Life's Greatest Pleasure
THE JOYS OF READING
BY BURTON RASCOE
Life's Greatest Pleasure
THE JOYS OF READING
BY BURTON RASCOE

Wisely chosen, properly used like the food they are, books enrich life and enhance all the values known to life.

HALDEMAN-JULIUS PUBLICATIONS
GIRARD, KANSAS
THE JOYS OF READING

The purpose of this little book is to assist those who, because of one thing and another, have not acquired the most pleasurable and most satisfying of all habits—the habit of reading—and who are justifiably envious of those whose quality of mind reflects the cultivation that comes from a persistent and continuing indulgence in the joys of reading.

The purpose also is to give some useful, if perhaps commonplace, suggestions as to how one can get the most pleasure and the most benefit out of reading.

The purpose finally is to help those who profess that they "love to read but rarely find time for it."

People who say they cannot find time to read anything, except a detective story or some other work of current light fiction now and then, are deceiving themselves; and self-deception is an evil to be modified or corrected at all hazards, for it is infinitely worse than the habit of deceiving others.

He who deceives others may, for a considerable time or on frequent occasions, get away with it; but he who makes a practice of deceiving himself tends to disintegrate his personality. The more he does it, the more his true nature escapes his attention, knowledge and control until, in time, he has no sensible idea of what truth about himself is like.

When he reaches that point he is ready for the sanitarium. The asylums are full of people who have deceived themselves to the point where they no longer know the truth about themselves as the truth is obvious to the disinterested observer, and where they no longer have any integrated personality but have taken flight into personalities they have imagined it would be pleasant or profitable to have. Those unfortunate have deceived no one. They have merely reduced self-deception to its final absurdity.

It is far better for a man or a woman to give the real reason why he or she rarely reads than to give the false one that he or she cannot find the time. It would be better to say, "I am such a confirmed movie addict that I have to go to the movie two or three times a week, and, then, of course, I play bridge," or "My mind is so jaded by the fast life I lead that I cannot concentrate on a book long enough to make any sense out of the words, unless the book is spicy with sex or full of murder and sudden death," or "I am so indolent and my mind is so slothful I can't make the effort to find out anything about the world of the mind, the spirit and the imagination; I am content with the little effortless, half-awake world of platitudes which circumscribe my life."

Any such confession of the real facts of the matter would be better for the soul than the self-deceiving untruth of saying, "I can't find any time to read." As a general rule it will be found that those who lead the busiest lives find the most time to read, whereas those who read the least have little else except trifling things to occupy their minds and energies.

They are not merely the bookworms and scholars who are the great readers of the world; they are men best known in the field of action—statesmen and empire builders, soldiers, explorers, leaders of men. Julius Caesar had one of the largest private libraries in Rome, and
it was a library with which he had familiarized himself as assiduously as if his fame rested on his scholarship; and it was through his knowledge of the classics of Greek and Latin literature that he was able to express himself with such fluency, clarity and brilliance both as an orator and as a historian of his own campaigns.

Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution, served his country as ambassador to France, and fought for the principles of liberty and democracy throughout his tumultuous years as President of the United States, was self-taught in Greek and Latin, in the classics of which he was a marvelous scholar, and, when the original Congressional Library was burned to the ground, Congress purchased his library of 10,000 volumes as the nucleus of the present great Library of Congress.

Theodore Roosevelt, proponent of the “strenuous life”, reformer, soldier, plainsman, explorer, orator and statesman, as well as one of the most colorful men our country has ever produced, was an omnivorous reader, in office and out—a reader with a prodigious capacity to absorb the printed pages in rapid reading and yet to quote from memory, extensively and accurately, long passages in volumes of history, science, memoirs, poems, plays and novels.

