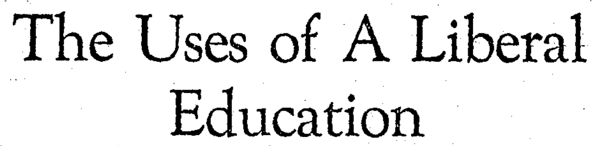

The Uses of A Liberal Education

by

Brand Blanshard

THE HAZEN PAMPHLETS
NUMBER TWENTY-SIX

The Uses of A Liberal Education

by

BRAND BLANSHARD

Professor of Philosophy, Yale University

This essay was presented as a Convocation address at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, September, 1949, and is printed by permission.

THE USES OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION

BRAND BLANSHARD

Our higher education has two types. One of them is represented by schools of engineering and law, medicine and journalism. The other is represented by the liberal arts college. About the first I am going to say almost nothing, since for most of us professional studies need no defense. But liberal studies, the sort of studies that are pursued for their own sake rather than for the sake of any uses to which they can be put, do stand in need of defense. To put it bluntly, if they have no use, what is the use of them? Each wave of students, considering how they are to budget their lives, must ask that question anew. On the answer you give to it will depend not only the course of your education, but very possibly the course of your life. Furthermore, it is a question on which there are two sides. Many people take the view that in these days when the getting of a living is so sternly competitive a business, and in all the professions there is so much to learn, liberal studies should be regarded as merely the parsley on the roast, or if you prefer, the frosting on the cake, or the sugar coating on the educational pill. The dean of a well-known medical school told me that he would be just as happy over a good halfback among his applicants as over a Phi Beta Kappa in the liberal arts. Such studies in his view did supply a button-hole bouquet which, worn with a careless grace, might help a young gentleman through conversational evenings, particularly if the talk happened to veer toward T. S. Eliot or Jean Paul Sartre. But he regarded them as decorative merely. They did not supply the vitamins and calories of the educational feast; they were something added as garnishing.

I want to raise with you the question whether he is right. He certainly has a case. And in order not to be unfair, I want to begin by stating and stressing some of the arguments commonly used against liberal education.

First, there is an argument that often stirs as a vague protest in the subliminal mind of students, the argument from the price you have to pay for it, not merely the price in money, though that is high enough, but also the price in freedom. For many young people the opening of college is the time when shades of the prison house begin to fall, when life must be abjured for books. Four years of it,

too! Four years when the sap is rising in one's veins, and adventure calls, and the urge to do things is at its strongest, given over to the companionship of—whom? Primarily not human beings at all, but books—dusty books, dead books, by authors dead and dry as nails. Four years of forcing a reluctant attention, of sitting in dreary classrooms, of dragging the academic ball and chain, while beyond the prison walls the skies are blue and open roads are inviting to the larger world where things are happening.

And what are the books about? Perhaps economics, described by Carlyle as the dismal science, in which all men are supposed to be scrambling for wealth at the expense of their neighbors. Or mathematics, described by the greatest living mathematician as the science in which nobody ever knows what he means, or whether what he says is true. Or history, which is the record, according to Dean Inge, either of events that probably never happened or of events that do not matter. Or philosophy, defined by one practitioner as the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct, and by another as an inverted filter into which whatever goes in clear comes out cloudy. Now people have been known to offer themselves a living sacrifice because they thought that sooner or later a reward would be conferred on them for their high disregard of the flesh, as St. Simeon Stylites chose to divorce himself from the world by living on top of a pillar where normal comforts and contacts were out of the question. But who believes nowadays that one must buy the abundant life with asceticism? Youth was not made for gazing at print through premature glasses; it was made for action and high spirits. We your teachers would vote for the books, but of course with a professional bias—and besides just look at us. The poet's voice is more understanding:

> Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
> Old time is still a-flying:
> And this same flower that smiles today,
> Tomorrow will be dying.

