

what it may, is this: "What books shall I read?" For him who has inclination to read there is no dearth of reading matter—there is an embarrassment of riches. Shall you read without discrimination whatever comes most readily to hand? I shall not attempt to answer that question, unless you can detect the answer in this further question: Are you ready to accept as a friend and companion every chance acquaintance whom you meet on the street? Of course not.

In the study of literature one should begin with an author and with a subject not too difficult to understand. A beginner will be likely to find little comfort in Chaucer, or Spenser, or even in Shakespeare; but after he has worked up to them he may study them with unbounded delight.

For the ready understanding and correct appreciation of the masterpieces of English literature, a knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology and history is almost indispensable. The great works of the world's master minds should be studied with some reference to the similarity of their subject-matter. For example, the reading of Shakespeare will give occasion to the study of dramatic literature in all its forms. The reading of "Paradise Lost" will introduce us to the great epics, and to heroic poetry in general. Sir Walter Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel" will lead naturally to the romance literature of modern and mediæval times. Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" fitly illustrates the story-telling phase of poetry; the study of lyric poetry may centre upon the old ballads, the sonnets, the love songs and the religious hymns of our language. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" introduces us to allegory, and Milton's "Lycidas" to elegiac and pastoral poetry. To know the best specimens of argumentative prose we should begin with some of the great speeches of such men as Burke, Daniel Webster, Gladstone, and end with the orations of Demosthenes.