That strange genius of recent years, T. E. Lawrence, who knew the language, dialects and ways of the Bedouin tribe of Arabia so well that he could unite them and become their leader in an amazing army which defeated the Turks, was so rapid and so indefatigable a reader that during his 10 years at Oxford he was said, by Robert Graves, his biographer, to have averaged reading 6 books a day, more than 20,000 in all, many of them in difficult Oriental languages; and, moreover, while working as a humble mechanic in the British Royal Air Force, Lawrence translated the “Odyssey” of Homer and rewrote from memory his huge “Seven Pillars of Wisdom”, the original and only first draft of which he had lost in a railway station.

Examples of busy men who found time to do a vast amount of reading could be multiplied indefinitely. Even among savage tribes that have been exposed but briefly to the civilizing effect of the printed word there have been notable instances wherein the most active, the “busiest”, leaders of the tribes have also shown the quickest concern and the great preoccupation with what backwoodsmen contemptuously refer to as “book learning”. Sequoia, the great chief of the Cherokee Indians, had no sooner learned to read English fluently than he devised a syllabic alphabet and grammar of the Cherokee language and translated the Bible into Cherokee.

It would be tedious and scarcely to the point of this little book to extend the list of historical examples to show that men whose waking hours were crowded with active and fruitful work far beyond the average yet found time to read whole libraries of worthy books. But these examples are useful to refute the sluggish or lazy person’s complaint of lack of time for reading.

To normal, active men or women, in whatever kind of work they are engaged, or whatever are their duties and social responsibilities, the reading of books should be as natural and as inevitable a function as eating, drinking, bathing, taking exercise and sleeping. In a civilized world it might even be said that a man or woman who fails to do a fair amount of purposeful and recreational reading each week, or even each day, is not living a normal and healthy life—for health of the mind is maintained by an exercise as necessary as the exercise needed to maintain bodily health.

In fact, many a good biologist would maintain that the exercise of the mind is immeasurably more important than the exercise of the body, and that it is the exercise of the mind which keeps the body alive, when the body is puny or diseased or deformed, as in the case of
Homer and Milton who were blind, of St. Paul, Aeschylus, Flaubert and Dostoievski who were epileptic, of Byron and Steinmetz who were deformed, and of Stevenson who was tubercular, to mention but a few names at random.

To all cultivated persons the joy of reading is so natural and necessary a function of their daily living that they suffer as acutely by being deprived of the kind of literature they are accustomed to read as they would suffer from being long deprived of nourishing food. In fact, arctic and jungle explorers and scientists, who have been accustomed to the mental stimulation and pleasure which good literature affords, tell me they can readily accustom themselves to reduced and unpalatable diets of food in remote regions but they cannot accustom themselves to being deprived of “something good to read.” Hunger of the stomach they can put up with almost indefinitely; but hunger of the mind drives them into irritations, aberrations and even a kind of temporary insanity.

For good books are not merely the luxuries of life. They are the sustenance of life. Wisely chosen, properly used like the food they are, they enrich life and enhance all the values known to life. For, as Milton wrote in “Aeropagitica,” “Many a man lives a burden to the earth, but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.”

THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE

Books may fall into neglect. Fashions may shift in that demand for the “continuous slight novelty” we all require to escape monotony or satiety. And good books, may be obscured for a while, unread for a century for years, even for centuries. Homer was unread and forgotten for nearly 1,400 years when the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey” came alive again under the revival of learning inaugurated by the great Italian poet, Petrarch, in his declining years; Robert Burton’s “Anatomy of Melancholy,” which ran through seven editions in the 17th century and was widely read, was entirely neglected during the 18th century and revived by Lord Byron and Charles Lamb in the beginning of the 19th century. Hundreds of similar examples could be given of that perpetuation of “the precious life-blood of a master spirit,” which, in Milton’s phrase, a good book is, “treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.”

Literature does not die. It is the self-perpetuating product of an ever-flowering process like life itself; and it is the articulate spirit of life, voicing the hopes, aspirations, the conflicts, the experience, of people, of time and of place—and the best of literature, the literature that endures, is the literature which arouses in the breast of all literate peoples at all times the emotion of recognition that this book, this poem or this play is something they know, they feel, they have observed, they acknowledge to be true, they have felt or observed, expressed in a language that is clearer, more exact, more comprehensive, or more subtle than is within the average man’s power of articulation.