That is the first argument, the argument from the dreariness of academic drudgery. The second argument is stronger. If the drudgery brought proportionate rewards, it would and should be borne in patience. But it does not. These years of the treadmill, it is said, are on the whole wasted effort. To be sure we hear on all sides that a college education is the condition of getting on. In some fields the

statement is plausible. If one is going to be a physician or dentist or engineer, one needs a technical training, and if one wants to form connections with future Secretaries of State, experience reveals that it is the part of prudence to go to Yale. But even in fields where the argument seems strongest, as in engineering, there seem to be plenty of contrary cases. Robert Fulton, Thomas A. Edison, Henry Ford, have left firm footprints on the sands of time, but those footprints never passed across the threshold of a college. And if even a technical degree can be dispensed with, how much more readily can one in the liberal arts which hardly pretend to usefulness. One can no longer take the high line of the Cambridge don of story, who, after demonstrating a very abstruse mathematical theorem, added: "And the best of this, gentlemen, is that this theorem is pure theory with no sort of application anywhere." But if Professor Dewey is right, there are still fossil remains among us of those academics of old time who thought of an education rather as an aristocratic adornment than as a thing of utility. The Greek aristocrat and the young gentleman of Victorian Oxford had no need to bother their handsome heads about earning a living; a liberal education was for them an aid to the graceful employment of leisure; and some people seem to conceive it so still.

We no longer feel happy about such a view, but the critics tell us that we really have little more to offer. They point out that the classicists staved off the inevitable for a while by insisting that their subjects had transfer value, so that the habits formed in studying them could be applied to other subjects. But the psychologists have undercut this argument by showing that habits are far less transferable than was supposed. And the suggestion that these subjects are widely applicable is met by the critic with an embarrassing insistence that this be shown specifically. You are studying mathematics, for example, often described as a tool subject. Just how often in the past year, or in all your years, have you had occasion to use a trigonometrical theorem or an algebraic equation? And even if you have done so occasionally, was the advantage worth some hundreds of hours of work? You are proposing to study French. How often in the future do you expect to be in a position where the information or ideas you need are inaccessible in English? You are studying Spanish. What is the likelihood of your taking up residence in Spain or in South America, where Spanish will be necessary? You

are studying history. Do not even the historians now admit that not one law can be derived from history that will make possible the prediction of any single event? How well did the historians do in prophesying the outcome of the Dewey-Truman election? As for philosophy, the utility of that distinguished subject was suggested very early when the first Western philosopher, Thales, wandering about with his head in the clouds, fell into a well, to the mirth of his more practical neighbors and all their derisive progeny. They have put their view on the matter in the proverb that philosophy bakes no bread. And so of the other subjects. If you ask your father and mother how well they remember and how often they have used the physics and chemistry, the political or economic theory, the astronomy or zoology, the knowledge of *Beowulf* or *Paradise Lost* that they picked up in college, the answer will be strangely hesitant.

The skeptic could say more if we let him. He could point out that students' interest even in Boswell or Addison may be dulled by enforced study, so that they never read a page of them later; that some of the humanities, poetry for example, are better grasped in maturity than in youth; that college puts off the apprenticeship in practical life which will in any case be necessary; that a passing grade of 70 is ill preparation for a world of competitive business where you will go under with less than 90. But I have said enough to indicate the main line of attack. It is simply that a liberal education calls for a great outlay in time, money, and effort, for which little or nothing useful is gained in return.

What is to be said on the other side? Unfortunately the argument in defense of liberal studies is harder to state. But I will try to put it in the following steps. To begin with, I will ask you to examine with me what usefulness really means. When we have got clear about this, I will argue that the studies in question are enormously useful in three ways. First, they are useful *directly* because they satisfy some of the deepest wants in our nature. Secondly, they are useful *indirectly* through enabling us to borrow the best insights and standards of others. Thirdly, if taken seriously, they may permeate with their influence all our thought and feeling and action.

First, then, let us ask the critics a question. You are insisting that the college prove its usefulness: just what do you mean by useful-

ness? You imply that a thing is useful when it contributes to success, but how do you measure success? Is it success, for example, to make a great deal of money? That is certainly not the whole story, for money is not an end in itself; it too is prized because it is useful, that is, because it is a means to something beyond. Money in itself has no value. If you were on an island, cut finally off from civilization, and your pockets were bulging with bills of large denominations, what would the money be worth? A little, perhaps; it would save one the trouble of gathering leaves if one wanted to build a fire; but that would be about all. Money is literally not worth keeping; its only value is that we can get rid of it in exchange for other things. Well, what are these other things? A better house, we say, a better car, the chance to travel. But then we prize these too for their usefulness, for the something further that they bring us. The ampler house brings us comfort and rest and quiet and a sense of freedom and dignity; the car brings to our family the pleasures of the open road, and their pleasure is reflected in ours; travel enriches us with new impressions and ideas. These are the ulterior things, the self-validating things, that make money and possessions useful. Comfort and quiet and richness of mind are not good because they are good *for* something; they are simply good, good in their own right. And you will notice that all these values are goods of the spirit, goods that lie not in things but in the minds that enjoy them. In the end all useful things are useful because they produce these useless goods that are valued for nothing further; or if you wish, it is precisely the useless things of the world that in the end alone are useful, since only they will give us what we want.

