

# Everybody is Ignorant, Only on Different Subjects

Eliot Butler

It is presumptuous, of course, to attempt to describe and discuss the *educated person*. I take comfort, however, in the observation that one is not required to be that which he describes. It does seem easier to get directly at the opposite of the educated person. James Thurber had a classmate whom he described clearly: "While he was not dumber than an ox," Thurber said, "he was not any smarter either."<sup>1</sup> I guess that we have all known that boy.

In my attempt to reach a definition of the educated person I have kept you and me in mind. If the standard set by the definition is so high that almost none among us can achieve it then the standard is clearly too high and there is no point in discussing it, except as an academic exercise.

One is tempted to consider as educated only Renaissance men, those great scholars whose knowledge and superior ability swept across many fields. There is no doubt that Leonardo was an educated man. And one stands in awe of Christopher Wren, who was mathematician and astronomer, and who appears to have picked up architecture only as an afterthought—and then designed beautiful churches, cathedrals, libraries, hospitals by the score. Thomas Jefferson's breadth of excellence was such that at a dinner in the White House honoring Nobel Prize winners, President Kennedy could describe his guests (those Nobel laureates) as, "The most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House—with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone."<sup>2</sup> But, let us face the truth. Renaissance people are not crowding the world.

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A forum address given 14 September 1976 at Brigham Young University. Eliot Butler is professor of chemistry and acting dean of the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences at Brigham Young University.

<sup>1</sup>James Thurber, "University Days," in *The Thurber Carnival* (New York: The Modern Library, 1945), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup>As quoted in "Far From the Briar Patch," *Time*, 11 May 1962, p. 18.

Even solid competence in a rather narrow field is not common enough.

On the other hand, if the standard for the educated person is so low that with little or no effort any one of us can achieve it, it is valueless.

A common fault made in discussing education is to describe it as a posture or stance, when in fact it is a continuing process. The vigor and effectiveness of one's mental activity and learning today tell much more concerning whether that person is educated than does the record of matters learned last year. Yet we use such expressions as, "She was educated at Vassar," "He completed his education last year," or even, "I'll be so glad to finish my education and get out of here." (It is sad to tell that too often those statements about finishing and completing one's education turn out to be true.)

Let us try then: *An educated person is one who by his or her own initiative and discipline is consciously, vigorously, and continually learning.* We will need to add two small extensions later, but just now we will not cloud the issue.

Meeting this definition does not guarantee one a Nobel Prize, nor does it make one a scholar. But it is worth noting that no one ever became a scholar without first becoming an educated person. This is a good first step.

Notice some characteristics that the educated person must have:

If she is educated, she is learning now, and this learning is not an aberration, because the requirement is that it be a continuing process.

If he is educated, the learning must be the result of self-discipline and not the result of demands and pressures from others.

If she is educated, she is learning vigorously.

I have enjoyed the experience in almost every one of twenty years at Brigham Young University of teaching a class of freshmen. Without exception there have been a few educated people in each freshman class that I have taught. There have been men and women who had grown out of the slavlike position of doing only what was required by pressures from parents or teachers or society, and had found the satisfaction of being free—of doing more than meeting requirements, of learning because it is good to learn.

It is disappointing that there have also almost invariably been a few who have chosen a false freedom—the hedonistic freedom of doing only that which seemed fun at the moment. This, of course,

is no freedom at all, and it leads neither to education nor even to graduation.

A much larger number of students work to meet the requirements. It is commendable to do what is required, but merely meeting the requirements can at best make one trained or taught—never educated.

A first extension to our definition of the educated person is that the learning be worthy of the attention of a human being.

The verb *to learn* is used in so many ways that we must spend a moment to clarify what we're about. The most common and casual use of the word is completely removed from the conscious and active learning of the educated person. One says, "I just learned that it is raining in Santaquin," or asks, "Have you learned what time the play begins?" To become aware is often important and it may be truth that one is becoming aware of, but that is not the learning that makes one educated. The learning must be active.