It is the function of literature—indeed, of all the arts—to make us more aware of the life we live and see about us. Literature not only gives us lives to live vicariously in the imagination; it not only helps to teach us, in Montaigne’s phrase, to live well and to die well; it not only diverts and entertains and instructs us; it also gives meaning and significance to the very routine, the very dullest moments, of our days. It makes us feel the emotional value of hazards, of conflicts, of all the homely, personal, and apparently petty events, as well as the crises and climaxes, the spectacular and sensational aspects of our living.

A good writer makes you see with new eyes the familiar world which has been so long familiar to you that you have, perhaps, taken it for
granted and have not really seen before. How often have you experienced this? How often have you read a descriptive passage about some scene familiar to you, only to say to yourself, “That’s exact; that’s true; and I had not really noticed it before”?

How often have you encountered dialogue using the very words, the very idiom, the very pronunciation you habitually use, only to find that it is at once strange and familiar to you; that the words you have used almost automatically take on, for you, a deeper meaning, a greater significance; that your own speech has a loveliness and a character you have never thought of its having?

You will forgive me if I mention something autobiographically. When I was still in grade school and only 11 years old I read a novel that was once greatly loved by a generation but which is now rather generally out of the people’s minds. It was “The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come” by John Fox, Jr. It was sentimental and romantic, about poor but clan-proud Kentucky mountain folk. It abounded in descriptions which were effective and lovely. It was, I realized, about the countryside I knew; for I was then a Kentucky boy and I had camped and hunted in woods and hills like these the author described. I had fished and swum in cool clear streams like these. I realize I had never particularly noticed these streams and woods and hills before. Theretofore I saw pines and spruces and rhododendrons with new, efflorescent eyes; even rail fences and barns took on a new beauty for me. They became an intimate part of me; they belonged, somehow, more definitely to me—they were a vivid part of my experience.

Thereafter, I believe, I began to take greater pains that my reading should mean something to me, that I should make what the author was trying to convey to me accessible to my spirit and imaginative experience by reading with attention a book worthy of attention and not just skimming through it to “see how it comes out” or to enable me to display the vulgar vanity of being able to say (without entirely lying) that I had read it.

**SNOBS AND THEIR BOGUS CULTURE**

It is quite true that a great many people make no further use of books than as a means of keeping up with the fashions. That is to say that, when a book becomes a best-seller, they want to get hold of it and perhaps only to skip through it, not out of a love of literature, not out of curiosity even, but merely to be in the swim.

When nearly everybody else seems to have read the book and to be talking about it, they seem as uncomfortable as if they had on clothes that are last year’s and, therefore, out of date. When the Empress Eugenie hats were so much the rage in 1851 that Queen Mary was probably the only living woman who didn’t wear one, it was also so much the fashion to read “The Good Earth” by Pearl Buck that it took more courage than most can muster to resist a desire to buy or borrow it.

The intellectual snobs sneer at this sort of thing. The sneer is both stupid and vulgar. For the undeniable fact is that the Empress Eugenie hat was so beautifully designed that no woman could but add to her appearance by wearing one, and “The Good Earth” was so good a novel that no one could help deriving some pleasure, some good, out of even a superficial skimming of it.

The book that is currently most in demand at any given time may not be first-rate or even good second-rate literature, judged by the strictest standards; but also the style of clothes most in demand at any given time is not necessarily of the highest standard in symmetry, color and design.

It is remarkable, these days, how frequently the public demand for a work of literature coincides with or approaches the severe de-
mands of the ancient principles of good art. If one checks back over
the best sellers in the past 15 years, one finds that the writers who
top the best-selling lists are the writers who, judged by any standards,
are the best of our time. During the past 15 or 20 years there is no
writer, American or foreign, of importance, recognized by high critical
opinion, whose work has not figured in the best-selling lists.