We are now ready to deal with this question whether a liberal education has use. It is clear that the issue is not whether an education will increase our income or our efficiency; it may very well do that; but if it fails to do so, it is not thereby proved to be useless. The issue is a deeper one. It is whether an education does or does not contribute substantially to those ultimate goods on which all usefulness depends. I do not think many of us would hesitate here. It contributes enormously.

It does so in the first place by satisfying directly some of our elemental hungers. One of these is the hunger to know. To be sure, I have sometimes wondered how elemental this is when I have

observed how skilful some students are in avoiding the banquets spread before them. "The love of truth," said A. E. Housman, "is the faintest of human passions." And there is no doubt that much that passes as the love of knowledge is really something else, such as the love of finding some place off the beaten track where one can excel, or a mere hobby like that of a friend of mine who collects languages, or a frankly avowed means to a further end, as it is in the subscriber to the *Wall Street Journal.* But when all the impurities have been washed away, there remains, I think, a genuine golden residuum of interest in truth itself.

I am a teacher of philosophy, which is commonly held to be one of the most difficult as well as most useless of all fields of study. Students prowling about in search of what they may most painlessly devour have often asked me what was the use of studying the subject. I have come to see that when they do, it is a radical blunder to stutter out something about how helpful philosophy is in solving business and personal problems. I do not for a moment deny that it is thus helpful. But that is not the real reason why men philosophize. They philosophize because they want to understand the world they live in. I believe that, in some degree or other, everyone wants this. Everyone here is a budding philosopher, not perhaps in the sense that he wants to spoil a great many pages with very large words, but in the sense that he is genuinely interested in the great metaphysical problems.

Take one or two of these at random. The old question of free will is the question whether, if I knew all about your body and mind at this moment, I could tell what you would do or say five minutes from now, or whether, so to speak, you could double-cross me by doing something incalculable. One of the clearest heads that ever wrote on the problem, Henry Sidgwick, said that a solution one way or the other would make no practical difference; and yet the problem has fascinated men's thought for thousands of years, and, if Milton is to be believed, is eagerly canvassed by the angels in such spare time as they have. Or take body and mind. I find it impossible to doubt that at the present moment something called ideas in my mind are causing movements of tiny particles in the cells of my head, which movements in turn cause messages to be sent down to my lips and make them move. But how is it done?

How can an idea, which has no mass or shape or motion, push solid particles about in a very solid head? If anyone here can write a paper on this which gives a plausible answer, I should be glad to propose him for a Nobel prize.

Of course if one has no interest in questions of this kind, the effort to answer them will be a dreary business. But the dreariness will belong less to philosophy than to one's own soul. Certainly the great thinkers have not found philosophy a dreary business. As Josiah Royce said, "You cannot think the truth without loving it; and the dreariness which we often impute to metaphysics is merely the dreariness of not understanding the subject—a sort of dreariness for which indeed there is no help except learning to understand." This desire to understand rises in some persons to a passion. Professor Montague of Columbia says that "man began to think in order that he might eat; he has now evolved to the point where he eats in order that he may think." Perhaps not many of us could say that of ourselves, but certainly some people can. I like the story that Alcibiades tells in Plato's *Symposium* about his companion in a military campaign, a strange ugly soldier whose immense physical strength was matched only by the delight he took in the play of ideas. "One morning," says Alcibiades, "he was thinking about something that he could not resolve, and he would not give up, but continued thinking from early dawn until noon—there he stood fixed in thought; and at noon attention was drawn to him, and the rumour ran through the wondering crowd that Socrates had been standing and thinking about something ever since the break of day. At last in the evening after supper, some Ionians out of curiosity . . . brought out their mats and slept in the open air that they might watch him and see whether he would stand all night. There he stood all night as well as the day . . . and with the return of light he offered up a prayer to the sun, and went his way." The Western world has never been quite the same since this strange figure stood that way in thought. He showed men an ideal city and gave them the key. Even the tough campaigners who poked fun at him did so with a puzzled respect, for they knew that he had the freedom of that city, and in an instant, from the midst of business or the crowd, could go for refreshment to far places where they could not follow.

