

happiness from books. Mr. Trevelyan, in his charming biography, says that "of the feelings which Macaulay entertained towards the great minds of bygone ages it is not for any one except himself to speak. He has told us how his debt to them was incalculable; how they guided him to truth; how they filled his mind with noble and graceful images; how they stood by him in all vicissitudes—comforters in sorrow, nurses in sickness, companions in solitude, the old friends who are never seen with new faces; who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity. Great as were the honours and possessions which Macaulay acquired by his pen, all who knew him were well aware that the titles and rewards which he gained by his own works were nothing in the balance as compared with the pleasure he derived from the works of others."

There was no society in London so agreeable that Macaulay would have preferred it at breakfast or at dinner to the company of Sterne or Fielding, Horace Walpole or Boswell.

The love of reading which Gibbon declared he would not exchange for all the treasures of India was, in fact, with Macaulay "a main element of happiness in one of the happiest lives that it has ever fallen to the lot of the biographer to record."

Moreover, books are now so cheap as to be within the reach of almost every one. This was not always so. It is quite a recent blessing.

Mr. Ireland, to whose charming little "Book-Lover's Enchiridion," in common with every lover of reading, I am greatly indebted, tells us that when a boy he was so delighted with White's "Natural History of Selborne," that in order to possess a copy of his own he actually copied out the whole book.

Mary Lamb gives a pathetic description of a studious boy lingering at a bookstall:—

I saw a boy with eager eye
Open a book upon a stall,
And read, as he'd devour it all;
Which, when the stall-man did espy,
Soon to the boy I heard him call,
"You sir, you never buy a book,
Therefore in one you shall not look."
The boy passed slowly on, and with a sigh
He wished he never had been taught to read,
Then of the old churl's books he should have
had no need.

Such snatches of literature have, indeed a special and peculiar charm. This is, I believe, partly due to the very fact of their being brief. Many readers, I think, miss much of the pleasure of reading, by forcing themselves to dwell too long continuously on one subject. In a long railway journey, for instance, many persons take only a single book. The consequence is that, unless it is a story, after half-an-hour or an hour they are quite tired of it. Whereas, if they had two, or still better three, on different subjects, and one of them being of an amusing character, they would probably find that by changing as soon as they felt at all weary, they would come back again and again to each with renewed zest, and hour after hour would pass pleasantly away. Every one, of course must judge for himself, but such at least is my experience.

I quite agree, therefore, with Lord Iddesleigh as to the charm of desultory reading; but the wider the field the more important that we should benefit by the very best books in each class. Not that we need confine ourselves to them, but that we should commence with them, and they will certainly lead us on to others. There are of course some books which we must read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. But these are exceptions. As regards by far the larger number, it is probably better to read them quickly, dwelling only on the best and most important passages. In this way, no doubt, we shall lose much, but we gain more by ranging