THE OUTLOOK FOR THE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE
THE MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE
NEWS LETTER
SENT BY THE COLLEGE TO ALL MIDDLEBURY MEN AND WOMEN

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The Saturday Review of Literature once carried a little verse by Carolyn Ellis,

"I'd like to ask of science, why, oh Science, is it so? Morons sound like mental giants When they answer 'yes . . . and no?'"

The Daily Princetonian last week (9/22/50) carried an editorial comment—or letter—paying high praise to a professor who "said something of his own in the lecture—he took a side, made a point, and did not apologize for doing so to the Liberal Union spies scattered throughout the audience." The writer continued, "In the very make-up of any lecture, a certain rational prejudice must be exercised by the professor in the selection and discard of the topics that can be handled in the sixty minutes. So let's hear occasionally about an irrational prejudice, or even just a personal opinion once in awhile. The dividends are tremendous."

The interest of this observation lies in the fact that a professorial opinion was newsworthy.

Commitments to judgments—especially value judgments—are inevitable in a scholar's field of professional competence. Knowing the difficulty of making fair judgments, it is easy for scholars to be over-cautious about encouraging commitment to anything on the part of anybody who does not know all the questions at issue. To be open-minded about one's own commitments, willing to revise judgments as new data appears, that is a fine art. Too many scholars are so fearful of being closed-minded that they avoid the danger by avoiding any commitments at all.

But domestic relations involve commitment—loyalty, dedication. The freest man is the one who has the security of great convictions. Assured of fundamental support he can adventure into the future unafraid.

It is a good sign in a bad world when a great institution like Columbia University can announce its new Undergraduate Courses in Religion with the statement which involves both tolerance and commitment:

"There are in the faculty and student body of the University persons of many different faiths, including the secularist faiths (humanism, materialism, etc.)—and quite properly so. But on a basis of its foundation the University as an institution is not neutral about the Judeo-Christian tradition; it is for it and for its perpetuation and expansion in our culture. As an independent university in a free society it is free to be for all those forces on which a free society depends."

Emerson said of his scholar, "The day is always his who works in it with serenity and great aims."

Modern educators are in a position to face the future with serenity when they hold fast to the great aim of colleges like this one and prepare young people for the unpredictable future by training them to be intelligent and humble; self-confident and cooperative; dedicated and tolerant men and women. Such men and women, liberally educated, will have the domestic virtues which they and the world need now and forever.

THE OUTLOOK FOR THE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE

Dr. Henry M. Wriston
President, Brown University

You have observed that up to this moment you have had stimulating addresses from three ex-college presidents. I will now confide in you that when Dr. Seymour and Dr. Horton were first asked if they would honor us with their presence here this evening they were active presidents of Yale and Wellesley respectively. Now a superstitious person might have hesitated to ask yet another president to join this Symposium lest he might precipitate another retirement or resignation and thus deprive another university or college of its beloved leader. We refused, however, to yield to superstition.

In New England we have a venerable institution called the "Association of Colleges in New England." It has a presumptuous title for it numbers but fourteen of the older colleges and universities of this region. Annually the presidents and delegates of these institutions meet for a two day informal discussion of mutual problems. In 1943 I was the neophyte of the group and I attended my first meeting with some apprehension that it would be a place for pontifical speeches and shall I say, stuffed-shirt performances.

I do not know what those meetings may have been like before Dr. Henry Wriston became president of Brown University but I can assure you that my preconceived notions were dispelled the moment President Wriston started making his wise, witty, challenging, down-to-earth, and always refreshing contributions to our discussions.

If there is an educator in this land who knows more of the foibles and fancies, the facts and the fiction of higher education than the eminent president of Brown University I have yet to meet him.

If anywhere there is a man who can equal Dr. Wriston in so quickly spotting out, and in so precisely and incisively carving out and tossing aside mere educational verbiage and patter, that man is unknown to me.
Our Symposium comes to its close with the address to be presented to you by President Henry Wriston, one time Professor of History at Wesleyan, former President of Lawrence College, and now for the past thirteen years the dynamic and outstanding President of Brown University. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Dr. Henry Wriston.