There is a kind of very real learning that occurs as a result of facing life, but this too is not the active learning required by our definition of an educated person. Let me illustrate. Any parent learns in breathtaking steps—just by being a parent. You should realize that because of you your parents learned much. But that kind of learning under the sword does not qualify one as an educated person.

The learning must be of matters of reality: the real behavior of people and of matter, the real thoughts and reasoning of thinking people, not the pseudoevents so eloquently denounced by Daniel Boorstin—those continued nonevents that make up most of what is called news.<sup>3</sup>

There is a strong belief among some people that merely naming something solves the problem:

"I was concerned," one hears, "for he acts as if he were two different people. What a relief to find that he is schizophrenic."

"Why does the Indian government respond in that way?" "Oh, you see, India is a third-world country."

Learning for the educated person must be more than becoming aware, or gaining experience, or applying names. The learning must challenge the human being's intellect and capacity to comprehend.

What of depth and breadth? Neither the narrow specialist nor

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), chapter 1.

the shallow generalist is the ideal. W. H. Auden's description of the bewildered fifth century Athenian who visits our society is apt:

"Yes," says the man from Athens, "I can see all the works of a great civilization: But why cannot I meet any civilized persons? I only encounter specialists; artists who know nothing of science, scientists who know nothing of art, philosophers who have no interest in God, priests who are unconcerned with politics, politicians who only know other politicians."<sup>4</sup>

It is sad to report that occasionally one even finds able men and women, competent in their own specialties, who act proud of their having kept clean and innocent of understanding in other areas of study. Perhaps this is only a cloak for hiding their fear of the unknown. But that kind of pride or fear cannot be an attribute of the educated person.

However narrow the specialist with no rounding out may seem, even more pitiable is the generalist with no substance. Here is the master of the bull session and the party. In his extreme he becomes almost like characters in *The School for Scandal*: able to gossip a little about several subjects, but no more. An evening spent in sharing ignorance with people who do not know and do not think does not produce understanding. Indeed, the application of a course number and credit to a bull session, as has been known to happen, does not give it educational merit.

One hears easy statements such as "Today we all know," and "There is an explosion of knowledge." One might carelessly suppose that today everyone is more intelligent than were members of earlier generations. It is well to remind ourselves that where there is increased understanding it is largely the result of intensive study and effort by a few great characters and is not a summation of the halfhearted and idle curiosity of millions. Moreover, for one to be proud that now people know so much, while remaining ignorant oneself, is a foolish position. The student who chooses a major because its requirements are easily met cheats himself of the opportunity to be taken through a rigorous, if short, introduction to the reasoning, thinking, study, techniques, and challenges of one subject. Having avoided the opportunity to learn discipline he is doomed to superficiality.

In a real sense good education is always *both* general and special.

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<sup>4</sup>W. H. Auden, Editor's Introduction, *The Portable Greek Reader* (New York: Viking, 1948), p. 7.

None of us enjoys having personal ignorance displayed publicly. However, the fear of having others see one's ignorance, if not controlled, can easily prevent one from being an educated person. Socrates made the nice point in the *Apology* that ignorance of one's ignorance is the worst kind of all.<sup>5</sup> A person who is obsessed by the need to cover up personal ignorance has no chance to become educated.

Is it useful to be educated? Listen to an approximate quotation:

"I took algebra and geometry, never used them, and now my income is fifty times that of the woman who taught those classes. I pay big taxes. Why do the schools waste our hard-earned money teaching junk like that?"

That is essentially the statement that appeared in a letters-to-the-editor column a few years ago.

Some questioners take an expanded view of the problem:

"Why study English or any language? The Adamic language is all we'll need."

"Law should be useful in the next life—if you are in the place where there will be arguments and disagreements and criminals."

This next one cuts:

"What are you chemists preparing to do? Make thermodynamic studies of the lake of fire and brimstone?"

