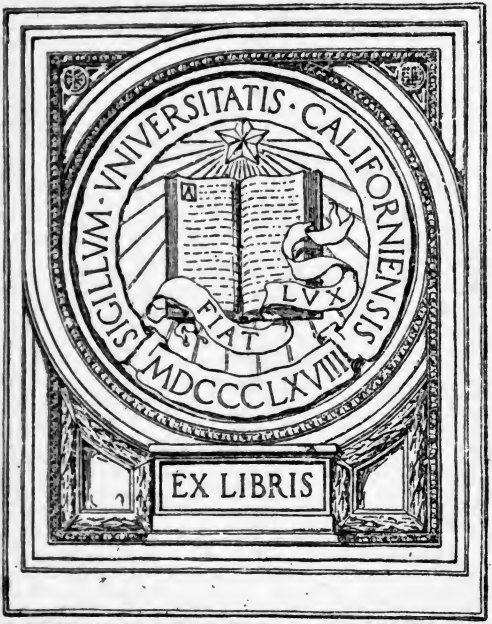
Right Reading



RIGHT READING

RIGHT READING

WORDS OF GOOD COUNSEL
ON
THE CHOICE AND USE OF BOOKS
SELECTED
FROM THE WRITINGS
OF
TEN FAMOUS
AUTHORS

CHICAGO
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WHEREVER we go in life, even in the darkest alleys of literature, a good and an evil example will always be put before us; and because this world is not heaven, we must be left to make our choice between good and evil; but the more a person's views are enlarged, and the wider the choice that is offered to him, the better hope there is that he may take the good and leave the evil. All that we can do is to give him light—light in every possible direction; and if a man chooses to make a bad use of his eyes and ears, and of his other faculties, all that we can say is, we have done our best; we cannot make the world heaven.

Archbishop Whately

NOTE

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LIST OF AUTHORS

SIR ARTHUR HELPS

Sir Arthur Helps

GIBBON says, "After a certain age, the new publications of merit are the sole food of the many." A sarcastic person would perhaps remark that the words "of merit" might be omitted without injury to the truth of the sentence. But that would be too severe; for the publications of merit do mostly obtain some hearing in their own day, though a very disproportionate one to what they should have; as it is exceedingly difficult, even for highly-cultivated persons, to make good selection of the nascent fruits and flowers of literature amidst the rank herbage of the day.

Before entering upon the mode of managing study; or perhaps I ought to use the word reading instead of study (for it would be quite wrong to suppose that the following remarks apply to professed students only); it would be well to see what does really happen in life as regards the intellectual cultivation of most grown-up people.

I ask them, Is it not mainly dependent upon chance? The professional man, wearied with the cares and labours of his office or employment, when he comes home, takes up whatever book may happen to be the reading of his wife, or mother, or daughters: and they, for women are often educated in a way to avoid method and intellectual strength of any kind, are probably contented with what the circulating library affords, and read according to the merest rumour and fashion of the present hour. Again, what is called light literature (how it has obtained or maintained that name is surprising), criticisms, scraps, tales, and the like, is nearly the sole intellectual food of many intelligent persons. Now, without undervaluing this kind of literature, which improved as it would be if addressed to a class of persons who were wont to read with wisdom and method, would be very serviceable to those persons; we cannot say but that to make such literature the staple of the mind is unworthy and frivolous in the extreme.

I believe, however, that many persons are aware how indifferently they are spending their

time in the way they read at present; and I shall not labour any more at this part of the subject, but come at once to what appears to me the remedy for the evil: which is, that every man and every woman who can read at all, should adopt some definite purpose in their reading—should take something for the main stem and trunk of their culture, whence branches might grow out in all directions seeking light and air for the parent tree, which, it is hoped, might end in becoming something useful and ornamental, and which, at any rate, all along will have had life and growth in it. . . .

If we consider what are the objects men pursue, when conscious of any object at all, in reading, they are these: amusement, instruction, a wish to appear well in society, and a desire to pass away time. Now even the lowest of these objects is facilitated by reading with method. The keenness of pursuit thus engendered enriches the most trifling gain, takes away the sense of dulness in details, and gives an interest to what would otherwise be most repugnant. No one who has never known the eager joy of some intellectual pursuit

can understand the full pleasure of reading. . . .

There is another view of reading which though it is obvious enough, is seldom taken, I imagine, or at least acted upon; and that is, that in the course of our reading we should lay up in our minds a store of goodly thoughts in well-wrought words, which should be a living treasure of knowledge always with us, and from which, at various times and amidst all the shifting of circumstances, we might be sure of drawing some comfort, guidance, and sympathy. We see this with regard to the sacred writings. "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" But there is a similar comfort on a lower level to be obtained from other sources than sacred ones. In any work that is worth carefully reading, there is generally something that is worth remembering accurately. A man whose mind is enriched with the best sayings of the poets of his own country is a more independent man, walks the streets in a town, or the lanes in the country, with far more delight than he otherwise would have; and is taught by wise observers of man and nature to examine for himself. Sancho Panza with his proverbs is a great deal better than

he would have been without them: and I contend that a man has something in himself to meet troubles and difficulties, small or great, who has stored in his mind some of the best things which have been said about troubles and difficulties. Moreover, the loneliness of sorrow is thereby diminished. . . .

I have not hitherto spoken of the indirect advantage of methodical reading in the culture of the mind. One of the dangers supposed to be incident upon a life of study is, that purpose and decisiveness are worn away. Not, as I contend, upon a life of study such as it ought to be. For pursued methodically there must be some, and not a little, of the decision, resistance, and tenacity of pursuit which create, or further, greatness of character in action. Though, as I have said, there are times of keen delight to a man who is engaged in any distinct pursuit, there are also moments of weariness, vexation, and vacillation, which will try the metal in him and see whether he is worthy to understand and master anything. For this you may observe, that in all times and all nations, sacrifice is needed. The

savage Indian who was to obtain any insight into the future had to starve for it for a certain time. Even the fancy of this power was not to be gained without paying for it. And was anything real ever gained without sacrifice of some kind?