In discussing the outlook for the independent college it is essential to avoid a procedure which impairs the validity of estimates. Without a strong counter-effort there is a natural temptation to project current moods into the future. President Seymour’s emphasis on heritage is most welcome, for only by taking the long view can a sound perspective be achieved.

Bertrand Russell recently repeated Spinoza’s advice to view passing events “under the aspect of eternity.” It is a timely reminder, for the practice of extrapolating curves is often carried over from statistics and engineering where it has high validity into trends of thought where it has almost none. Ideas simply cannot be extrapolated.

“Predict the tides—
But still the mind goes free,
Unhindered by the moon,
Untaught by prophecy,
Yet holding vastness in its cell
Like captive oceans in a shell.
* * *

“Foretell the rain,
Snow, sun and hail—
But we the unpredicted ones
May climb to pinnacles and fail
Without a chart unless we find
The secret weathers of the mind.”

The habit of translating current moods into predictions can be endlessly illustrated. It is not yet twenty years since our economy was said to be mature. Our highest political authority stated: “Our industrial plant is built.” “A mere builder of more industrial plants, a creator of more railroad systems, an organizer of more corporations, is as likely to be a danger as a help.” “We may build more factories, but the fact remains that we have enough to supply all of our domestic needs, and more, if they are used. With these factories we can now make more shoes, more textiles, more steel, more radios, more automobiles, more of almost everything that we can use.”

His immediate successor in office censured the steel industry for expanding too little and too slowly. He threatened to build and operate government plants unless private industry accelerated its pace. In a recent public address the President said, “Business men should expand productive facilities, develop new techniques, and increase efficiency in every way possible.” The reversal of prediction from a future dominated by a “mature economy” to one characterized by indefinite expansion is complete.

For some time it was widely asserted and believed that our economy was to be in “perpetual crisis,” an unclear phrase which referred to allegedly inherent and incurable instability. A good deal of post-war discussion here and abroad was founded upon that prediction. It was succeeded by the Marshall Plan, Atlantic rearmament, and Point Four, all having a common premise: that the American economy is the only one with enough strength and stability to serve as a crutch to others.

Not only politics and economics suffer from this fallacy of interpreting a transient mood as the pattern of the future. Education has been confused by the same habit. In one of its reports the National Youth Administration said: “Thousands of young men and women leaving our schools each year are destined never to become self-supporting and independent in the sense that your and my generation was led to believe was our due. The supply of workers exceeds the demand. Manpower is a drug on the market. The productive forces of this country are glutted with brain and brawn which they cannot use. And what can’t be utilized is simply laid aside to moulder and decay.”

Falling into the same methodological error, in one of its elaborately documented reports the American Youth Commission said, two years later: “The great majority of pupils in secondary schools are led by the studies which they pursue to hope for careers in ‘white-collar’ jobs. Any examination of the opportunities that are really open makes it clear that the hopes fostered by the present educational system are sure to be disappointed for most of those now registered in secondary schools.” That was the declaration of able and sincere people, misled by failure to employ a longer perspective and to realize that moods can change with altered circumstances.

The war defeated all forecasts. On the tide of victory, the depression mood of the thirties was reversed. The wave of the future now seemed to be running in the opposite direction. In its predictions the President’s Commission on Higher Education took as
grandiose a view as the earlier reports had been pessimistic. It accepted "a description of the population and labor force framework within which higher education probably will operate for the decade to come," and concluded: "There is no dearth of personal, social, or vocational activities which require training at the college level." They were so sure of this that they argued in favor of 4,600,000 college students by 1960.

Before the validity of their expectations could be tested the Korean war precipitated still another change of mood. Now, it is foretold that we are to have ten years of mobilization; for a decade or more we are to live in a "garrison state." Ten years seem to be a favorite range for prophets; so far it has proved too long a span for useful predictions. Even in population trends, particularly those relating to the birth rate, the extrapolation of curves has obviously neglected vital matters: primary school enrollments which were supposed to shrink are soaring.