It is sad that so many have spent so much time at schools and universities without getting the point—that far beyond all professional or vocational or career aspects of the institutions there is the assistance, guidance, and encouragement to be educated. And that brings us to the second extension to the definition: there should be purpose and a sense of responsibility to the learning, at least for the educated *Christian*. Here we are not speaking of economic or employment purpose. Your parents and we are all anxious that you be able to get worthwhile work to do and we expect that almost all of you should do better at your work because of having been here. Indeed, most of you will get positions that you could not have obtained without the experience and degree from the university. However, much of our effort with you here is to help you to be educated—and if that effort is successful your reward will be far greater than any vocational or economic return alone could ever be. You will be a changed person, your life will be different, and you will have increased ability and opportunity to serve.

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<sup>5</sup>Plato, *Five Great Dialogues* (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), p. 38.

The Lord said it directly. After stating the limitless breadth of subjects appropriate for our study, he explained the purpose: "That ye may be prepared. . ." (D&C 88:80). As one reads on in the 88th Section one sees that the preparation is to serve—to serve one's fellow beings.

Is one credible who speaks of an eternity of progress, but who makes only halfhearted effort to learn today?

The question is asked, "Isn't it enough to be good?" In the limited time I would like to make a few observations: Joseph Smith, instructed by the greatest characters of scriptural times, burdened with the responsibility of establishing the Restored Church in the face of appalling difficulties, persecuted, often turned upon by people who had been at his side, still responded with remarkable vigor to an inner drive to learn. And how he learned! Read of the School of the Prophets, the tutors, the subjects he attacked. After you catch your breath there, look at the founder of our university. A recurrent theme in the letters of Brigham Young to his sons is "observe." Whether they were on missions or away at school he urged them to observe and learn.<sup>6</sup> President John Taylor made his case for learning with an analogy all could understand:

We want our children to grow up intelligently, and to walk abreast with the peoples of any nation. God expects us to do it. . . . I have heard intelligent practical men say, it is quite as cheap to keep a good horse as a poor one, or to raise good stock as inferior animals. And is it not quite as cheap to raise good intelligent children as to rear children in ignorance?<sup>7</sup>

I encourage you to hear the other presidents of the Church. It is as if the call to that office ignites an intense drive to learn. President Kimball's comment here during the centennial year reaches to the heart of the matter: "We understand, as few people do, that education is a part of being about our Father's business. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Isn't it enough to be good? One is reminded of the statement of a distinguished member of this faculty in earlier years, P. A. Christensen: "God himself is limited when men cease to think."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), pp. 14, 29, 31, 276, etc.

<sup>7</sup>John Taylor in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-1886), 24:168-69.

<sup>8</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, "Second Century Address," 10 October 1975, Brigham Young University.

<sup>9</sup>P. A. Christensen, "On Liberty in Our Time: Milton and Mill," in *Of a Number of Things* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1962), p. 25.

We have defined the educated person as one who by his or her own initiative and discipline is consciously, vigorously, and continually learning. We have added that the study and learning must be in subjects worthy of the offspring of God—worthy of human beings with great potential—and that there must be purpose. Now the questions must be faced:

“Are we doing no more than defining an exclusive and elite group? Are we seeking to feed egos by establishing a new class system in which members of the upper class can feel and act out their pretended and snobbish superiority—just as in all class systems?”

Certainly not! In the first place there is no barrier to anyone except one's own self. The invitation is to all of us. Any one of us may start immediately, study, learn, and feel the joy of expanding the godlike aspects of our humanness. In addition to the unrestricted invitation, there is built into the nature of learning a remarkable protection against pride. The educated person, actively, consciously, and vigorously learning through his own drive, cannot be egotistical about what he or she knows. Each step that increases understanding reveals a larger area of ignorance than could be seen before. For example, one who has never heard of ancient Greek civilization can have no concept of the extent of his ignorance of that subject. One who knows nothing of calculus cannot begin to appreciate how ignorant he is of the possibilities of reasoning, order, logic, and complex problem-solving offered by that area of mathematics. One must learn some before he can even recognize his ignorance. Will Durant, in an interview at age 80, said it well: “Sixty years ago I knew everything; now I know nothing; education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.”<sup>10</sup>

You have heard Newton's statement about having been like a child playing on the beach and having picked up a few pebbles of understanding from the vast shore. In his play *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* Shaw has Newton say to Charles II and George Fox, “I spend my life contemplating the ocean of my ignorance. I once boasted of having picked up a pebble on the endless beach of that ocean. I should have said a grain of sand.”<sup>11</sup> Newton's statement does not imply, of course, that he became more ignorant. It tells that through a lifetime of study he became increasingly conscious of a world of learning yet to be pursued.