Masterpieces, of course, are not produced every day or every week
or every year. Writers of masterpieces themselves do not always turn
out masterpieces. The public does well indeed when in any one year
it is offered one or two fair examples of first-rate literature or even
of good second-rate literature. But, meantime, let us look at the pub-
lisher's records of sales and confuse the snobs, who, with bogus culture,
lengthening their ears, condemn books merely because the public
in great numbers likes and buys them.

And let me proceed to state as clearly as I can the factors which
enter into the development of taste in literature and the allied arts.

ON GOOD TASTE

In the first place, good taste is so variable and individual a mat-
ter that it is much easier to define it by stating what it isn't but is often
erroneously supposed to be than it is to define it by stating what it is.
The phrases "in good taste" and "in bad taste" are used so frequently
as undefined and indefinable qualifiers by people who, ignorant of gen-
eral and specific ideas, use empty catch phrases as bludgeons, that it is
probably a safe rule to set down any person who uses these two phrases
with any degree of frequency as a person without any taste whatever,
good or bad—an intellectual neuter, an emotional moron, a char-
acterless individual of the pusher type who seeks to identify himself
with the people he conceives to be his betters by using catch phrases
which he thinks will give him color and character of a superior being
or, at the least, put stupid people in awe of him.

Taste, like Beauty and Truth, is an abstraction, and an abstraction
is but a vague postulate which may be sensed or mystically apprehended
but cannot be comprehended or explained. There are beautiful things
but, strictly speaking, there is not beauty. There are truths, but strictly
speaking, there is no Truth. The Latin proverb "De gustibus non est
disputandum" (There is no disputing about tastes) is wrong, for tastes
can be disputed; but not even Aristotle, who was the best qualified to
try it, ever attempted to define Taste: all he attempted to do was to
establish certain principles to distinguish good art from bad.

Good taste in reading is acquired by reading and only by reading.
It cannot be grafted on, because it is itself an evolution of the mind.
But good taste in literature, a genuine cultivation, is open to anyone who
can read. If one develops a habit of reading even the simplest and most
meretricious sort of adventure stories, such as the nickel novels of an
earlier day or the "pulp" magazines of our time, one has already laid
the foundation of good taste in literature.

That may sound shocking to the academicians, the pedants and
the snobs of culture; but it is a demonstrable fact: Innumerable men
whose taste in literature is impeccable and whose range of reading is
wide and a great many men who have become distinguished writers
themselves readily confess that their first great impulse toward find-
ing pleasure in reading came from the nickel novels—the Frank Merri-
well series, "The Liberty Boys of '76," "Diamond Dick," and other
paperback thrillers—in their boyhood, often read surreptitiously and
in defiance of the parental edict against reading such "trash."

The gifted Irish poet, James Stephens, who is the author of char-
ming and imperishable songs of Irish soil and also the author of that
classic of philosophic fantasy, humor and irony, "The Crock of Gold," is
even today addicted to those nickel novels so universally forbidden to
and so universally read by American boys a generation ago; and noth-
ing delight him more than to come into possession of one of the
now-scarce thrillers that he has not already read. Another famous
author who likes these exciting stories of daring and heroism is Arthur
Machen, the writer of precious tales of mystery and horror.

The reason why Stephens and Machen quite shamelessly enjoy this
literature, so lightly called “trash” by those who haven’t read it, is
obvious. Although they are both sophisticated and worldly wise, pro-
doundly read in both poetry and prose, they are themselves contrivers of
simple, ingenuous and natural tales of the imagination. They both
create characters and situations not quite like any characters or sit-
ations ever found in everyday life. They and the writer of the nickel
thrillers are akin in spirit at least to creators of the great sagas and
epics of the primitive periods of literature.