If one felt any temptation to be sardonic, he could emphasize that these sharp oscillations of mood—from the feeling that high schools turn out too many white-collar people to an assertion that colleges turn out too few, from an over-accent upon economic instability to a willingness to subsidize the whole world and lay burdens beyond dreams upon the only economy strong enough to bear them—all these rapid and radical shifts occurred in a period when "planning" has been the magic word. It is a term which assumes that the future not only may, but should, be foreseen with something like precision.

Changes of mood have been matched by a variety of fashions in educational method. Twenty-five years ago—and for some time thereafter—any college which did not join the survey course parade was not only unprogressive, it was reactionary, an enemy of reform. Now the survey course has run its overadvertised race and is pretty well discredited. Colleges which once were said to be stuck in the mud appear to have been merely steady. There have been many useful experiments, and many passing fancies; colleges which hastened to imitate one novelty after another find themselves more confused than ever. Dr. Carmichael has made reference to that confusion.

Reversals of prediction are recalled not for the purpose of claiming greater prescience than others, but to indicate the need for caution in discussing the outlook for the independent college. Nothing I have said opposes change; nothing is more certain than change, or more necessary than reform. My plea is simply that we should not distort our expectations of the future by over-attention to current events.

The immediate outlook is grim. Having raised tuition toward the point of diminishing returns independent colleges must compete with tax-supported institutions which, if they do not have free tuition, charge relatively low fees. As for new gifts, there are fewer and fewer rich people, and the stimulation of benevolence among the many of modest means requires a dramatic presentation as well as expensive organization. Neither is adequately available to the independent college. Endowments are growing too slowly to offset loss of revenue occasioned by the artificially low interest rate; therefore even when invested funds increase, they are less adequate. Shrinkage in relative resources is accentuated by higher costs which make effective competition even more difficult.

Moreover, the public relations of the independent institutions are unsatisfactory. A tax-hungry Congress eyes the huge total of institutional investments. Without careful analysis to see how those resources are distributed or match obligations congressmen exploit some unusual and perhaps unwise investment policies. To close "loopholes" in the tax law sweeping proposals are made which may operate to the detriment of many institutions which never used the devices to which objection is made. It now seems likely that even scholarly grants-in-aid will be taxed. Public officials do not appear to appreciate the contribution of the independent college. This is a far cry from the classic attitude of the Federal government continuously expressed from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 until recently.

Public relations of so-called private institutions suffer also because of the current defensiveness of the democratic spirit. There is no patience with "proceeding grandly down from precedent the precedent,—we must become perceptibly more democratic by the minute. To that end it is necessary to flagellate any who do not meet the new pace or who seek the same end by different means.

The President's Commission on Higher Education illustrates this tendency. I doubt very much that its conscientious and public-spirited members realized what a flood of criticism their report poured upon the independent college. Nevertheless, the cumulative
effect was seriously to impair public confidence in institutions which have made a distinguished contribution to American life. A few samples will give the tone of the criticism: colleges support "intolerant attitudes," and pursue policies of "exclusion." They are guilty of "inconsistency between profession and practice." They claim to have "solely a private responsibility."

The liberal arts college in particular is "aristocratic in tone," and "remote from practical considerations." It deals with "traditional" subjects and is not forward-looking. It subscribes "to the belief that higher education should be confined to an intellectual elite." Vast numbers of students ought to be educated and must be educated, yet the independent college does not want to pick up the burden and, therefore, it is not playing "the social role" which higher education is obligated to play. It is plainly indicated that on these and other grounds the independent colleges will not increase and will have only a limited role in the future. Indeed the report blandly consigns to oblivion many "private" institutions. They will not be able to compete with the community colleges which are to be established in large numbers.

Let me say parenthetically that if this prediction proves to be true, it will go hard with humane studies, for it is historical fact that beginning with the Morrill Act of 1862 publicly supported education has shown steadily less and less concern for liberal education. Federal money has gone more and more to vocational training. Again there is a temptation to be sardonic and point out that publicly supported institutions have more and more stressed individual vocational profit through education; it is the so-called private institutions which have laid emphasis upon public service. It's a topsy-turvy world where government insists upon private gain and private institutions train for an enlightened public opinion. While writing this paper I heard a radio notice that G.I. benefits must be used only for studies which would "help make a living, not courses taken for pleasure." Cultural enrichment is clearly not a Federal interest. In some state universities the arts college, so-called, has become largely a service station for the professional and semi-professional schools rather than an integral unit with a significant function of its own.

