literary institution in our country, seems, moreover, to warrant in some degree my presumption, in inviting your attention to the consideration of a few general principles of instruction. It is upon these, that much of the success of all schools and seminaries of learning, however they may be conducted in other respects, must ultimately depend. The principles, I have endeavoured to illustrate, seem to me never to have been carried into effect in our country. Though my illustrations are all drawn from so humble a department as that of elementary instruction, the application will be easily made to the more advanced pursuits of literature and science.

Some of the leading thoughts in the following Letters were prepared for the press a few months since in the form of a Review; and it was not till within a *few weeks*, that I yielded to the advice of friends, on whose judgment I am accustomed

to rely, and determined to submit them to the publick in their present form. I have not assumed the *principles* hastily; but the circumstances above named, together with my daily avocations, and the impossibility of examining the whole in a connected form, before it was sent to the press, may fairly claim some indulgence in the execution. In selecting your name as a medium, through which to make my communications to the publick, I was guided not merely by the reasons, to which I have already alluded. These, although sufficient to determine my choice, only came to corroborate a decision, which my personal feelings had already suggested. With all their imperfections, and no doubt many will be detected, the following Letters are submitted to your perusal, and if found worthy, to your protection and encouragement. The highest ambition, I have dared to form in regard to them, will be answered, if they meet your approbation, and are the means of turning the public attention more to the important subject, to which they relate. I cannot, however, but indulge a secret hope, that they may be a remote cause of interesting minds more commensurate than my own, with the magnitude of the object.

Most respectfully, I remain,

Sir, your obliged and

Obedient servant,

J. G. CARTER.

Lancaster, 13 August, 1824.

LETTERS.

LETTER I.

SIR,

THE system of free schools in New England, has long been the subject of almost unqualified praise ; and those, who have had largest experience of its excellence, have felt themselves privileged to be most eloquent, in setting it forth to the world. The great degree of complacency, with which we dwell upon this favorite institution, has drawn upon us some illnated remarks from our less fortunate brethren in other sections of our country. They would, no doubt, be glad to beg a truce from the subject, even at the expense of believing all that has been said. And if no object were proposed, but a vain ostentation of some little advantage, which we may happen to possess in this respect, I should spare myself the useless task of saying more upon the subject. No trait in the character of our legislation, deserves more admiration, than the liberal and high-minded policy adopted by the Federal and State

governments, in regard to provisions for early education. New England may well offer her most hearty congratulations, that the system of free schools, originating with her, has been introduced into most of the States of the Union; and in some has been carried to a good degree of perfection. I am, certainly, not disposed to detract any thing from so good an establishment. It is, indeed, the richest inheritance, we enjoy from our ancestors; and the value, we attach to it, is enhanced no small degree, by a knowledge of the sacrifices, it cost its pious founders. The first and imperious wants of a people in a "strange land," were but indifferently supplied, when provision was made by authority, for the *universal* instruction of the young. We must not analyze, too closely, *all* the motives, which induced such provision. We might, perhaps, find, that a zeal for the faith, which they believed to have been once delivered to the saints, made no small share; for it must be confessed, that little was taught in the schools of the puritans, but catechisms containing their faith. At least, this was the grand object, and every thing else was subsidiary. The youth, who had been taught subjection to his superiors, by arguments summarily addressed to his back, and was well versed in the creed of the *then* orthodox church, was sent into the world, with perfect confidence in his competency to surmount all difficulties, which might occur in the various relations of life. But this was not long the state of things. The

religious zeal of the puritans, which, to say the least, approached to bigotry and intolerance, was much qualified in its influence upon the early institutions of the country, by their love of civil liberty. Their political creed was hardly less heretical than their religious; and they were as impatient of control in the capacity of a body politick, as their consciences were wayward and obstinate in matters of religion. Their attachment to free institutions was devoted and enthusiastick; and they had the wisdom to discover, that "knowledge is essential to freedom." These two causes, zeal for their faith, and love of free institutions, conspiring, led to the adoption of a policy for the general diffusion of knowledge, which showed practically and efficiently, how much they loved their institutions, and how well they understood, what constitutes the basis of free governments.

New England was first granted by letters patent from King James, in 1621, to "diverse of his loving subjects," to wit; the Council established at Plymouth, and embraced that moderate portion of the American continent, "lying and being in breadth from Fourty degrees of Northerly Latitude from the Equinoctiall line, to Fourty eight Degrees of the said Northerly Latitude, and in Length by all the Breadth aforesaid, throughout the main Land from sea to sea."* One would think, by the liberality of this grant, that his Majesty did not very well understand

* Haz. Hist. Coll. vol. i. p. 105.