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<sup>10</sup>“The Essence of the Centuries,” *Time*, 13 August 1965, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*, in *Complete Plays*, 6 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1963), 6:19.

The expansion of one's awareness of his ignorance as he learns is a guarantee that the educated person is kept humble about knowledge and understanding. Stop to consider the people you know who know all the answers: they know how the neighbors should rear their children, they know what the president of the Church should say about this or that, they know how the president of the country should handle that problem, and so on. Is it not true that the people who know the least about the problem tend to be the most outspoken and the most positive about its solution? If a person is not aware of his own ignorance he can easily be positive.

Pascal's analogy of learning is helpful: The circle of knowledge grows larger as one learns, and the circle thus impinges on ever-increasing regions of ignorance.<sup>12</sup>

When we recognize that the educated person is kept keenly aware of his expanding consciousness of ignorance, and that the door to being educated is open to all of us, we can consider and appreciate Aristotle's response to the question, "By how much are educated people different from the uneducated?" "As much," said Aristotle, "as the living from the dead."<sup>13</sup> His comparison is very apt. Remember that there was no formal and structured school system such as we know. There were no degrees. There were no symbols to confuse us. The educated person was one who had come to life, who was living. This person was consciously and vigorously learning. The invitation is to every one of us: Join the Living!

Our definition of the educated person includes the point that one's own discipline must cause the learning. A favorite line from *The Wisdom of Solomon* bears on this: "The very true beginning of [wisdom] is the desire of discipline."<sup>14</sup> At our worst we do not even rise to the level that we desire to discipline ourselves. But when we desire to develop discipline, there is hope.

To learn is hard work. It requires discipline. And there is much drudgery. When I hear someone say that learning is *fun*, I wonder if that person has never learned or if he has just never had fun. There are moments of excitement in learning: these seem usually to come after long periods of hard work, but not after all long periods of hard work.

We human beings tend to let our minds congregate in areas

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<sup>12</sup>C. Kegan Paul, trans., *The Thoughts of Blaise Pascal* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Company, 1885), pp. 19-20, 83.

<sup>13</sup>Diogenes Laertius, "Aristotle," Book V of *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891), p. 188.

<sup>14</sup>The Wisdom of Solomon 6:17 (*The Apocrypha*, Authorized Version).



of trivia and to protect our minds from the challenge of serious thought. Notice how much more comfortable we feel in the book of Acts where action leads us on than in Paul's letters, especially when scriptural arguments are being developed.

The commander in Shaw's *Man and Superman* in a sad sense represents all of us when he finds the philosophical discussion between Don Juan and Lucifer too deep for his marble-headed capacity.

"This is extremely abstract and metaphysical, Juan," he said. "If you would stick to the concrete, and put your discoveries in the form of entertaining anecdotes about your adventures with women, your conversation would be easier to follow."<sup>15</sup>

It is impossible to imagine an educated person who does not love the language. The reasons are manifold, but the first by all odds is that language is at the heart of our humanness. And our humanness is an essential step in the preparation to become what God would have us be. Without language would we even be human?

In the beginning was the Word. Is it not interesting that John chose to describe the Son of God in a way that means not only the truth and the way in the direction and the instruction, but also means the language? One is stirred by the thought that John, wise and eloquent, intentionally included multiple meaning: the purposeful beginning for any of us lies in language.

How anxious one who learns is to tell friends and family of new experiences and new understanding! And as the understanding is of increased complexity and the experiences of deeper consequence to our souls, how our need for language explodes! How one yearns for enough competence in the language to say it well.