But the field of truth is as wide as the world, and philosophy is only one part of it. The mind that wants to know can find fascination along a hundred avenues. Darwin will spend countless fascinated hours in watching the behavior of earthworms, J. J. Thomson the behavior of atoms, Eddington the behavior of nebulae, Yerkes the behavior of apes. One of the most remarkable lectures I ever heard was given at Yale last spring by Karl von Frisch, the Austrian zoologist, whose particular interest is bees. He discovered that when a bee finds a new bed of flowers, it is able to report its find to the hive and to supply its colleagues with accurate directions as to the distance, the direction, and the kind of nectar to look for. Von Frisch set out to solve the intricate problem of how it did this, and was able to prove beyond doubt that it was done by a dance that the discoverer performed for her neighbors, in which she indicated the point of the compass by dancing in the right direction, the distance by the number of wiggles, and the nectar by supplying whiffs from a specially collected sample. If you were to ask these scientists what was the use of such knowledge, they might reply, as Faraday did to the person who asked the use of his early studies in electricity, "What is the use of a child? It grows to be a man." But probably in their own minds they would silently register one more philistine. If one wants as much as they do to know the secrets of things, one would not need to ask the question; if one does not, their answer would be unintelligible. Knowledge was their profession; and it has been said that while a trade is something one follows in order to live, a profession is something one lives in order to follow.

Now this passion of the scholar and the scientist, this love of truth for its own sake, is a quality beyond price. "To love truth for truth's sake," said John Locke in his wise old age, "is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed-plot of all other virtues." This may appear extravagant praise. There seems to be nothing very heroic in ferreting out the facts about bees and earthworms. But put this same pure light, this love of uncolored truth, in one of those fields that are rendered murky by human bias, and "how far that little candle throws its beams." "Things and actions are what they are," said Bishop Butler, "and the consequences of them will be what they will be; why then should we desire to be deceived?" But apparently we do. "We are past masters

in the art of throwing dust in our own eyes." How many of the millions of persons who read about the recent exchange between Cardinal Spellman and Mrs. Roosevelt could look at the issue with an eye wholly single to the truth of the matter? What a reassurance it would be to those who have followed with puzzled concern the tension in our armed services to know that all the responsible men involved were moved by nothing whatever but the evidence in the case! How often does one find a person who can see in perspective not only the cruelty and intolerance of the system behind the Iron Curtain, but also that which makes it so seductive to millions the world over? A man or a society with a genuine interest in truth is like a gyroscope that may wobble crazily for a while, but will right itself in the end. What seems to some of us most sinister in the reports from behind the Curtain is not so much the suppression of mercy, heavy-fisted as that is, as the suppression of objectivity, the discouragement of the very desire to see things straight. When it is decreed that the issue between Lysenko and Mendel, or between Bulgaria and Greece, is to be settled by an appeal not to the facts, but to the party line, the love of truth itself becomes an offense. And when the love of truth is banished, justice and honor too are on the way out. Archbishop Whately was right that "it makes all the difference in the world whether we put truth in the first place or in the second place."

Now the true defense of the educated mind is that it alone has at once the desire and the discipline to see the truth. This truth may or may not have applications in practice; that is not the test of its value. We even have it on good authority that he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow and makes men sadder as well as wiser. Even so, would you, if you had the choice, prefer to be happier at the cost of living among illusions? You have come to see, perhaps, that the theory of evolution is true, and that its truth renders impossible your old interpretation of Genesis and of much else that you once believed. With the passing of those beliefs there has gone something of your old assurance and peace of mind. But would you be willing to buy back that old assurance at the cost of the knowledge you have gained? I suspect not. There is something wrong with the man who would sell his intellectual maturity for the sake of a return to childhood with its irresponsibilities. "In the long run," as Augustine Birrell says, "even a gloomy truth is better

company than a cheerful falsehood." The mature mind, the mind that has escaped the straitjacket of prejudice, superstition and ignorance, the mind that knows the truth about itself and its world and by knowing the truth has been made free, is itself the highest value that education can confer. The courageous clinging to that value by a comparatively few men—Socrates, for example, Galileo, Erasmus, Newton, Darwin—brought our Western intellectual world into being. The Irish poet "AE" has given us their quiet injunction:

> "No blazoned banner we unfold—
> One charge alone we give to youth,
> Against the sceptered myth to hold
> The golden heresy of truth."