The story of the siege of Troy by the Greeks after Paris had car-
ried away Helen, the wife of King Menelaus, and the story of the
wanderings of Ulysses after the fall of Troy had been celebrated in
primitive song for centuries before Homer gathered the threads of
the narratives into two magnificent epics. The Nibelungenlied and the
Icelandic sagas are both refinements of barbaric recitals; and in them,
as in the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey,” there are some of the same pre-
oposterous deeds, incredible coincidences, triumphs of good over evil as
are to be found in the nickel thrillers.

Of course, there are differences between a nickel thriller and a
Greek epic, differences of kind and of degree, but they are differences
arising from the poetic genius of a Homer as compared with the ped-
estrian and commonplace language of the hack writer of nickel thrillers.
As for the substance of a nickel thriller, in which the courageous hero
slaughters his enemies against great odds, and the substance of the
“Iliad,” they are both the same. “The Iliad,” writes G. K. Chesterton,
“is only great because all life is a battle, the ‘Odyssey’ because all life
is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle. There is one
attitude in which we think that all existence is summed up in the
word ‘ghosts’; another, and somewhat better one, in which we think
it is summed up in the words ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream.’ Even
the vulgarest melodrama or detective story can be good if it expresses
something of the delight in sinister possibilities—the healthy lust for
darkness and terror which may come on us any night in walking down
dark lane.”

Sir Francis Bacon, that able lawyer-essayist with some of the stiff
preciseness of the typical legal mind, who, some people have the
querness to believe, wrote the tumultuous and divinely intoxicated
plays of Shakespeare, in one of his most famous essays, “Of Studies,”
states the whole case for reading in these succinct axioms:

“Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. The
chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament,
is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgement and disposition
of business... To spend too much time in studies (i.e., reading)
is sloth; to use them too much for ornament is affectation; to make
judgment wholly by their rules is the humor of the scholar... Read
not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for
granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and con-
sider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some
few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read
only in parts; others to be read but not curiously; and some few
to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. ... Reading
maketh a full man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had
need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have
much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make
men wise; poets (make men) witty; mathematics (make men) subtle; natural philosophy (makes men) deep; moral philosophy (makes men) grave; logic and rhetoric (make men) able to contend. Nay, there is no stond or impediment of the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies."

THE PLACE OF THE CLASSICS

Among bookish folk an unfortunate and stultifying attitude, or at least a deceiving pose, derives from Charles Lamb's having said in an essay that whatever new book came out he always read an old one. I have heard many men of cultivated library taste make vain excuses for a lazy disinclination to keep abreast of the thought and literature of their own times by quoting these words of Lamb as applying to themselves. If they meant literally what they said they would be reading more than 20 books a day 365 days out of the year, for in a normal publishing year that many new books, exclusive of reprints, are brought out in the United States alone. What they mean is that they prefer to read and reread the classics that are canonized by time rather than attempt the contemporary fashions in literature; they merely mean to excuse themselves of any presumptive knowledge of the latest exposition of the newest ism, or the works of fiction which are manifestly of the day and hour and so soon to sink into that quick oblivion which is so often the fate of the book that everybody is discussing today.

To read and reread the classics is a worthy and safe pursuit. It is to be applauded in those who indulge in it and recommended to those who don't. It is a means of the mind's enrichment without the hazards of the wasted time that is inevitable when one is a promiscuous reader, eager to sample every new batch of words that gets between book covers. It would not be a bad idea for everyone to make it a point to read at least a snatch of classical literature every day of the year—a chapter from the Bible, a passage from Shakespeare, some verses of a translation from the Greek Anthology, a few maxims from La Roche-foeaul, a short essay by Hazlitt, an episode from the adventures of Don Quixote de la Mancha, or whatever comes readily to hand that is hallowed by time and whose merits are attested to by critics and by the silent assent of the generality who will agree on the high merit of any classic so long as they are not called upon to read it.

KINDS OF READING

Reading is, broadly speaking, of two kinds. There is reading simply for the pleasure that may be conveyed by the written word. And there is purposeful reading; that is, reading for information, for the increase of one's store of knowledge, for the broadening of one's basic culture.

