

be known by all: "First, never read any book that is not a year old. Second, never any but famed books. Third, never any but what you like. Here is a great man taking it for granted that what we like is sure to be not only famous but old,—rather an unwarrantable assumption in these days when most people like only the newest and the most infamous. Emerson very evidently lets such people alone. But his rules are sensible indeed. They will at all events rescue us from that most pernicious vice of trying to read too much—a deadly habit, the ultimate outcome of which is an inability really to read anything at all. It is hardly necessary to insist upon the absolute necessity of reading some books, or at least some portions of some books, absolutely accurately and minutely, weighing carefully every word and syllable and letter. Neither need we discuss the importance of reading all round a good book, as it were, of gaining some estimate of the character and temper of its author, of understanding something of the age in which he lived and of his relation to that age.

After all is said and done, the one and only secret of successful reading lies contained in one simple sentence, *Make what you read your own.* Not until what we read has become a part of our mental equipment, until it has been literally assimilated by the mind, made an integral and indivisible portion of our sum of knowledge and wisdom, is what we read of any practicable avail. Too much system is like too elaborate fishing-tackle; it is all very well for the experienced angler, but it seems useless and an affectation in the amateur. First prove your skill and keenness, then elaborate your means at will. However, for a certain sort and a certain amount of system there is this much to be said—namely, that it is an ex-

cellent antidote to that insinuating and enervating habit of wholly desultory reading. "Wholly," because, as Lord Iddesleigh has shown us, there is a desultory reading which is very profitable and not one whit pernicious.

Then again, that assertion of Bacon remains forever true, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." Of books to be chewed and digested there should be at least three readings: the first to get a general bird's-eye view of the author's field of thought and the method in which he traverses it; the second to survey carefully all the ground he covers, examining all the nooks and crannies omitted in the first survey; the third to fix in the memory, with the help of transcriptions and tabulated statements if necessary, all his details, and to criticise the conclusions at which he arrives. To master a book, perhaps the best possible way is to write an essay in refutation of it. One may be bound few things will escape us then. The next best way may perhaps be to edit and annotate it for students. The worst way, I should think, would be to review it for a newspaper.

Eschew commentators till you have first read your text; or, better still, be your own commentator. When we have read "Hamlet," we can take up Furness. Different readings and emendations may reveal the skill of the author; but first admire the painting, then look for the marks of the brush. The thoughtful book is not for the thoughtless mind. Is a Thomas Carlyle to wrestle five years at lonely Craigenputtock with the problems of life and being that "Sartor Resartus" may be skimmed in five hours? 'Tis not every one can chew, nor every one that can digest, the tough tit-bits of Teufelsdröckh. Books there are