There is a very refined use which reading might be put to: namely, to counteract the particular evils and temptations of our callings, the original imperfections of our characters, the tendencies of our age or of our own time of life. Those, for instance, who are versed in dull crabbed work all day, of a kind which is always exercising the logical faculty and demanding minute, not to say vexatious, criticism, would, during their leisure, do wisely to expatiate in writings of a large and imaginative nature. These, however, are often the persons who particularly avoid poetry and works of imagination, whereas they ought, perhaps, to cultivate them most. For it should be one of the frequent objects of every man who cares for the culture of his whole being, to give some exercise to those faculties which are not demanded by his daily occupations and not encouraged by his disposition. . . .

At any rate we cannot be wrong, whether we are professed students, or soldiers, or men of the world, or whatever we are, in endeavouring to make the time we give to books a time not spent unprofitably to ourselves and our fellow-creatures; and this will never be the case if we are the victims of chance in what we take up to read; if we vacillate forever in our studies, or if we never look for anything in them, but the ease of the present moment, or the gratification of getting rid of it insensibly.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL

THOMAS CARLYLE

Thomas Carlyle

WE have not *read* an author till we have seen his object, whatever it may be, as *he* saw it. Is it a matter of reasoning, and has he reasoned stupidly and falsely? We should understand the circumstances which, to his mind, made it seem true, or persuaded him to write it, knowing that it was not so. In any other way we do him injustice if we judge him. Is it of poetry? His words are so many symbols, to which we ourselves must furnish the interpretation; or they remain, as in all prosaic minds the words of poetry ever do, a dead letter: indications they are, barren in themselves, but, by following which, we also may reach, or approach, that Hill of Vision where the poet stood, beholding the glorious scene which it is the purport of his poem to show others.

A reposing state, in which the Hill were brought under us, not we obliged to mount it, might indeed for the present be more convenient; but, in

the end, it could not be equally satisfying. Continuance of passive pleasure, it should never be forgotten, is here, as under all conditions of mortal existence, an impossibility. Everywhere in life, the true question is, not what we *gain*, but what we *do*: so also in intellectual matters, in conversation, in reading, which is more precise and careful conversation, it is not what we *receive*, but what we are made to *give*, that chiefly contents and profits us. True, the mass of readers will object; because, like the mass of men, they are too indolent. But if any one affect, not the active and watchful, but the passive and somnolent line of study, are there not writers expressly fashioned for him, enough and to spare? It is but the smaller number of books that become more instructive by a second perusal: the great majority are as perfectly plain as perfect triteness can make them. Yet, if time is precious, no book that will not improve by repeated readings deserves to be read at all. And were there an artist of a right spirit: a man of wisdom, conscious of his high vocation, of whom we could know beforehand that he had not written without purpose and earnest meditation, that

he knew what he had written, and had embodied in it, more or less, the creations of a deep and noble soul, — should we not draw near to him reverently, as disciples to a master; and what task could there be more profitable than to read him as we have described, to study him even to his minutest meanings? For, were not this to think as he had thought, to see with his gifted eyes, to make the very mood and feeling of his great and rich mind the mood also of our poor and little one?

GOETHE'S HELENA

IF, in any vacant vague time, you are in a strait as to choice of reading, a very good indication for you, perhaps the best you could get, is toward some book you have a great curiosity about. You are then in the readiest and best of all possible conditions to improve by that book. It is analogous to what doctors tell us about the physical health and appetites of the patient. You must learn, however, to distinguish between false appetite and true. There is such a thing as a false

appetite, which will lead a man into vagaries with regard to diet; will tempt him to eat spicy things, which he should not eat at all, nor would, but that the things are toothsome, and that he is under a momentary baseness of mind. A man ought to examine and find out what he really and truly has an appetite for, what suits his constitution and condition; and that, doctors tell him, is in general the very thing he ought to have. And so with books. . . .

I do not know whether it has been sufficiently brought home to you that there are two kinds of books. When a man is reading on any kind of subject, in most departments of books, — in all books, if you take it in a wide sense, — he will find that there is a division into good books and bad books. Everywhere a good kind of book and a bad kind of book. I am not to assume that you are unacquainted, or ill-acquainted, with this plain fact; but I may remind you that it is becoming a very important consideration in our day. And we have to cast aside altogether the idea people have, that if they are reading any book, that if an ignorant man is reading any book, he is doing rather

better than nothing at all. I must entirely call that in question; I even venture to deny that. It would be much safer and better for many a reader, that he had no concern with books at all. There is a number, a frightfully increasing number, of books that are decidedly, to the readers of them, not useful. But an ingenious reader will learn, also, that a certain number of books were written by a supremely noble kind of people, — not a very great number of books, but still a number fit to occupy all your reading industry, do adhere more or less to that side of things. In short, as I have written it down somewhere else, I conceive that books are like men's souls: divided into sheep and goats. Some few are going up, and carrying us up, heavenward; calculated, I mean, to be of priceless advantage in teaching, — in forwarding the teaching of all generations. Others, a frightful multitude, are going down, down; doing ever the more and the wider and the wilder mischief.

EDINBURGH INAUGURAL ADDRESS

ISAAC D'ISRAELI

Isaac D'Israeli

MANY ingenious readers complain that their memory is defective, and their studies unfruitful. This defect arises from their indulging the facile pleasures of perceptions, in preference to the laborious habit of forming them into ideas. Perceptions require only the sensibility of taste, and their pleasures are continuous, easy, and exquisite. Ideas are an art of combination, and an exertion of the reasoning powers. Ideas are therefore labours; and for those who will not labour, it is unjust to complain, if they come from the harvest with scarcely a sheaf in their hands. . . .

It is an observation of the elder Pliny . . . that there was no book so bad but which contained something good. To read every book would, however, be fatal to the interest of most readers; but it is not always necessary, in the pursuits of learning, to read every book entire. Of many books it is sufficient to seize the plan, and to examine

some of their portions. Of the little supplement at the close of a volume, few readers conceive the utility; but some of the most eminent writers in Europe have been great adepts in the art of index-reading. I, for my part, venerate the inventor of indexes. . . .

A reader is too often a prisoner attached to the triumphal car of an author of great celebrity; and when he ventures not to judge for himself, conceives, while he is reading the indifferent works of great authors, that the languor which he experiences arises from his own defective taste. But the best writers, when they are voluminous, have a great deal of mediocrity.