You have reached maturity at a time when the language suffers both neglect and vigorous attack. Those who have rebelled against society or some part of it have often chosen to make their degraded language the first symbol of revolt. But it is not necessary to revolt to sour the word. Conversations overheard about campus seem often to consist mostly of huh, y'know, yeah, ok, I mean.

I should hasten to admit that the language lives and evolves, and that each minute step of its evolution will irritate someone. But evolution of the language and its destruction are two different matters. Rapid upheaval of the language by those who never knew or loved it soon leads to complete and dreadful isolation—isolation

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<sup>15</sup>George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, in *Complete Plays*, 3:631.

from heritage, from philosophical roots, from faith, from the opportunity to learn well from one's fellow human beings, from the ability to tell someone clearly what one knows and feels. We, of all people, should understand this, for we know of Nephi and Laban—and of God's concern that the religious heritage in written and continuingly understandable form go with the little group of colonists.

There is no evidence that the people of Mulek set out to destroy their language or even that they were especially neglectful, but there is clear evidence of the result of their losing the blessing of a stable language. The great stabilizers of the English language, dating from the early seventeenth century, have been the King James Bible and Shakespeare. But as generations of English-speaking people mature having had no serious contact with the Bible and only a forced splash in *Julius Caesar* in high school, what do we have for stabilizers? Commercial television?

When I was an undergraduate we all read *1984* and *Brave New World*. We discussed and argued at length the positions of those early futurists. I remember feeling that Huxley peered ahead more clearly than did Orwell: that "Newspeak" described by George Orwell was too ludicrous to imagine. In the official language of the regime in 1984 words had the opposite of their ordinary meaning. This language was used for control of the minds of the people. How unbelievable. But this is only 1976—eight years short of 1984. We have read transcriptions of the White House tapes and have compared them with contemporary public statements by the same men. Newspeak! And if that example seems only a shocking aberration, consider the chatty, disorganized, smudged, meaningless mixture of words that often substitutes for conversation today:

"Hey, wasn't that, y'know, just a fabulous thing."

"Yeah, I mean, really, just far out."

In the beginning was the word. For too long and too often the word has been used to deceive. Some people in the areas of speech writing, public relations, and advertising have sullied their trades by becoming professional fabricators of images—images that obscure the truth, that deceive.

A strangulation of the language is underway by another group—the Pompous People. The following quotation should lead us into that gagging bog: "I cannot conceive of any scenario in

which that could eventuate.”<sup>16</sup> This was said neither by a stand-up comedian nor by Howard Cosell (I am indebted to ABC and their reporting of the Olympic contests for my awareness of Mr. Cosell). The statement was made by a vice-president of the United States when he was asked if might be a candidate for president.

“I cannot conceive of any scenario in which that could eventuate.” One shouldn’t be too critical for he could have said, “At this point in time, possibilitywise, I am inclined to prioritize that minimally.”

That reminds me of the time I asked a man a question that needed only yes or no. His answer: “My response to your inquiry is affirmative.”

The aim of many seems to be to mess it up. “Cute” words are collected by some and used endlessly.

expertise  
input  
output  
feedback  
thrust

upgrade  
interface  
interact  
know-how  
utilize

finalize  
actualize  
prioritize  
internalize

Listening to someone use such barbarisms nearly forces one to externalize his breakfast. The numbing effect on the reader or listener is such that he slips past the point of caring that the sentences are meaningless.

“Your information will be integrated into our own brainstorming.” That appeared in a recent memo sent to me.

Ordinarily I have nothing good to say in behalf of speed reading—for if something written is worth reading it deserves attention and thought, and at its best, even savoring. But too often I find myself thinking that since responsibility forces me to plow through nonwriting in too many memos, committee documents—*documents* (their word, not mine)—and studies, speed reading is the most that they deserve, while complete and rapid oxidation is the correct treatment.

Now let me hasten to add my appreciation to those busy people who always make the effort to avoid jargon and to get to the point, even taking time to inject a little grace. Not every memo or letter or report can be a poem, but it needn’t be a garbage dump.