Despite these adverse circumstances it is not yet time for the independent college to lose heart. The community college movement calls for the expansion of public support for education beyond the high school. But if there is any truth in what is now said about the lack of adequate public support for elementary and secondary education, it seems doubtful that so great a new load can immediately be piled on top of burdens which cities and towns have shown themselves no longer able to bear. States, already committed to subsidize elementary and secondary schools, as well as to support universities and teachers colleges, are finding it increasingly difficult adequately to meet old obligations and maintain existing institutions. A host of new community colleges will pose financial problems of enormous dimensions—and may run beyond the fiscal powers of many states.

As for Federal support there have recently been some significant straws in the wind. Subsidy for medical schools, which was a "must" in order to meet an imminent crisis, passed the Senate, seemed about to pass the House; it waited only for a "rule," which never came. The subsidy has not yet been authorized nor has it been pressed during this session. Federal aid for elementary and secondary education, which was voted by one house of Congress, has never been approved by the other. Loans to build college dormitories, actually authorized, were suspended by the President and no appropriation has been provided. Even the National Science Foundation has not gotten off the ways, and the authorization provided for relatively insignificant funds. With talk about an annual budget of 60 billion dollars or more during the next ten years, it may prove hard to get Federal subsidies for many of the projects which seemed "inevitable" in yesterday's mood.

In both state and Federal governments there has arisen a very sharp competition between age and youth for the tax dollar. Age has been winning the contest in a walk—even the oldest can vote. If the inflation spiral continues, the aged are certain to siphon off even more money. The dollars they saved earlier will not support them; they cannot be allowed to starve. Relative to the total population the percentage of older people is rising. As health standards have improved the balance between age and youth continues to tip more and more heavily toward age. Financing the retired citizen is likely to get still more costly.

Unless some economic magician appears and works a financial miracle, it may be that community colleges will not promptly be established on the scale that
their advocates have urged. Thus the independent colleges, even though the President's Commission on Higher Education suggested that they have no significant future, may have to carry the load. In short, the trend toward centralization, uniformity, and Federal support, which has been gathering momentum, may, like other trends, be reversed.

Having suggested that inaccuracy is the only consistent quality of recent prophets, I am not going to be drawn into an attempt to foretell the future; therefore I do not say that the independent college will always be able to avoid direct public subsidy. Nonetheless I think such colleges will make a serious mistake if they surrender, as many are now tempted to do, to the "inevitability" of government support. Indeed if there is any validity in the argument I have just made with reference to further support of expanded publicly controlled education, it applies with double force to independent institutions. Federal aid may not only not be inevitable, it may not be available.

Meanwhile colleges cannot neglect to strengthen their position. To achieve this result they must take thought of the way in which their own programs have been promoting an idea which is based, to a large extent, upon the anticipated disintegration of the liberal arts college. The hard line drawn at the end of the sophomore year, the sharp division between upper and lower classes, and the failure to treat the curriculum as an organic whole have weakened arguments against those who would break up the colleges. The growing accent upon the "major" or "concentration" as primarily vocational or semi-professional has hardened the division and has tended to make the first two years the only "liberal" element. If the liberal arts are to have only two years, the basic argument for the four-year college is gone.

If we are candid about the outlook of the liberal college, we must face the fact that it must find its own way to organic unity and create a really seamless educational fabric.

In trying to outguess the future, many colleges have imperilled their birthright. For example, chapel was at the heart of the independent college and symbolized its characteristic and distinctive mission. Chapel services have been widely abandoned because of complaints that they were "compulsory." This was surrender to a word. Compulsory in what respects? Was chapel attendance more compulsory than class attendance, more compulsory than the curriculum, than the almost universal swimming test, or any other college requirement? As long as he is free to go where he likes, a student, when he selects an institution, elects also to abide by its curriculum and other rules. Therefore, if chapel is part of the college program which has been explicitly set forth in its catalogue he elects it along with the rest.