On the other side, readers must not imagine that all the pleasures of composition depend on the author; for there is something which a reader himself must bring to the book, that the book may please. There is a literary appetite which the author can no more impart, than the most skilful cook can give an appetency to the guests. When Cardinal Richelieu said to Godeau, that he did not understand his verses, the honest poet replied, that it was not his fault. It would indeed be very

unreasonable, when a painter exhibits his pictures in public, to expect that he should provide spectacles for the use of the short-sighted. Every man must come prepared as well as he can. Simonides confessed himself incapable of deceiving stupid persons; and Balzac remarked of the girls of his village, that they were too silly to be duped by a man of wit. Dulness is impenetrable; and there are hours when the liveliest taste loses its sensibility. The temporary tone of the mind may be unfavourable to taste a work properly, and we have had many erroneous criticisms from great men, which may often be attributed to this circumstance. The mind communicates its infirm dispositions to the book, and an author has not only his own defects to account for, but also those of his reader. There is something in composition, like the game of shuttlecock, where, if the reader does not quickly rebound the feathered cork to the author, the game is destroyed, and the whole spirit of the work falls extinct. . . .

A frequent impediment in reading is a disinclination in the mind to settle on the subject; agitated by incongruous and dissimilar ideas, it is

with pain that we admit those of the author. But on applying ourselves with a gentle violence to the perusal of an interesting work, the mind soon assimilates to the subject; the ancient Rabbins advised their young students to apply themselves to their readings, whether they felt an inclination or not, because, as they proceeded, they would find their disposition restored and their curiosity awakened.

Readers may be classed into an infinite number of divisions; but an author is a solitary being, who, for the same reason he pleases one, must consequently displease another. To have too exalted a genius is more prejudicial to his celebrity than to have a moderate one; for we shall find that the most popular works are not the most profound, but such as instruct those who require instruction, and charm those who are not learned to taste their novelty. . . .

Authors are vain, but readers are capricious. Some will only read old books, as if there were no valuable truths to be discovered in modern publications; while others will only read new books, as if some valuable truths are not among

the old. Some will not read a book because they are acquainted with the author: by which the reader may be more injured than the author; others not only read the book, but would also read the man: by which the most ingenious author may be injured by the most impertinent reader.

LITERARY MISCELLANIES

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Ralph Waldo Emerson

THERE are books; and it is practicable to read them, because they are so few. We look over with a sigh the monumental libraries of Paris, of the Vatican, and the British Museum. In 1858, the number of printed books in the Imperial Library at Paris was estimated at eight hundred thousand volumes, with an annual increase of twelve thousand volumes; so that the number of printed books extant to-day may easily exceed a million. It is easy to count the number of pages which a diligent man can read in a day, and the number of years which human life in favourable circumstances allows to reading; and to demonstrate that though he should read from dawn till dark, for sixty years, he must die in the first alcoves. But nothing can be more deceptive than this arithmetic, where none but a natural method is really pertinent. I visit occasionally the Cambridge Library, and I can seldom go there without renew-

ing the conviction that the best of it all is already within the four walls of my study at home. The inspection of the catalogue brings me continually back to the few standard writers who are on every private shelf; and to these it can afford only the most slight and casual additions. The crowds and centuries of books are only commentary and elucidation, echoes and weakeners of these few great voices of time.

The best rule of reading will be a method from nature, and not a mechanical one of hours and pages. It holds each student to a pursuit of his native aim, instead of a desultory miscellany. Let him read what is proper to him, and not waste his memory on a crowd of mediocrities. As whole nations have derived their culture from a single book, — as the Bible has been the literature as well as the religion of large portions of Europe; as Hafiz was the eminent genius of the Persians, Confucius of the Chinese, Cervantes of the Spaniards; so, perhaps, the human mind would be a gainer if all the secondary writers were lost, — say, in England, all but Shakespeare, Milton, and Bacon, — through the profounder study so drawn

to those wonderful minds. With this pilot of his own genius, let the student read one, or let him read many, he will read advantageously. Dr. Johnson said: "Whilst you stand deliberating which book your son shall read first, another boy has read both: read anything five hours a day, and you will soon be learned."

Nature is much our friend in this matter. Nature is always clarifying her water and her wine. No filtration can be so perfect. She does the same thing by books as by her gases and plants. There is always a selection in writers, and then a selection from the selection. In the first place, all books that get fairly into the vital air of the world were written by the successful class, by the affirming and advancing class, who utter what tens of thousands feel though they cannot say. There has already been a scrutiny and choice from many hundreds of young pens before the pamphlet or political chapter which you read in a fugitive journal comes to your eye. All these are young adventurers, who produce their performance to the wise ear of Time, who sits and weighs, and, ten years hence, out of a million of pages reprints

one. Again it is judged, it is winnowed by all the winds of opinion, and what terrific selection has not passed on it before it can be reprinted after twenty years; — and reprinted after a century! — it is as if Minos and Rhadamanthus had indorsed the writing. 'Tis therefore an economy of time to read old and famed books. Nothing can be preserved which is not good; and I know beforehand that Pindar, Martial, Terence, Galen, Kepler, Galileo, Bacon, Erasmus, More, will be superior to the average intellect. In contemporaries, it is not so easy to distinguish betwixt notoriety and fame.

Be sure then to read no mean books. Shun the spawn of the press on the gossip of the hour. Do not read what you shall learn, without asking, in the street and the train. Dr. Johnson said "he always went into stately shops"; and good travellers stop at the best hotels; for though they cost more, they do not cost much more, and there is the good company and the best information. In like manner the scholar knows that the famed books contain, first and last, the best thoughts and facts. Now and then, by rarest luck, in some

foolish Grub Street is the gem we want. But in the best circles is the best information. If you should transfer the amount of your reading day by day from the newspaper to the standard authors —— But who dare speak of such a thing?

The three practical rules, then, which I have to offer, are, — 1. Never read any book that is not a year old. 2. Never read any but famed books. 3. Never read any but what you like; or, in Shakespeare's phrase, —

"No profit goes where is no pleasure ta'en:
In brief, sir, study what you most affect."