When I was in school *use* and *utilize* had a subtle but valuable difference in meaning. To *utilize* meant to make application of

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<sup>16</sup>“More Blood in GOP’s Donnybrook,” *Time*, 24 May 1976, p. 8.

something beyond its designed or intended purpose. For example, one on a desert island might, in the emergency, utilize his fountain pen for extracting his companion's appendix. That is clearly an extension of the utility of a fountain pen. Today, however, one dare not use the word *utilize*, for the pseudosophisticates, believing that it is a synonym for *use*, would never apply the one-syllable word when three can be thrown in.

The nature of English allows nouns to be made from verbs; consequently, you and I have heard *utilization* as an offensive five-syllable substitute for *use*. (The *use* of something vs. its *utilization*.) The language, polluted, quickly becomes a hindrance to understanding. The noise is high and the signal is weak.

You probably will not believe this next. I have heard that *finalize* is used officially at some universities. My thesaurus has nearly a half page of words that mean to finish, to end, to complete, to conclude. Despite the abundance of good words in use, some barbarian with neither love of the language nor appreciation for its value patched together *finalize*. And it did not stop there. The end has become the *finalization*. Next we will probably encounter the monstrous verb *finalizationalize*.

These examples are only a few flyspecks in the filth of mucky language, but you get the idea.

The loss will be irreparable if we reach the point that our ties of understanding with the past and the future are severed. Consider those attributes that differentiate us from the animals. Neither our relative hairlessness nor our use only of the upright position for walking provides meaningful distinction. God's *offspring* as distinguished from his *creatures*, have the capability not only of learning from each other and thinking about it but also of learning from the accumulated understanding, wisdom, and faith of their ancestors. In addition, God's offspring have the responsibility of leaving a heritage of knowledge and faith for their descendants.

The love of the language that we speak of is not merely some appreciation for the rules that guide us in its use, important as they are. The language at its best functions to reveal the dignity of man. What would you know of your birthright as a child of God without language? What would one know of the continuity and of the change in the aching efforts of human beings to climb to understanding without the language? How could there be love instead of mere lust, without the language?

Degraded language still allows some functioning in society—one

can find the way to a restaurant, buy and sell, send and receive memos, get the television repaired, mention the weather and the election to a neighbor; much that occupies our time can still be handled with degraded language. But those matters that lift us above the crude and the mundane cannot.

George Orwell made an interesting point about the language:

A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.

He then adds a hopeful note:

“The point is that the process is reversible.”<sup>17</sup>

It is possible for one who does not love the language to be well trained—but not to be an educated person.

We have, so far, scarcely mentioned the university and how it fits into the matter of our becoming and staying educated. It should be clear to you that some educated people have not attended a university, and such are not just the Abraham Lincolns of the past. I mentioned having some freshmen in class nearly every year who are educated—and who show the interest and drive that should keep them vigorously learning and hence educated. Is there any point in their staying at the university? Since you can be educated outside the university should you stay? Hold on. Don't pack your football and curling iron yet. (I was careful, you'll notice, to choose objects that could not imply any sex bias.) The university is excelled by only one other institution in igniting the fire of desire to be educated, and the university is by all odds the best widely-available institution for giving one a solid start in one discipline (the major) along with sufficient exposure to several other areas that one's lifetime of learning can have direction and meaning.

It feels redundant to say again what has been proved so many times: it is painfully obvious that one can obtain a degree without becoming an educated person, and that unfortunate truth obtains worldwide. Neither four years of punting on the Cam River nor four years of eating parsley at Cannon Center carries a guarantee

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<sup>17</sup>George Orwell, “The Politics of Language,” in *The College Omnibus*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), p. 63.

that one will become educated. But the university offers the opportunity and encouragement. And you must decide how you will respond. The Introduction to Music class can be a drudge with you dragging mental feet, complaining at the requirements of the class—or you can wake up, get interested in the subject by meeting the requirements, and then become free by letting that interest carry you beyond the requirements. You can choose to get credit, or you can choose to change your life (still receiving the credit, but now with an improved grade). That class may be one that will affect your listening ever after. With a little understanding of music you will crave increased understanding, for you will have seen how much your appreciation and enjoyment grew just from your effort in one class. Or you can get the credit.