To abandon chapel because it is called compulsory does not make any more sense than the abandonment of the liberal arts curriculum—which unfortunately has also been going on. In many places the curriculum has been expanded and spread so that it has practically evaporated. The outlook for the independent college would be vastly improved if it decided that it need not compete in "offerings" with universities, that its function is distinctive, and that to be different from universities does not mean to be less significant or less virtuous or less effective. Indeed it means a gain in all three respects—and also a reduction in costs.

Enormous stress has been put upon faculty tenure, security, and retirement allowances, and a never-ending emphasis upon the need for better salaries. I would not have it thought even for a fleeting instant that I oppose any of those things. Nevertheless, if one looks with perfect candor at the situation it is clear that part of the responsibility for the inadequacy of salaries rests heavily upon the faculty itself. They have inflated curricula; in the name of reform, there has been departmental log-rolling. So far as the discharge
of their educational function is concerned, many colleges could drop a third of their courses by careful reorganization of the curriculum. If that were done, it would result in internal economies significant enough to make a real impact upon the financial problem.

It is urgently necessary to raise more money for the faculty; but it is also essential for the faculty to re-examine teaching procedures and curricular offerings. Thoroughgoing and vigorous reform, which is within the power of the faculty themselves, would produce astonishing results.

Moreover, if the independent college wants to have a strong future it should revise its methods of selecting faculty and pick teachers not only with reference to their professional training but their personal relationships. Selection has become impersonalized to a shocking degree. In a teaching faculty an over-accent on degrees and the other impediments of formal scholarship detracts attention from the human, vital relationships by which alone great teaching is achieved.

I suggest, therefore, in conclusion that the first step in assuring a brighter outlook for the independent college is to look within rather than without. The college cannot shut itself in an ivory tower, to be sure, but it can be more sensitive to its great historic mission than to the confusions, irritations, and difficulties of the moment. The recovery of a sense of mission cannot be achieved without paying a price. It means running counter to the overvocationalism of our times, it means resisting the materialism of our day, it means a firm stand for intellectual and spiritual values. Only by such emphasis can the colleges vindicate the burdens which they lay upon our economy; only so can they justify the time taken out of the life of the student. The college must be ready to give up the superficial manifestations of bigness for the substance of greatness.

The key revolution of our time is the independence of India and Pakistan. He who brought about the disintegration of empire despite its wealth and power, its prestige and panoply, employed "soul force." It would put a man at his wit's end to define it—but it wrought a vital change in the fabric of the modern world. The outlook for the independent college hinges upon whether it has soul force, whether its mission is more important than its wealth, whether it can live in the king's palace on a diet of pulse and water and still flourish amidst all the trials and tribulations to which virtue has ever been subject.

The Sesquicentennial Convocation
Saturday morning, September 30, 1950

GREETINGS IN BEHALF OF THE STATE OF VERMONT

By Governor Harold J. Arthur

It is indeed a privilege to bring you greetings in behalf of the Green Mountain State on this beautiful fall day.

I am especially happy to be with you for this day marks an important milestone in the progress and development of higher education in Vermont. Middlebury College, we are proud to proclaim, since its earliest beginning has consistently ranked among the highest of our college institutions in the field of liberal arts.

The roll of famous personages who have gone forth from Middlebury's halls in the past century and a half remains a challenge to many a larger institution. If we in Vermont fail to recognize fully Middlebury's contribution to the progress and advancement of education we are, indeed, ungrateful. But we do recognize that contribution.

Middlebury College since its founding has been fundamentally sound in its mission and its teachings. I trust Middlebury shall not depart from the soundness. The College has left a tremendous impression in educational fields far beyond the confines of our own State.

This is your sesquicentennial. Lying before Middlebury in the next 150 years are fertile fields and unbounded opportunities to educate our youth in sound, wholesome, Christian ideals. It is my firm belief that
Academic procession passing through a double file of students (top); Sesquicentennial Marshalls (center), Dr. C. Leonard Hoag and Professor John G. Bourke; and (bottom) honorary degree recipients include, left to right, Dr. Wriston, Dr. Carmichael, Dr. Seymour, Dr. Stratton, Ambassador Jessup and Mrs. Horton. Dr. Stratton presented the degrees.