SOCIETY AND SOLITUDE

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Arthur Schopenhauer

IT is in literature as in life: wherever you turn, you stumble at once upon the incorrigible mob of humanity, swarming in all directions, crowding and soiling everything, like flies in summer. Hence the number, which no man can count, of bad books, those rank weeds of literature, which draw nourishment from the corn and choke it. The time, money, and attention of the public, which rightfully belong to good books and their noble aims, they take for themselves: they are written for the mere purpose of making money or procuring places. So they are not only useless, — they do positive mischief. . . .

Hence, in regard to reading, it is a very important thing to be able to refrain. Skill in doing so consists in not taking into one's hands any book merely because at the time it happens to be extensively read; such as political or religious pamphlets, novels, poetry, and the like, which make

a noise, and may even attain to several editions in the first and last year of their existence. Consider, rather, that the man who writes for fools is always sure of a large audience; be careful to limit your time for reading, and devote it exclusively to the works of those great minds of all times and countries, who o'ertop the rest of humanity, those whom the voice of fame points to as such. These alone really educate and instruct. You can never read bad literature too little, nor good literature too much. Bad books are intellectual poison; they destroy the mind. Because people always read what is new instead of the best of all ages, writers remain in the narrow circle of the ideas which happen to prevail in their time; and so the period sinks deeper and deeper into its own mire.

When we read, another person thinks for us: we merely repeat his mental process. In learning to write, the pupil goes over with his pen what the teacher has outlined in pencil: so in reading; the greater part of the work of thought is already done for us. This is why it relieves us to take up a book after being occupied with our own thoughts.

And in reading, the mind is, in fact, only the playground of another's thoughts. So it comes about that if anyone spends almost the whole day in reading, and by way of relaxation devotes the intervals to some thoughtless pastime, he gradually loses the capacity for thinking; just as the man who always rides, at last forgets how to walk. This is the case with many learned persons; they have read themselves stupid. For to occupy every spare moment in reading, and to do nothing but read, is even more paralyzing to the mind than constant manual labour, which at least allows those engaged in it to follow their own thoughts. A spring never free from the pressure of some foreign body at last loses its elasticity: and so does the mind if other people's thoughts are constantly forced upon it. Just as you can ruin the stomach and impair the whole body by taking too much nourishment, so you can overfill and choke the mind by feeding it too much. The more you read, the fewer are the traces left by what you have read; the mind becomes like a tablet crossed over and over with writing. There is no time for ruminating, and in no other way can you assimi-

late what you have read. If you read on and on without setting your own thoughts to work, what you have read cannot strike root, and is generally lost. It is, in fact, just the same with mental as with bodily food: hardly the fifth part of what one takes is assimilated. The rest passes off in evaporation, respiration, and the like.

The result of all this is that thoughts put on paper are nothing more than footsteps in the sand; you see the way the man has gone, but to know what he saw on his walk, you want his eyes.

RELIGION AND OTHER ESSAYS
(Translated by T. Bailey Saunders)

JOHN RUSKIN

John Ruskin

ALL books are divisible into two classes,—the books of the hour, and the books of all time. Mark this distinction; it is not one of quality only. It is not merely the bad book that does not last, and the good one that does; it is a distinction of species. There are good books for the hour, and good ones for all time; bad books for the hour, and bad ones for all time. I must define the two kinds before I go farther.

The good book of the hour, then,—I do not speak of the bad ones,—is simply the useful or pleasant talk of some person whom you cannot otherwise converse with, printed for you. Very useful often, telling you what you need to know; very pleasant often, as a sensible friend's present talk would be. These bright accounts of travels; good-humoured and witty discussions of question; lively or pathetic story-telling in the form of novel; firm fact-telling, by the real agents con-

cerned in the events of passing history;—all these books of the hour, multiplying among us as education becomes more general, are a peculiar possession of the present age. We ought to be entirely thankful for them, and entirely ashamed of ourselves if we make no good use of them. But we make the worst possible use if we allow them to usurp the place of true books; for strictly speaking, they are not books at all, but merely letters or newspapers in good print. Our friend's letter may be delightful or necessary to-day,—whether worth keeping or not, is to be considered. The newspaper may be entirely proper at breakfast-time, but assuredly it is not reading for all day; so, though bound up in a volume, the long letter which gives you so pleasant an account of the inns and roads and weather last year at such a place, or which tells you that amusing story, or gives you the real circumstances of such and such events, however valuable for occasional reference, may not be in the real sense of the word, a "book" at all, nor, in the real sense, to be "read." A book is essentially not a talked thing, but a written thing, and written not with a view of

mere communication, but of permanence. The book of talk is printed only because its author cannot speak to thousands of people at once; if he could he would,—the volume is mere *multiplication* of his voice. You cannot talk to your friend in India; if you could, you would. You write instead; that is mere *conveyance* of voice. But a book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to perpetuate it. The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one has yet said it; so far as he knows, no one else can say it. He is bound to say it clearly and melodiously if he may; clearly, at all events. In the sum of his life he finds this to be the thing or group of things manifest to him,—this, the piece of true knowledge or sight which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down forever, engrave it on rock if he could, saying, "This is the best of me; for the rest, I ate and drank and slept, loved and hated, like another. My life was as the vapour, and is not; but this I saw and knew, —this, if anything of mine, is worth your mem-

ory." This is his "writing"; it is in his small human way, and with whatever degree of true inspiration is in him, his inscription or scripture. That is a "Book." . . .

Now, books of this kind have been written in all ages by their greatest men,—by great readers, great statesmen, and great thinkers. These are all at your choice; and Life is short. You have heard as much before; yet have you measured and mapped out this short life and its possibilities? Do you know, if you read this, that you cannot read that; that what you lose to-day you cannot gain to-morrow? Will you go and gossip with your housemaid or your stable-boy, when you may talk with queens and kings; or flatter yourselves that it is with any worthy consciousness of your own claims to respect that you jostle with the hungry and common crowd for *entrée* here, and audience there, when all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society, wide as the world, multitudinous as its days,—the chosen and the mighty of every place and time? Into that you may enter always; in that you may take fellowship and rank according to

your wish; from that, once entered into it, you can never be an outcast but by your own fault; by your aristocracy of companionship there, your own inherent aristocracy will be assuredly tested, and the motives with which you strive to take high place in the society of the living, measured, as to all the truth and sincerity that are in them, by the place you desire to take in this company of the dead.