You can approach the class in the physical sciences—necessary either to prepare for a general education exam or because your major requires it—with fear and resistance because it will be hard. Or you can immerse yourself in the subject and come to feel the unusual rewards. In no other subjects can one, knowing little, do so much that is correct, and predict accurately the results of so many previously untried experiments. In these subjects, as nowhere else, one can gain an appreciation for the order in God's universe and for the possibilities and limitations of human reasoning.

Or one can resist and be fearful and miss the whole point.

I have reflected recently on my undergraduate years, this apparently being one of the required activities of middle age. In each of those four years I had at least one class outside my major that has had profound effect on my life ever since. What a disappointing void would have remained if I had missed taking those classes! By associating with those fine teachers, who were educated people, more mature and much wiser than I, I was introduced to several subjects that I could hardly have hoped to encounter significantly otherwise, and the introduction was sufficient to make it possible for me to maintain reading and study in those areas.

I mentioned that the university is excelled by only one institution in the area of igniting the desire to be educated. It is with joy that I remember the many young men and women whom I have known through their undergraduate years, who have changed in that period from enrolled bodies to awake and consciously learning students. But another institution has an even better record of making people want to learn than has the university and we, of all people, should not be surprised to hear that it is the home.

Harry Golden tells in his little book *Only in America* of a practice followed among immigrant Jews in lower eastside New York when he was growing up there. When a child was presented his first book—one that would be his own—a little ceremony was held in which a drop of honey was placed on the book's cover, and the child knelt, placing his tongue on the honey on the book so that his first contact with learning and books would be sweet!<sup>18</sup> (One weeps when one realizes that the counterpart in too many homes today is that the child may eat his first pizza off the television set.)

How frequently one observes that the student who has unusual commitment comes from a home where people cared and tried, where books were known and loved, and where ideas instead of neighbors were discussed.

I am sorry to say that one cannot always detect whether someone recently met has graduated from a university. But one can soon tell if one is speaking with an educated person. Mark Van Doren points out correctly that nobody who is will ever admit to being educated.<sup>19</sup> This is not, of course, that the person is embarrassed to be educated, but only that he or she is so conscious of so many areas of gross ignorance. Will Rogers saw it clearly: "Everybody is ignorant," he said, "only on different subjects."<sup>20</sup>

But, I say, one quickly detects when one speaks with an educated person. Matters learned last evening, an idea being pondered and developed, books recently read, an essay just encountered, an argument still going on, a book just purchased to be read tonight as soon as another is finished—one hears of such from an educated person.

Over several years I have spoken with many graduating seniors in one program here: with several there was the pain of learning that not one book had been read since they entered the university except the required books. By others a few had been read. But the educated men and women in the program all had books just finished, others being read, and a growing list of books that they could hardly wait to get into.

To be an educated person does not carry a set of comfortable guarantees—it will neither cure acne nor remove unwanted weight.

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<sup>18</sup>Harry Golden, *Only in America* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 181.

<sup>19</sup>Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), chapter 1.

<sup>20</sup>Will Rogers, syndicated column, 31 August 1924, as quoted in *The Will Rogers Book*, comp. Paula McSpadden Love (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), p. 138.

It does not promise to remove all ambiguities from life. But the educated person will have increased capacity for living amidst some ambiguity, without losing faith in God or man. To be educated does not promise that one will be popular, but neither does it require that one become a social clod. Indeed the educated person is vastly more interesting to be around. To be educated will enrich one's life and increase one's joy—and joy is the reason that humans are. To be educated will increase one's humanness and one's respect and love for God's offspring—and such love is the second great commandment. To be educated will enlarge one's capacity to serve one's neighbor—and to serve well is the highest calling for a child of God.

My suggestion for you and me is that we get on with the task.