I have mentioned only one of the direct satisfactions that liberal studies bring us, the satisfaction of an understanding mind. But of course there are many others. We are told that a thing of beauty is a joy forever, and many people have verified this in the province of beauty that they have made their own: the province of poetic speech, or of line and color, or that purest of the arts, music. Again, one of our deepest desires is to be liked by other people. There are no classes in college on the art of social intercourse, yet every day of college life provides discipline in that high art. Oscar Wilde said of Bernard Shaw that he had no enemies, but was much disliked by his many friends. College will not teach you how to avoid enemies; that can hardly be done by one with the strong convictions that an educated mind should have. But it will give you a hundred lessons in the important business of making friends and keeping them.

Now in theory it is possible to satisfy all these hungers, hungers for the best that has been thought and said and acted and painted and composed in the world, without going to college at all; indeed it has actually been done. John Stuart Mill was one of the best educated men of his century, and he said he had never suffered the handicap of a college education. But it is sad to think of how few Mills there are, how few people succeed in educating themselves merely by efforts after hours. They find that the noblest and purest pleasures are the result of an acquired taste which itself must be won laboriously. That is what college is for: to help you acquire the tastes that make possible the deeper delights. Those who can really hear Bach—and their numbers are not great—tell us that they are transported by him into another and serener world; but to hear

Bach is not a matter of walking into a concert hall and sitting down; it is a matter of years, not minutes. So of all truly fine art. Probably much that nowadays passes as such has a streak of charlatanry in it; but only those who have served an honest apprenticeship in these things have the right to bring the charge. And even if Eliot and Picasso are all that their admirers say they are, we shall not find it out by approaching them jauntily and demanding that they stand and deliver. We cannot see till we have eyes to see, and perhaps also some mental spectacles. "Mr. Whistler," said a lady to whom the painter had shown one of his pictures, "I never saw a sunset like that." "Madam," he answered, "don't you wish you could?"

But it is not only the direct enjoyment of the greater values of life that a liberal training gives us; it is also, and secondly, a large indirect enjoyment. Other minds are sounding boards that enlarge our own powers of response. Professor McDougall reminds us that it is an exciting experience to sit in the grandstand with ten thousand other people through the wind and rain of an autumn day and watch a football game. But if you had to watch that same game sitting in the grandstand in wind and rain alone, it would be a dreary business. Indeed many things remain simply invisible till we see them through others' eyes. This was brought home to me vividly ten years ago when I visited Venice. Venice is by any estimate an extraordinary city, but by a double stroke of luck it became for me an enchanted city. The small pension where I was staying happened to be a house where John Ruskin had lived when he was writing *The Stones of Venice,* and on one of its shelves was a battered old copy of this wonderful book. It was just what an unobservant descendant of Thales needed, and from then on I went gaping about the streets of Venice with the book open in my hands, gazing at the Doge's palace and St. Mark's and the Rialto through eyes many times more discerning than my own. Thanks to Ruskin, Venice has been to me ever since a sort of fairy city.

Fortunately, it is not only others' sense of sight that we can borrow, but also something more important, their sense of values. Education, someone has said, is a process of learning to like the right things. Our likes, then, should change as our education proceeds. It is natural that a boy of eight should regard Joe Palooka as

the creation of genius; if he holds this opinion at eighteen, he is suffering from arrested development; if he holds it at fifty-eight, he is suffering from premature senility. Unhappily, the growth of a formed and independent taste calls, in this country, for exceptional courage and self-reliance. One reason for this, whose relevance is perhaps not at once plain, is that America is the largest market in the world. A company that can produce the right refrigerator or cook-book or washing-machine for the average American family has its fortune assured, for the hundred and forty millions of us are mainly average people with average income and average tastes. This means that America is the paradise of mass production; Dr. Stringfellow Barr in his last book has said that mass production is one of our two main contributions to civilization, the other being the idea of a federal union of states. Now mass production is an admirable thing, which is here to stay; but its results are not equally admirable in all fields. In the field of taste it is a catastrophe. The artist or novelist or Hollywood producer who has original gifts knows that if he consults his own idea of what is first-rate, he is not unlikely to wind up in bankruptcy, while if he can manage to hit the dead center of taste, he may make a fortune. No doubt there are persons who, like Henry Clay, "would rather be right than be President," and get their choice; but the pressure on an American artist to compromise his integrity is almost irresistible.