"The place you desire," and the place *you fit yourself for*, I must also say, because, observe, this court of the past differs from all living aristocracy in this,—it is open to labour and to merit, but to nothing else. No wealth will bribe, no name overawe, no artifice deceive, the guardian of those Elysian gates. In the deep sense, no vile or vulgar person ever enters there. At the portières of that silent Faubourg St. Germain, there is but brief question: "Do you deserve to enter? Pass. Do you ask to be the companion of nobles? Make yourself noble, and you shall be. Do you long for the conversation of the wise? Learn to understand it, and you shall hear it. But on other terms?—No. If you will not rise to us, we cannot stoop to you. The

living lord may assume courtesy, the living philosopher explain his thought to you with considerate pain; but here we neither feign nor interpret. You must rise to the level of our thoughts if you would be gladdened by them, and share our feelings if you would recognize our presence."

This, then, is what you have to do, and I admit that it is much. You must, in a word, love these people, if you are to be among them. No ambition is of any use. They scorn your ambition. You must love them, and show your love . . . by a true desire to be taught by them, and to enter into their thoughts. To enter into theirs, observe, not to find your own expressed by them. If the person who wrote the book is not wiser than you, you need not read it; if he be, he will think differently from you in many respects.

Very ready we are to say of a book, "How good this is,—that's exactly what I think!" But the right feeling is, "How strange that is! I never thought of that before, and yet I see it is true; or if I do not now, I hope I shall some day." But whether thus submissively or not, at least be sure that you go to the author to get at *his* meaning, not to find

yours. Judge it afterward if you think yourself qualified to do so; but ascertain it first. And be sure also, if the author is worth anything, that you will not get at his meaning all at once, — nay, that at his whole meaning you will not for a long time arrive in any wise. Not that he does not say what he means, and in strong words too; but he cannot say it all, and what is more strange, *will* not, but in a hidden way and in parable, in order that he may be sure you want it. I cannot quite see the reason of this, nor analyze that cruel reticence in the breasts of wise men which makes them always hide their deeper thought. They do not give it you by way of help, but of reward, and will make themselves sure that you deserve it before they allow you to reach it. But it is the same with the physical type of wisdom, gold. There seems, to you and me, no reason why the electric forces of the earth should not carry whatever there is of gold within it at once to the mountain-tops; so that kings and people might know that all the gold they could get was there, and without any trouble of digging, or anxiety, or chance, or waste of time, cut it away, and coin as much as

they needed. But Nature does not manage it so. She puts it in little fissures in the earth, nobody knows where; you may dig long and find none; you must dig painfully to find any.

And it is just the same with men's best wisdom. When you come to a good book, you must ask yourself, "Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would? Are my pickaxes and shovels in good order, and am I in good trim, myself, my sleeves well up to the elbow, and my breath good, and my temper?" And keeping the figure a little longer, even at a cost of tiresomeness, for it is a thoroughly useful one, the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are as the rock which you have to crush and smelt in order to get at it. And your pickaxes are your own care, wit, and learning; your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without those tools and that fire; often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling and patientest fusing, before you can gather one grain of the metal.

SESAME AND LILIES

JOHN RUSKIN

IT is of the greatest importance to you, not only for art's sake, but for all kinds of sake, in these days of book deluge, to keep out of the salt swamps of literature, and live on a little rocky island of your own, with a spring and a lake in it, pure and good. I cannot, of course, suggest the choice of your library to you, for every several mind needs different books; but there are some books which we all need, and assuredly, if you read Homer, Plato, Æschylus, Herodotus, Dante, Shakespeare, and Spenser as much as you ought, you will not require wide enlargement of shelves to right and left of them for purposes of perpetual study. . . . Avoid especially that class of literature which has a knowing tone; it is the most poisonous of all. Every good book, or piece of book, is full of admiration and awe; it may contain firm assertion, or stern satire, but it never sneers coldly, nor asserts haughtily, and it always leads you to reverence or love something with your whole heart. It is not always easy to distinguish the satire of the venomous race of books from the satire of the noble and pure ones; but in

general you may notice that the cold-blooded Crustacean and Batrachian books will sneer at sentiment; and the warm-blooded, human books, at sin. . . . A common book will often give you much amusement, but it is only a noble book which will give you dear friends. Remember also that it is of less importance to you in your earlier years, that the books you read should be clever than that they should be right. I do not mean oppressively or repulsively instructive; but that the thoughts they express should be just, and the feelings they excite generous. It is not necessary for you to read the wittiest or the most suggestive books; it is better, in general, to hear what is already known, and may be simply said. Much of the literature of the present day, though good to be read by persons of ripe age, has a tendency to agitate rather than confirm, and leaves its readers too frequently in a helpless or hopeless indignation, the worst possible state into which the mind of youth can be thrown. It may, indeed, become necessary for you, as you advance in life, to set your hand to things that need to be altered in the world, or apply your heart chiefly to what must

be pitied in it, or condemned; but, for a young person, the safest temper is one of reverence, and the safest place one of obscurity. Certainly at present, and perhaps through all your life, your teachers are wisest when they make you content in quiet virtue, and that literature and art are best for you which point out, in common life and familiar things, the objects for hopeful labour, and for humble love.

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAWING

JULIUS CHARLES HARE

Julius Charles Hare

THE difference between desultory reading and a course of study may be illustrated by comparing the former to a number of mirrors set in a straight line, so that every one of them reflects a different object, the latter to the same mirrors so skilfully arranged as to perpetuate one set of objects in an endless series of reflections.

If we read two books on the same subject, the second leads us to review the statements and arguments of the first; the errors of which are little likely to escape this kind of *proving*, if I may so call it; while the truths are more strongly imprinted on the memory, not merely by repetition, — though that too is of use,— but by the deeper conviction thus wrought into the mind, of their being verily and indeed truths. . . .

Desultory reading is indeed very mischievous, by fostering habits of loose, discontinuous thought, by turning the memory into a common

sewer for rubbish of all sorts to float through, and by relaxing the power of attention, which of all our faculties most needs care, and is most improved by it. But a well-regulated course of study will no more weaken the mind than hard exercise will weaken the body; nor will a strong understanding be weighed down by its knowledge, any more than an oak is by its leaves, or than Samson was by his locks. He whose sinews are drained by his hair, must already be a weakling. . . .