Purposeful reading to be really purposeful should at the same time be a pleasure. When it is not a pleasure, but an irksome task, its benefit can only be temporary—as temporary, for instance, as the knowledge you gain by boning for an examination.

We have all known men and women who have been graduated with honors and degrees from colleges and universities who feel that when they have taken their degrees they have completed the disagreeable task of acquiring an education. They are not only eager to forget the classics they were required to read in school; they are also disinclined to read anything thereafter except the newspapers or light articles and popular fiction in the magazines or a best seller that is talked about so much they feel they are not in the swim if they haven't read
it, or at least enough of it to make superficial conversation about it.

Such people are mentally on the retrograde without knowing it. They have had advantages and they have not made the best of them. The money and time consumed in educating them are almost a dead loss. They have been instructed badly or else they have been incapable of instruction. If you listen to these people they will tell you they rarely find time to write letters. This is not the exact truth. The closer truth is that it takes them a great deal of time to write a single letter. If you examine one of their letters you may be appalled not merely by the lack of substance in the communication but by the clumsiness of the expression, the bad grammar and the bad syntax. I have read letters written by college graduates in which plural subjects were followed by singular verbs and the number of a relative pronoun did not agree with the number of the noun to which it was related. One cannot go through grade school, let alone college, without learning the elementary rules of grammar governing those mistakes. But these rules are easily forgotten if one neglects to read. Conversely, one does not forget the proper means of expression if one is daily brought into contact with good and forceful English by the reading of good books. He who reads well writes well.

People who neglect to read locks, who are not alive enough in mind to be aware that education is a continuous and never-ending process, not only cannot write decent letters; they are inarticulate in conversation. Their eyes light up and their spirits become animated only when conversation is on the low level of newspaper gossip or has got around to their own lines of endeavor and has thus presented them with an opportunity to talk shop. They have no general ideas, no extensive base of cultural interests. They are not even intelligent listeners; for you cannot listen intelligently if you have only a vague idea what the speaker is talking about.

M. Lincoln Schuster wrote a paper for the Publisher's Weekly in which he voiced a truth more general than obvious. He began:

"College graduates who do not know how to read constitute a major indictment of American educational methods and a constant challenge to the country's publishers and booksellers.

"Large numbers of college graduates do know how to read, in the fullest sense, but there are far too many whose acute apathy might be described as an occupational disease. To observant teachers and candid publishers, this statement is a commonplace of the day's work."

He goes on to place the responsibility for this condition upon the defects in our educational system by which, from the most impressionable days in grade school or through secondary school and college, "book reading too often has become associated with midnight oil and the drudgery of homework. Students are taught by teachers who are themselves victims of the same educational process, and who openly or subconsciously have a positive distaste for disinteresting reading. Wrong life patterns thus are formed, and instead of our getting an eager candidate for continuing education, who should look forward to a lifetime of learning and reading after commencement, we get an unripe Bachelor of Arts who is scarcely adult and who shuns education like the plague."

Mr. Schuster believes this condition can largely be corrected if reading is "taught and learned as a technique, as an art, as a working method of self-education, as a way of life," and if boys and girls are taught to use books and libraries resourcefully and with relish.

I believe Mr. Schuster is right in this, but I also believe that this cannot be accomplished without a complete revolution of our methods of education. I hold that all the discipline of a child should be confined to the primary grades and throughout the primary grades this discipline
should be thorough. As things are, our discipline is lax in the primary grades and it begins to tighten up in the secondary schools. It is carried to an absurdity when adults, as boys and girls of college age actually are, are still treated as children, who must learn conjugations and declensions for "discipline of the mind" instead of being taught languages as the media of an ever-living literature and who must answer elaborate and irrelevant questionnaires on points of pedantic Shakespearean scholarship before reading "Hamlet" or "Antony and Cleopatra" for pleasure as poetry and drama.

