A VISIT TO ANDREW CARNEGIE, 1907

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The following letter illustrates that even in retirement Andrew Carnegie lost none of his hardheaded business acumen or ability to size up an individual or a business prospect. The engaging incident described here grew out of his acquaintance with Joel Chandler Harris, the Georgia journalist and folklorist. The last undertaking in Harris's life was the founding in 1907 of Uncle Remus's Magazine. For a quarter century (1876-1900) Harris had worked on the Atlanta Constitution as an editorial writer spreading the gospel of the "New South" philosophy—racial harmony, diversified industry, and scientific agriculture. In 1905 he and his eldest son Julian, himself a former managing editor of the Constitution, began planning a southern magazine devoted to the cause of sectional and racial reconciliation. They well knew that since the Civil War the South had been a notorious graveyard for publishing efforts, but they intended to create a periodical with a national appeal.

Julian Harris became the guiding spirit in the new venture. He spent considerable time studying advertising and conditions in the magazine-publishing business, negotiated with potential contributors, planned the building of a four-story plant in Atlanta, bought presses and other machinery, and solicited financial backing from local businessmen. The first issue appeared in June 1907. Later that year, Joel Chandler Harris wrote to Carnegie seeking further financial support. The two had met the previous year in Atlanta. Harris explained that dissipating ill feelings between the races was the "only ambition I have ever had. . . ." There were certain policies he had in mind that the daily press could not take up but that could be pursued in a magazine. "I have it in my mind to fit the magazine to such gentle and sure policies of persuasion with respect to the negro question, which is also the white man's question," he told Carnegie, "that honest people cannot resist them — and, in the main, the people of the south are both honest and kindly." 1

As a follow-up to this letter, the elder Harris dispatched Julian to

1 Harris to Carnegie, Nov. 2, 1907, in Julian LaRose Harris Collection, Emory University Library, Atlanta, Georgia (cited hereafter as Harris Papers).
New York City to see Carnegie personally and to plead the case of the magazine. In a lengthy missive to his family, Julian Harris recounted his visit with the retired steel magnate. Because the first two pages of the letter are missing, it is unknown to whom Harris sent it; he probably wrote it either to his wife or to one of his brothers. The first two pages may have contained something Julian Harris did not want his father to see, for at the top of page three he added a note: “Let J. C. H. Sr. (Pop) read from here on, or read it to him. If you think the pension part may stir him up, don’t read it to him. I think C. meant well.” He then continued:

I suppose you would like to hear some of the details of my visit to Carnegie. Read on:

The Laird of Skibo is ensconced at 2 East 91st Street. I was to see him at 5 p.m. I arrived on time, but as he had been out on a trip to the country, he was not present to pass out the glad grip. I was flunkied in by a pair of solemn servitors, who neglected to search me for shooting irons or gun-cotton. I was led into the be-volumed library of the Laird of Skibo, and there I was alone in his iron-barred, velvet-carpeted edition-de-luxe residence which surrounds his edition de luxe library. I fairly had to pull my feet out of the velveted velours tapestry carpet, and had I not been otherwise engaged should have covered the foot-prints that my shoes made in the luxurious growth of carpet.

This library, filled with many a volume (hand-bound, hand-tooled, gilt-lettered) of forgotten lore, was also literally littered with hand-written (on hand-made paper) diplomas and script documents (on sheepskin) reciting in Latin, French, Celtic, or Gaelic the rare qualities, rich largesses, and the bountiful spendiferousness of the Czar of ready money.

Yet, much of the many motto-like and maxim-looking wall decorations was not writ amiss. I found the Little Man of Millions a smiling yet not un-stern person, and quickwitted as well as keen; nor did he betray any immediate desire to shift the responsibility or avoid the consequences of dying rich. Helas! for the frailty of human decision.

Well, enough of such trivialities. Let us turn toward the limelight. At a few minutes past five in trotted the Iron-master, alive with the joy of an exquisite day spent in the country. In his soft, insinuating, almost child-like voice, he began descanting on the beauty of the day, the necessity and desirability of dairy farms, and the duty of the down-trodden to something-or-other.
Well, I handed him my father's letter. He read it and exclaimed: "What magazine?" I was certainly "took back" as Aunty Minervy would say, but I managed to ejaculate: "Uncle Remus's Magazine."

At the same time I flashed a bundle of the magazines on him, demonstrating, as it were: Explaining about the start, the recovery, the progress, the prospects.