The result is what we see all around us; moving pictures, for example. Our moving pictures would almost make us believe Professor Terman's pronouncement that the average mental age of American adults is fourteen years. What do Americans read? In 1946 Henry C. Link reported to the Book Manufacturers' Institute the results of a survey, made at their request, of the books most widely read in the first half of the preceding year. The book that led the list was the Bible, though a large percentage of its readers admitted that their reading was most perfunctory. What is more significant perhaps is what followed the Bible. The next book on the list was *Forever Amber,* which had a long lead over the third, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.* Dean Mott of the Missouri School of Journalism has recently reminded us of the name of "the most popular author in the annals of American publishing." What would be your guess as to that name? Not Hawthorne or Melville or Henry James, of course, but perhaps Mark Twain or Harriet

Beecher Stowe or Margaret Mitchell? No, it would take you several guesses more. It is Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, nearly all of whose fifty novels sold more than 100,000 copies, and two of them more than 2,000,000 each. What, one wonders, are the standards of a reading public that would place books of this kind on so towering a pedestal? Sentimentality, sex, and excitement find it all too easy a business to palm themselves off as artistic worth. Nor is it only in art and literature that counterfeits are common. President Davidson of Union College spoke wisely, I think, when he said, "Americans need to be warned about . . . words and ideas which look much alike, but have different effects. For example, Americans often confuse size with importance, . . speed with progress, . . money with wealth, . . authority with wisdom, . . religion with theology, . . excitement with pleasure . . ." The great man whose bicentenary we are celebrating this year, Goethe, once spoke of "was uns alle bändigt, das Gemeine," of what enslaves us all, the commonplace. Commonplaceness, the surrender to the average, that good which is not bad but still the enemy of the best—that is our besetting danger.

The danger is the greater because it is so largely invisible and connected so intimately with what is best in American life. In our country the common man rules, and until we can achieve the Platonic utopia, that is perhaps as good a plan as can be devised. But it is fatally easy to go from the proposition that political power should follow the majority to the proposition that taste should follow the majority, a conclusion both false and fallacious. If you accept it, even implicitly, the probable result will be the drowning out of any budding distinction or individuality you may possess. In the great volume of voices you cannot, as the saying goes, hear yourself think; and before long you cease to have any thought worth hearing. How is one to escape mass suffocation? One must get outside the mass to some point from which it can be looked at in detachment. And the best and highest of those points is one that we shall never reach unaided, because the only guides that can take us there are those great spirits of the race who themselves hewed out the trail.

When we look back from such a peak, we see what little lives we were living. We begin to see ourselves as we are. Nobody who has read Meredith's *The Egoist* sees himself again in quite the same

light. Nobody can take his motives at face value after reading Freud. Nobody can place himself at the same point in the moral scale after following the long slow advance toward purity of heart in the Old and New Testaments. Of course if the change in perspective meant a disillusionment with the old with no compensating devotion, it would be better to go on with the bleak life of the wasteland. The snob and the pedant are restless creatures because they can neither like what other people like, nor get much from their own sterile idolatries; Sinclair Lewis's Mrs. Dodsworth gives the type. True advance in taste or morals is that in which one falls in love with something better, and therefore is no longer tempted by the old. If you want the doctrine worked out on its moral side, you will find it in a classic sermon by Thomas Chalmers on "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." Many years ago, when I was doing an obscure turn with the army in France, we had a song that was not quite refined in some of its interpretations, but enormously popular in spite of, or perhaps because of, that. It ran, "How're you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paree?" There is philosophy in that song. Podunk, New Haven, even Norton, do look different as seen from the porches of the Louvre.

This brings us to the last value in liberal studies that I set out to remark on. They give us great direct satisfactions. They serve us indirectly by enabling us to share the insights and standards of first-order minds. Finally, they infuse a new quality into our thought, feeling, and action. It seems to be implied in the ditty that once you have seen Paree, you are ruined as a farm-hand. Many people think of a liberal education as a means of escape into a white-collar job and otherwise useless. How often have I been told that all you can do with philosophy is to teach it! Now it is true that to rest the defense of philosophy or history or literature on applicability, in the sense that the theory of gas engines is applicable, is to blunder badly. The main value of philosophy and history and literature lies in what they supply directly, a deeper understanding, a wider knowledge, a finer power of response. But to say that this is their main value does not imply that they lack values in use. These they have abundantly.

