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On Buying Books for the Home Library.

As was remarked last week, the great difficulty to many people in buying books is in choosing them. You can't judge of a book by its title, and there are very few people who can choose for you—no one, perhaps, who does not know your needs and intellect almost as well as you do yourself. The works of standard authors are, of course, to be relied upon, upon them has been set the seal of the most competent to judge as to what really constitutes good literature. At the same time, those to whom the habit of reading is practically new, will find that, even among the standard books, choice must be made. It is very possible, for instance, that Sartor Resartus may be but gibberish and nonsense to you, while bread and meat, intellectually, to someone else; and, at the very beginning of your book-buying, you certainly do not want to spend money on something that you can neither understand nor enjoy. At the same time, keep it steadily in mind that, if you are ordinarily bright, what others have enjoyed you may also enjoy. Never were truer words spoken than those of Sir John Lubbock: "Many, I believe, are deterred from attempting what are called stiff books for fear they should not understand them, but, as Hobbes said, 'there are few who need complain of the narrowness of their minds if only they would do their best with them.'"

So, do not be discouraged. Remember that those classical volumes which are the delight and solace of the scholar, may also become your delight and solace, although, possibly, to many of them you will have to lead up by many steps and gradations. Persistence will do much. Even though a great part of what is termed the "best" in literature may seem to be a sealed book to you, do not turn away from it in disgust. You may cultivate your tastes and broaden your comprehension, if you will. Begin with the simpler classes of "good" literature, and go on. At first, you may only care for the delightful descriptions and odd bits of thought that give you glimpses into the hazy and beautiful world towards which you are bent. You may enjoy the simple and delightful sketches of John Burroughs to the full, while stumbling at much of what you find in Emerson and Carlyle, Ruskin and Thoreau. You may enjoy George Eliot's novels, while getting hopelessly befogged in much of the philosophy of her essays. But never mind that—keep on. Take the classics that seem "easiest" at first, and trust to it that the others will become clearer later on. The development of the mind is a strange thing. It never progresses by leaps and bounds, but goes on by such easy gradations, that, by and by, without knowing just how the thing has been and is being accomplished, one realizes that one's sympathies are broadening and one's comprehension of things becoming ever clear and more clear. The only condition is to see that one is making some effort. If not, in this, as in all other things, one can expect little development. As Oliver Wendell Holmes has said: "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving."

Personally, in buying books, I have found the best plan to be to join a good library, if possible, dip into books from it, and jot down the names of those which I have reason to believe may become real

friends to me. These, then, I can buy at leisure. It is always well to "belong" to a library anyway, were it only for the privilege of reference. Besides, there are many books which one is curious enough to wish to see, but with which, possibly, one would not care to fill up one's shelves, nor to spend much money upon. Last of all, one should join a library for the sake of helping to maintain the institution. There are some things which one is under obligation to do pro bono publico. But, to return to our subject. A very good rule is never to buy a book which you will not take pleasure in reading many times. It is usually very foolish to invest in the latest fiction. Of course, there is a great blare and uproar made over these books when they appear, at the back of which fanfare, usually, stands some publisher bound to "boom the book" and make money out of it, but the great probability is that not more than one out of a thousand so advertised is worthy of the praise bestowed upon it, or will live beyond the proverbial "nine days." Of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine, one reading is quite enough, if not too much, and, if you persist in buying many of them, you will soon have your shelves filled with a pile of stuff as useless to you as so much trash in a garret. It does not pay to have good book-room taken up with such bulk. Twenty really good volumes, which will bear re-reading many times, are worth more to you than five hundred of the other class. Of course, your "twenty" volumes must be varied—it is not well to get into a rut in the reading line. At the same time, it may be taken, as a general rule, that, as Theodore Parker has said: "The books that help you most are those which make you think the most. The hardest way of learning is that of easy reading, but a great book, that comes from a great thinker, is a ship of thought, deep freighted with truth and beauty."

For my own part—and, remember, I am by no means trying to dictate to you in regard to your buying, but am merely presenting the idea to you for your consideration—I have found collections of essays among the most satisfying of my books. They never weary me, no matter how often I read them. They usually set me thinking, and, besides, have the advantage of being "convenient." If one has only a few minutes to spare, one can pick up a volume of essays and get something out of it. To attempt to read history, biography or a continued story for the same length of time would, on the other hand, be little less than an irritation. Moreover, and most cogent reason of all, it seems to have been a favorite trick of many of the really great thinkers to embody their best thoughts in essays. A great man may work out a great thought in a great novel, but if he has a number of ideas which he feels should be immediately given to the world, the probabilities are that he will not wait to give expression to them by the more cumbersome medium of a story. He is more likely to string his pearls. If he be a poet, he writes a number of poems, or a long one, made up of practically distinct parts, as Wordsworth's Excursion, or Tennyson's In Memoriam; if he be a prose writer, he presents the world with a collection of essays.

Once more I have come to the end of my space, and once more shall ask leave to write "To be continued." In all of the foregoing I have been thinking of the purely

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