Suppose a person to have studied Xenophon and Thucydides, till he has attained to the same thorough comprehension of them both; and this is so far from being an unwarrantable supposition, that the very difficulties of Thucydides tempt and stimulate an intelligent reader to form a more intimate acquaintance with him: which of the two will have strengthened the student's mind the most? from which will he have derived the richest and most lasting treasures of thought? Who, that has made friends with Dante, has not had his intellect nerved and expanded by following the pilgrim through his triple world? and would Tasso have done as much for him? The labour itself

which must be spent in order to understand Sophocles or Shakespeare, to search out their hidden beauties, to trace their labyrinthine movements, to dive into their bright, jewelled caverns, and converse with the sea-nymphs that dwell there, is its own abundant reward; not merely from the enjoyment that accompanies it, but because such pleasure, indeed all pleasure that is congenial to our better nature, is refreshing and invigorating, like a draught of nectar from heaven. In such studies we imitate the example of the eagle, unsealing his eyesight by gazing at the sun. . . .

For my own part, I have ever gained the most profit, and the most pleasure also, from the books which have made me think the most; and, when the difficulties have once been overcome, these are the books which have struck the deepest root, not only in my memory and understanding, but likewise in my affections. . . . Above all, in the present age of light reading, that is, of reading hastily, thoughtlessly, indiscriminately, unfruitfully, when most books are forgotten as soon as they are finished, and very many sooner, it is well if something heavier is cast now and then into the

midst of the literary public. This may scare and repel the weak; it will rouse and attract the stronger, and increase their strength by making them exert it. In the sweat of the brow is the mind as well as the body to eat its bread. *Nil sine magno Musa labore dedit mortalibus.*

GUESSES AT TRUTH

JOHN MORLEY

John Morley

NO sensible person can suppose for a single moment that everybody is born with the ability for using books, for reading and studying literature. Certainly not everybody is born with the capacity of being a great scholar. All people are no more born great scholars like Gibbon and Bentley, than they are all born great musicians like Handel and Beethoven. What is much worse than that, many come into the world with the incapacity of reading, just as they come into it with the incapacity of distinguishing one tune from another. To them I have nothing to say. Even the morning paper is too much for them. They can only skim the surface even of that. I go further, and frankly admit that the habit and power of reading with reflection, comprehension, and memory all alert and awake, does not come at once to the natural man any more than many other sovereign virtues come to that interesting creature. What I do venture to

press upon you is, that it requires no preterhuman force of will in any young man or woman—unless household circumstances are more than usually vexatious and unfavourable—to get at least half an hour out of a solid busy day for good and disinterested reading. Some will say that this is too much to expect, and the first persons to say it, I venture to predict, will be those who waste their time most. At any rate, if I cannot get half an hour, I will be content with a quarter. Now, in half an hour I fancy you can read fifteen or twenty pages of Burke; or you can read one of Wordsworth's masterpieces—say the lines on Tintern; or say, one-third—if a scholar, in the original, and if not, in a translation—of a book of the Iliad or the Æneid. I do not think that I am filling the half-hour too full. But try for yourselves what you can read in half an hour. Then multiply the half-hour by 365, and consider what treasures you might have laid by at the end of the year; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you during all the days of your life.

I will not take up your time by explaining the various mechanical contrivances and aids to suc-

cessful study. They are not to be despised by those who would extract the most from books. Many people think of knowledge as of money. They would like knowledge, but cannot face the perseverance and self-denial that go to the acquisition of it. The wise student will do most of his reading with a pen or a pencil in his hand. He will not shrink from the useful toil of making abstracts and summaries of what he is reading. Sir William Hamilton was a strong advocate for underscoring books of study. . . . Again, some great men—Gibbon was one, and Daniel Webster was another, and the great Lord Strafford was a third—always before reading a book made a short, rough analysis of the questions which they expected to be answered in it, the additions to be made to their knowledge, and whither it would take them. I have sometimes tried that way of steadying and guiding attention; and I commend it to you. I need not tell you that you will find that most books worth reading once are worth reading twice, and—what is most important of all—the masterpieces of literature are worth reading a thousand times. It is a great mistake to think that because

you have read a masterpiece once or twice, or ten times, therefore you have done with it. Because it is a masterpiece, you ought to live with it, and make it part of your daily life. Another practice is that of keeping a common-place book, and transcribing into it what is striking and interesting and suggestive. And if you keep it wisely, as Locke has taught us, you will put every entry under a head, division, or subdivision. This is an excellent practice for concentrating your thought on the passage and making you alive to its real point and significance. . . .

Various correspondents have asked me to say something about those lists of a hundred books that have been circulating through the world within the last few months. I have examined some of these lists with considerable care, and whatever else may be said of them—and I speak of them with deference and reserve, because men for whom one must have a great regard have compiled them—they do not seem to me to be calculated either to create or satisfy a wise taste for literature in any very worthy sense. To fill a man with a hundred parcels of heterogeneous scraps, from

the *Mahabharata*, and the *Sheking*, down to *Pickwick* and White's *Selborne*, may pass the time, but I cannot conceive how it would strengthen or instruct or delight. For instance, it is a mistake to think that every book that has a great name in the history of books or of thought is worth reading. Some of the most famous books are least worth reading. Their fame was due to their doing something that needed in their day to be done. The work done, the virtue of the book expires. Again, I agree with those who say that the steady working down one of these lists would end in the manufacture of that obnoxious product—the prig. A prig has been defined as an animal that is overfed for its size. I think that these bewildering miscellanies would lead to an immense quantity of that kind of overfeeding. The object of reading is not to dip into everything that even wise men have ever written. In the words of one of the most winning writers of English that ever existed—Cardinal Newman—the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties,

application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address, and expression. These are the objects of that intellectual perfection which a literary education is destined to give. . . .

Let me pass to another topic. We are often asked whether it is best to study subjects, or authors, or books. Well, I think that is like most of the stock questions with which the perverse ingenuity of mankind torments itself. There is no universal and exclusive answer. My own answer is a very plain one. It is sometimes best to study books, sometimes authors, and sometimes subjects; but at all times it is best to study authors, subjects, and books in connection with one another. Whether you make your first approach from interest in an author or in a book, the fruit will be only half gathered if you leave off without new ideas and clearer lights both on the man and the matter. . . .

