

THE BROKEN-FIELD THINKER



FOOTBALL GAME is a parable of life. For some years the greatest emphasis was upon the passing attack. As the art of defense developed it was found that passing was not always the quickest or surest way to the goal. In the past several years the secret of a championship football team has been to possess a really great running backfield man. It has become obvious that, while passing is a quick way to the goal-line, running gets you there more surely and more often. The broken-field runner, who can see the holes in the line ahead of him, and elude the secondary, is the man who gets to the goal-line.

Now this parable has meaning for the youth who is looking toward an education to prepare him for life, as well as to help him make a living. You cannot "pass" your way in life. No college can give you an "easy" way. Any college can get a man to the scrimmage line and "spring" him, but there is no clear path to the goal. The college does not run interference. A man cannot always get down-field blocking. When he has been "sprung" he is on his own and, then, the secret is "to be adaptable." The broken-field runner has to respond to the situation as it develops and as he encounters obstacle after obstacle. The broken-field runner is the football hero. It is he who thrills the crowds. He is "the American hero" because, out on his own, he makes his way through all obstacles to the goal. He is the truly "free" and "individualist" embodiment of the American idea.

Now, in life, you can scarcely plan for the economic situation of the next year, and, certainly, you cannot plan for the economic world that will exist four years from now. A young man, going to college for four years, needs to be ready to meet the economic situation as he finds it when he walks out of the halls of ivy on graduation day. He needs to be a "*broken-field*

thinker”—for he has the broken-field of life ahead of him. The college of liberal arts and sciences, then, has to turn out “*broken-field thinkers*” just as the football team develops “broken-field runners”. The professor of philosophy plays just as significant a role as the football coach. It is the professors who turn out the “*broken-field thinkers*.”

The “*broken-field thinker*” is the American ideal. He is the ideal of the liberal arts and sciences college. The American way of life derives from free enterprise carried on by free men. The institutions dedicated to the specific purpose of turning out such men are the colleges of the liberal arts and sciences. You may have heard the remark that the “trouble with going to the liberal arts college is that it does not prepare one for a job”. This remark has been made not only by prospective college students but, also, by their parents.

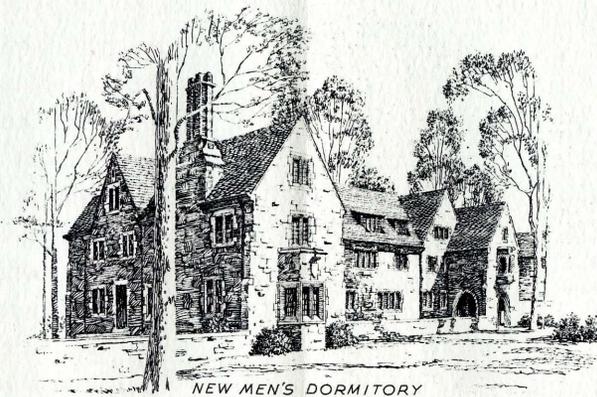
Perhaps a fair way to consider the matter is to make a case study. Let us take several men out of an actual graduating class of a small Christian college of the liberal arts and sciences. This college will be nameless, but the individuals referred to will be actual people who belonged to the class of 1933. What happened to these men when they walked out into what was one of the toughest economic situations this country has ever experienced? The field was littered with obstacles that year. The going was tough—the “*broken-field thinker*” had a job cut out for him.

There was E. He was interested in birds and the study of nature. Every afternoon he went ranging in the woods beyond the college. He was an intimate of the professor of biology and made countless field trips with him. Perhaps his best friend among the teachers was a wise old professor who taught philosophy, but who knew something about everything. E learned much from his books, from his professor friends, and from his hikes in the hills. Today he is chief ornithologist of one of the

world’s leading museums of natural history. He has led research expeditions into Persia, into Africa, into Mexico, and into South America. He has written many articles and books describing his important discoveries. A distinguished scientist, soldier and author—he is the graduate of a small liberal arts college.

Then there was C. He was the son of a South Carolina cotton planter. Cotton was selling at a low price in the 1930s. C went home after graduation and faced the very real problem of finding something to do. He remembered studying in South Carolina history how the Lower Carolina area was once a great source of long-staple cotton. In the face of the boll weevil attack and for reasons lost in the obscurity of history, no long-staple cotton was being grown in South Carolina. C asked his father and other people why they did not grow long-staple cotton as in the old days. The only answer seemed to be that no one had the imagination to do it. So C began with long-staple cotton. He had to build a gin to process it, as there were no gins for long-staple cotton. The upshot of it all was that he began a renaissance in long-staple cotton growing and today there are many imitating him. C was a graduate of a small liberal arts college. He never went to an agricultural college a day in his life.

In some ways S is even more interesting. He left college to take a position in a little high school in Georgia. They paid him eighty-five dollars a month when they had the money. Failing to receive his salary for several months and needing money with which to live, he quit teaching and moved to the city. The story of his first years as a salesman is interesting, but these years were merely preparatory to his final emergence as one of the greatest salesmen in America. He did not have any sales training in college. He was interested most of all in history. He still thinks that he would have made a good teacher, yet he has gone on to become a legend in the sales world. As a salesman he “sells ideas”



and not insurance. Salesmanship is an art that is gained by men who have imagination and ideas.

These examples indicate how a liberal education makes it possible for a man to adapt himself to the changing scene.

Yes, the best colleges of the liberal arts and sciences turn out men and women with imagination and ideas. These individuals have the wisdom that enables them to adjust themselves to new and ever-changing conditions. The graduate of the liberal arts college is like the broken-field runner in football—he is able to take advantage of an opening as it comes up, or as he makes it himself. Life is, after all, a broken-field with many obstacles. There is no royal road to the goal. It takes an adaptable, clear-thinking man, with imagination and ideas to achieve objectives in this life. This man, whom we call the “*broken-field thinker*”, is the American ideal, and he is the product of the college of the liberal arts and sciences.

The “*broken-field thinker*” must become the American hero—a symbol of freedom—the embodiment of intelligence and action—the man who can help this country get to its goal—as he makes his way to his own goal in a free, democratic society.



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