All the time he was tushing, pish-tushing, and creating a fusilade [sic] of deprecatory sounds by smacking his lips, and then he said, with genuine feeling, if I'm any judge:

"How could you do it? (i.e., start the magazine). Why didn't you come to me? I could have told you about it. No southern magazine can succeed. It was wrong of you to get your father into it. It was quite thoughtless of you."

He had said all this so rapidly I was somewhat taken off my feet, and before I had replied, [he] glanced up quickly and said:

"Well, I'll pension your father!"

Now, you know whether that simply stirred me up from top to bottom. For just a minute I was all for taking my hat and leaving the house without another word. Instead, I replied, though perhaps a little too sharply, though I was under great stress owing to the unexpected turn he had given our interview:

"No, you will not do that."

Perhaps it was the tone of peculiar complacency that Mr. Carnegie had used with reference to the pension that aroused me. But I couldn't calmly contemplate the idea (or vision) of J. C. H. Sr., partaking of Carnegie pottage, while he had a son left to hustle for him. At any rate, Carnegie replied:

"Why not?"

"Because," I answered, "he doesn't need it; because he wouldn't take it, and because fifty or sixty other reasons."

"Well, young man," said Mr. Carnegie, somewhat nettled, "you'd be surprised to see the names on my pension list. Nobody knows those on it. You would certainly be surprised — surprised!"

"Doubtless," I replied, "and therefore, I wouldn't want to help add any other surprise to the list."

This seemed to arouse Mr. Carnegie. I tried to be quite composed, but I supposed I got a little annoyed. He said abruptly:

"Well, then, what do you want to see me about, anyway? I thought it was your father who was personally in some financial trouble. If he is, I'll help him. If he is about to lose money through his investment in the magazine, I'll help him out. But beyond helping
him I'll not go one step, and not give one penny.'"

Well, that was straight to the point. I then told him of the magazine, its glowing prospects, and what I hoped to accomplish by helping the senior establish it. He asked for a list of the stockholders. He looked at the names, and said that if the prospects were so good it would be shameful not to give these southern bankers and businessmen a chance to help build up the magazine.

Then I went into the situation fully. Incidentally, to indicate to him how much in earnest I was, [I] told him how I had left a position on the Constitution when I was making $60.00 per week to begin work on the magazine at $30. At his comment on this I nearly exploded. He seemed actually shocked — this man whose income is about $50,000 per day — and exclaimed:

"Foolish, foolish boy! To give up a magnificent salary of $3,000 per year for an uncertainty at $30 per week. Oh, why didn't you stay on the Constitution?"

And, I honestly believe that he meant what he said. But perhaps I am easily fooled. We then went further into the figures, and he then said, with a souii rit [sic] in his tone if not on his face:

"Taking into consideration your very glowing prospects, I am sure that $3000 per month for the next six months will cover your losses.

"Now, I'm out of business, but I rather like your style — I think you are going to make a success in life even if the magazine doesn't. You've got virility and energy and seem to be able to go right after what you want. In fact, I think that if the magazine can be made a go, you can do it.

"So, I'll just give you $1,000 per month for six months, if the other stockholders will give $2000 per month for six months.

"You can give me any receipt you like. The money is for you, partly on your own account and a great deal on your father's. But perhaps you'd better send a receipt from the company."

Then he wrote a note embodying his offer, and handed it to me. When I thanked him, and later started out, his eye fell upon a little red pamphlet containing his speech on the negro. His entire philanthropic attitude came back, and he eagerly said: "Wait." Then he wrote in the front of the book — "To Dear Uncle Remus from Andrew Carnegie."

And then I left. In many ways Andrew Carnegie is a most wonderful man.
But — I'll think it over.

Yours, J Harris

Carnegie's skepticism about starting *Uncle Remus's Magazine* was well founded. Joel Chandler Harris died the following year. His son labored mightily to keep the publication alive and briefly succeeded in turning it into an attractive and well-edited family monthly with a circulation of 245,000 and an editorial slant toward Theodore Roosevelt's Progressivism. However, in 1913 *Uncle Remus's* expired, due to lagging advertising, conflicts within the management, the lack of support for Roosevelt in the south, and above all because of the distressingly small size of the southern reading public.

Carnegie was also accurate in his assessment of young Julian Harris's prospects. Harris soon moved to the *New York Herald* and covered World War I as editor of the Herald's Paris edition. Returning to the United States in 1920, he became owner and editor of the Columbus, Georgia, *Enquirer-Sun* and in 1926 won journalism's highest award, the Pulitzer Prize, for his crusades against the Ku Klux Klan, lynching, and antievolution laws.

2 Harris to ——, 1907, Harris Papers.