This points to the right answer to another question that is constantly asked. We are constantly asked whether desultory reading is among things lawful and permitted. May we browse at large in a library, as Johnson said, or is it forbid-

den to open a book without a definite aim and fixed expectations? I am for a compromise. If a man has once got his general point of view, if he has striven with success to place himself at the centre, what follows is of less consequence. If he has got in his head a good map of the country, he may ramble at large with impunity. If he has once well and truly laid the foundations of a methodical, systematic habit of mind, what he reads will find its way to its proper place. If his intellect is in good order, he will find in every quarter something to assimilate and something that will nourish.

STUDIES IN LITERATURE

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

James Russell Lowell

SOUTHEY tells us that, in his walk one stormy day, he met an old woman, to whom, by way of greeting, he made the rather obvious remark that it was dreadful weather. She answered, philosophically, that, in her opinion, "*any* weather was better than none!" I should be half inclined to say that any reading was better than none, allaying the crudeness of the statement by the Yankee proverb, which tells us that, though "all deacons are good, there's odds in deacons." Among books, certainly, there is much variety of company, ranging from the best to the worst, from Plato to Zola, and the first lesson in reading well is that which teaches us to distinguish between literature and merely printed matter. The choice lies wholly with ourselves. We have the key put into our hands; shall we unlock the pantry or the oratory? There is a Wallachian legend which, like most of the figments of popular fancy, has a moral in it. One

Bakála, a good-for-nothing kind of fellow in his way, having had the luck to offer a sacrifice especially well pleasing to God, is taken up into heaven. He finds the Almighty sitting in something like the best room of a Wallachian peasant's cottage—there is always a profound pathos in the homeliness of the popular imagination, forced, like the princess in the fairy tale, to weave its semblance of gold tissue out of straw. On being asked what reward he desires for the good service he has done, Bakála, who had always passionately longed to be the owner of a bagpipe, seeing a half worn-out one lying among some rubbish in a corner of the room, begs eagerly that it may be bestowed on him. The Lord, with a smile of pity at the meanness of his choice, grants him his boon, and Bakála goes back to earth delighted with his prize. With an infinite possibility within his reach, with the choice of wisdom, of power, of beauty at his tongue's end, he asked according to his kind, and his sordid wish is answered with a gift as sordid. Yes, there is a choice in books as in friends, and the mind sinks or rises to the level of its habitual society, is subdued, as Shakespeare

says of the dyer's hand, to what it works in. Cato's advice, *cum bonis ambula*, consort with the good, is quite as true if we extend it to books, for they, too, insensibly give away their own nature to the mind that converses with them. They either beckon upwards or drag down. *Du gleichst dem Geist den du begreifst*, says the World Spirit to Faust, and this is true of the ascending no less than of the descending scale. Every book we read may be made a round in the ever-lengthening ladder by which we climb to knowledge and to that temperance and serenity of mind which, as it is the ripest fruit of Wisdom, is also the sweetest. But this can only be if we read such books as make us think, and read them in such a way as helps them to do so, that is, by endeavouring to judge them, and thus to make them an exercise rather than a relaxation of the mind. Desultory reading, except as conscious pastime, hebetates the brain and slackens the bow-string of Will. It communicates as little intelligence as the messages that run along the telegraph wire to the birds that perch on it. . . . A man is known, says the proverb, by the company he keeps, and not only so,

but made by it. Milton makes his fallen angels grow small to enter the infernal council room, but the soul, which God meant to be the spacious chamber where high thoughts and generous aspirations might commune together, shrinks and narrows itself to the measure of the meaner company that is wont to gather there, hatching conspiracies against our better selves. We are apt to wonder at the scholarship of the men of three centuries ago and at a certain dignity of phrase that characterizes them. They were scholars because they did not read so many things as we. They had fewer books, but these were of the best. Their speech was noble, because they lunched with Plutarch and supped with Plato. We spend as much time over print as they did, but instead of communing with the choice thoughts of choice spirits, and unconsciously acquiring the grand manner of that supreme society, we diligently inform ourselves, and cover the continent with a cobweb of telegraphs to inform us, of such inspiring facts as that a horse belonging to Mr. Smith ran away on Wednesday, seriously damaging a valuable carryall; that a son of Mr. Brown swallowed a hickory

nut on Thursday; and that a gravel bank caved in and buried Mr. Robinson alive on Friday. . . . This is the kind of news we compass the globe to catch, fresh from Bungtown Centre, when we might have it fresh from heaven by the electric lines of poet or prophet! . . .

One is sometimes asked by young people to recommend a course of reading. My advice would be that they should confine themselves to the supreme books in whatever literature, or still better to choose some one great author, and make themselves thoroughly familiar with him. For, as all roads lead to Rome, so do they likewise lead away from it, and you will find that, in order to understand perfectly and weigh exactly any vital piece of literature, you will be gradually and pleasantly persuaded to excursions and explorations of which you little dreamed when you began, and will find yourselves scholars before you are aware. For remember that there is nothing less profitable than scholarship for the mere sake of scholarship, nor anything more wearisome in the attainment. But the moment you have a definite aim, attention is quickened, the mother of memory, all that you

acquire groups and arranges itself in an order that is lucid, because everywhere and always it is in intelligent relation to a central object of constant and growing interest. This method also forces upon us the necessity of thinking, which is, after all, the highest result of all education. For what we want is not learning, but knowledge; that is, the power to make learning answer its true end as a quickener of intelligence and a widener of our intellectual sympathies. I do not mean to say that every one is fitted by nature or inclination for a definite course of study, or indeed for serious study in any sense. I am quite willing that these should "browse in a library," as Dr. Johnson called it, to their hearts' content. It is, perhaps, the only way in which time may be profitably wasted. But desultory reading will not make a "full man," as Bacon understood it, of one who has not Johnson's memory, his power of assimilation, and, above all, his comprehensive view of the relations of things.