The reason they have such uses is that a mind is built, not like a rockpile, but like an organism. If you can add a stone or a thousand

stones to the rockpile, none of the original stones will take the least notice or perhaps stir one inch from its place. But you cannot add to your mind an understanding of Plato or Milton or modern Europe and leave the rest of your mind what it was; everything you think or feel or do will be affected by it. Dr. Johnson said of his friend Edmund Burke that if you were caught in a shower and found yourself for a few minutes in the same doorway with Burke, you would go away saying, "There was a remarkable man." Everything Burke did and said had the accent of greatness because he was a great spirit. I like to think of that incident which, according to Vasari, brought to light the genius of Giotto. The Pope wanted a supreme craftsman to help in making the old church of St. Peter a thing of beauty. He sent his envoy round to the studios of the Italian painters asking for samples of their work. When his envoy came to Giotto in Florence, so the story goes, the painter halted his work briefly and told the envoy to watch. Taking a large sheet of paper, he drew a perfect circle on it with a single stroke of his hand. "Take that to the Pope," he said; "he will understand." The Pope did understand, and Giotto got the appointment. Both knew that genuine mastery can reveal itself not only in a vast spread of painted wall, but in the drawing of a single line.

Now the educated mind is the mind that has achieved mastery of its own powers, and such mastery is reflected through all the detail of one's living. A liberal education impractical? Why there is nothing in the range of our speech or thought, our feeling or action, that it leaves quite as it was! Because the educated man knows the difference between knowledge and opinion, his thought on everything—on his business, on his creed, on the devaluation of the pound—will be more self-critical and more precise. Because speech is the reflection of thought, his talk on all these matters will have point and precision and weight. Again, right feeling is largely a matter of right thinking; if a man is honestly convinced that racial discrimination is wrong, the struggle for right feeling is two-thirds won. And besides, feeling is as educable as thought. The person who has really entered into *Rabbi Ben Ezra,* or Burns on the field-mouse, or Stephen Benét's *John Brown's Body* can never feel about old age, or four-footed things, or colored people, as he did before.

And if his thought and feeling are affected, so surely will his action be. I have been reading lately Thornton Wilder's *The Ides*

of March. I felt about his hero, Julius Caesar, as I felt long ago in reading Froude and Mommsen, that there is something not only fascinating but almost frightening in the man. That marvellous intelligence so permeated everything he did that the ablest statesmen and generals of his time, when they tried to oppose him, looked as you or I would look if we played chess against Capablanca. He was a great man of action, but he was so because his action embodied the precise and lucid mind that wrote the *Gallic War,* a mind that saw with the eye of an eagle every detail, saw them all in perspective, seized the essential as if by instinct, and conducted a campaign with the economy of a superb artist. And through it all there was so little sign of strain that Caesar almost seemed to be lounging through life. With that serene intelligence sitting on the inner throne, he was not only adequate, but almost effortlessly adequate, to every situation. To corner him was not to defeat him; it was only to give his infinite resourcefulness its chance.

To educate a human mind is not merely to add something to it, but to do something to it. It is to transform it at a vital point, the point where its secret ends reside. Change what a man prizes and you change him as a whole, for the essential thing about him is what he wants to be. Samuel Butler said that there were two rules about human life, a general rule and a special one. The general rule was that everyone could make of himself what he wanted to be, and the special rule was that everyone was more or less an exception to the general rule. Yes, but only more or less an exception. It remains true that as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. He may cut a wide swath socially, financially, politically, and be a midget. He may be a humble doctor of black people on the rim of the African jungle and be, in the opinion of discerning people, the greatest man alive. What is significant about a person or a people is the invisible things about them, the place where they keep their treasure stored, the unseen sun behind the clouds that determines the orbit of their lives. And curiously enough, it is these unseen things that are most nearly eternal. The educators of the West were those restlessly active people, the Greeks. But not one ship or bridge, not one palace or fortress or temple that their impatient activity erected has come down to us except as a ruin; and the state they built so proudly was already a ruin two thousand years ago.

Does anything of them remain? Yes, the Greek spirit remains. The thought of Plato remains, the art of Sophocles, the logic and ethics of Aristotle. Literature, it has been said, is the immortal part of history. No doubt there were hard-headed practical men in Athens who stopped before the door of Plato's Academy and asked what was the use of it all. They and their names have vanished; the little Academy became a thousand academies like this where we are now meeting, among nations then unborn. There is a moral, I think, in this history. It is the usefulness, the transcendent usefulness, of useless things.