DEMOCRACY AND OTHER ADDRESSES

FREDERIC HARRISON

Frederic Harrison

A MAN of power, who has got more from books than most of his contemporaries, once said: "Form a habit of reading, do not mind what you read; the reading of better books will come when you have a habit of reading the inferior." We need not accept this *obiter dictum* of Lord Sherbrooke. A habit of reading idly debilitates and corrupts the mind for all wholesome reading; the habit of reading wisely is one of the most difficult habits to acquire, needing strong resolution and infinite pains; and reading for mere reading's sake, instead of for the sake of the good we gain from reading, is one of the worst and commonest and most unwholesome habits we have. . . .

I have no intention to moralize, or to indulge in a homily against the reading of what is deliberately evil. There is not so much need for this now, and I am not discoursing on the whole duty of man. I take that part of our reading which by it-

self is no doubt harmless, entertaining, and even gently instructive. But of this enormous mass of literature how much deserves to be chosen out, to be preferred to all the great books of the world, to be set apart for those precious hours which are all that the most of us can give to solid reading? The vast proportion of books are books that we shall never be able to read. A serious percentage of books are not worth reading at all. The really vital books for us we also know to be a very trifling portion of the whole. And yet we act as if every book were as good as any other, as if it were merely a question of order which we take up first, as if any book were good enough for us, and as if all were alike honourable, precious, and satisfying. . . . Books are not wiser than men, the true books are not easier to find than the true men, the bad books or the vulgar books are not less obtrusive and not less ubiquitous than the bad or vulgar men are everywhere; the art of right reading is as long and difficult to learn as the art of right living. Those who are on good terms with the first author they meet, run as much risk as men who surrender their time to the first passer in the

street; for to be open to every book is for the most part to gain as little as possible from any. A man aimlessly wandering about in a crowded city is of all men the most lonely; so he who takes up only the books that he "comes across" is pretty certain to meet but few that are worth knowing. . . . A great deal of our modern literature is such that it is exceedingly difficult to resist it, and it is undeniable that it gives us real information. It seems perhaps unreasonable to many to assert that a decent readable book which gives us actual instruction can be otherwise than a useful companion and a solid gain. . . . But the question which weighs upon me with such really crushing urgency is this: What are the books that in our little remnant of reading time it is most vital for us to know? For the true use of books is of such sacred value to us that to be simply entertained is to cease to be taught, elevated, inspired by books; merely to gather information of a chance kind is to close the mind to knowledge of the urgent kind. Every book that we take up without a purpose is an opportunity lost of taking up a book with a purpose — every bit of stray information which we

cram into our heads without any sense of its importance, is for the most part a bit of the most useful information driven out of our heads and choked off from our minds. . . .

A healthy mode of reading would follow the lines of a sound education. And the first canon of a sound education is to make it the instrument to perfect the whole nature and character. Its aims are comprehensive, not special; they regard life as a whole, not mental curiosity; they have to give us, not so much materials, as capacities. So that, however moderate and limited the opportunity for education, in its way it should be always more or less symmetrical and balanced, appealing equally in turn to the three grand intellectual elements—imagination, memory, reflection: and so having something to give us in poetry, in history, in science, and in philosophy. . . . A wise education, and so judicious reading, should leave no great type of thought, no dominant phase of human nature, wholly a blank. Whether our reading be great or small, so far as it goes it should be general. If our lives admit of but a short space for reading, all the more reason that,

so far as may be, it should remind us of the vast expanse of human thought, and the wonderful variety of human nature. . . . Be it imagination, memory, or reflection that we address—that is, in poetry, history, science, or philosophy, our first duty is to aim at knowing something at least of the best, at getting some definite idea of the mighty realm whose outer rim we are permitted to approach. . . .

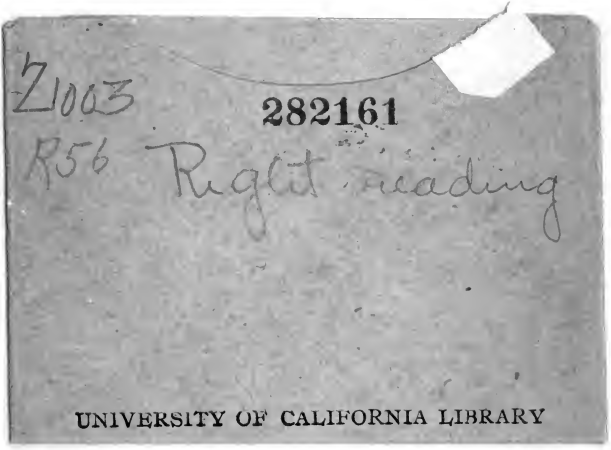
I will say nothing of that side of reading which is really hard study, an effort of duty, matter of meditation and reverential thought. . . . For I am speaking now of the use of books in our leisure hours. I will take the books of simple enjoyment, books that one can laugh over and weep over; and learn from, and laugh or weep again; which have in them humour, truth, human nature in all its sides, pictures of the great phases of human history; and withal sound teaching in honesty, manliness, gentleness, patience. Of such books, I say, books accepted by the voice of all mankind as matchless and immortal, there is a complete library at hand for every man, in his every mood, whatever his tastes or his acquirements. . . . But

who can say that these books are read as they might be, that we do not neglect them for something in a new cover, or which catches our eye in a library? It is not merely to the idle and unreading world that this complaint holds good. It is the insatiable readers themselves who so often read to the least profit. Of course they have read all these household books many years ago, read them, and judged them, and put them away for ever. They will read infinite dissertations about these authors; they will write you essays on their works; they will talk most learned criticism about them. But it never occurs to them that such books have a daily and perpetual value, such as the devout Christian finds in his morning and evening psalm; that the music of them has to sink into the soul by continual renewal; that we have to live with them and in them, till their ideal world habitually surrounds us in the midst of the real world; that their great thoughts have to stir us daily anew, and their generous passion has to warm us hour by hour; just as we need each day to have our eyes filled by the light of heaven, and our blood warmed by the glow of the sun. I vow that, when

FREDERIC HARRISON

I see men, forgetful of the perennial poetry of the world, muckraking in a litter of fugitive refuse, I think of that wonderful scene in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, where the Interpreter shows the wayfarers the old man raking in the straw and dust, whilst he will not see the Angel who offers him a crown of gold and precious stones.

THE CHOICE OF BOOKS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