For myself I must confess that, culturally, I got little out of high school and almost nothing out of college; but out of the books I read in the public library when I was in high school and in the college library when I was in university I got a great deal. I have often said I quit college before taking my degree because I found that college was interfering too much with my education. That may sound facetious, but it is the solemn truth. Cut-and-dried class routine and "disciplinary" homework cut seriously into the time I was able to put in at the library to satisfy my consuming desire for an education, my curiosity about life, men and emotions, the things of the heart and intellect that are expressed in the art of the written word.

THE SELF EDUCATED ARE THE BEST EDUCATED

The best-educated men and women I have known have been self-educated. This is true even of those who have been to college; for they did not go to college with an attitude, so often prevailing among students, of "I dare you to educate me!" but with an eagerness to learn, an eagerness that sent them to good books even when they found their classroom work dull, stale and unpromising.

If you have gone to a play or movie and have seen a drama built around the career of Mary Queen of Scots, let us say, it may be that you have discovered that your knowledge of Mary's reign and tragedy is rusty. When you get home you may look up the account of Mary Queen of Scots in an encyclopedia if you have one or in an old school textbook in history. That is purposeful reading—to satisfy an immediate curiosity. Or if you hear of a strange town in an unfamiliar country you may look it up in your atlas.

The value which this seeking out of special information has for you will depend entirely upon the degree of attention you give the information you seek. Memory is that and nothing more—memory depends upon the impact of a fact or of an image or of an impression, and the impact is governed by the degree of attention we give to the subject. We remember vividly the startling or unusual happenings in our lives, the accidents, the hurts, the shocks.

The acquisition of enlightenment, the learning of anything, the thrill of reading a beautiful poem or a fine novel, is an unusual thing with us and should affect us like a startling occurrence. When the poet Keats first came across a copy of Chapman's translation of Homer he was thrown into such transports of ecstacy that he wrote an immortal sonnet to celebrate the occasion, saying, "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken." Emily Dickinson, the New England poet who is among the greatest of lyricists said, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry."

Purposeful reading can be, and should be, a pleasure even a pleasure without purpose. You know how this can be if you have ever looked up a subject in an encyclopedia or a word in a large dictionary. After
getting the information you sought, you have doubtless had your attention attracted to some other article in the encyclopedia or some other word in the dictionary and, if you have had the time, you have read much more than you intended to read, learned things you had not set out to learn—and all for pleasure, the simple joy of reading.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that he found no book more fascinating than a dictionary. Nor can there be, to a person of sensibility and curiosity, a much more fascinating work than a good dictionary; for in a dictionary we have not only the implements of a language but intimations and suggestions and information about the history of the communication of thought.

Let us take a word. What does the word “cynic” mean to you? John L. Whitaker, in his book, “And Fear Came,” says that cynicism is the disease of journalism, corrupting the truth. What does he mean? He means that journalists are often cynics; and that cynics distrust sentiment as well as sentimentality, they have no faith in ideals, they suspect the motive of those who would do good. The cynic is hard-boiled; he is a realist; he is on guard against being taken in by any appeal to his emotions.

Those are the qualities the word has come to have and denote to us now. Its root meaning, however, is “doglike”, from the Greek word Kunois, a dog, and Kunikos, doglike. Its earliest meaning in English was “having the qualities of a surly dog; snarling; captious; currish.”

The early Greek cynics were philosophers. Their founder was Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates; and they taught that virtue was the only good, and that its essence lies in self-control and independence (Webster). Later Cynicism developed into a churlish contempt for the views of others. Now “cynic” means neither one who holds that virtue is the only good, nor one who has a contempt for the views of others: it means a person who believes that self-interest or self-indulgence governs the motives of all, including those who profess idealism and unselfishness.

Do you know where the word “gardenia” comes from? It is the name given to the flower which bears it, in honor of Alexander Garden, an eccentric but gifted American botanist who was first to discover the flower (known in the Old World) in America. It was interesting to me to discover that our word “gymnasium” comes from the Greek word gymnazein, which means “to exercise naked”: its root being gymnus or “naked.”

Little oddities of information like the foregoing serve no useful purpose; they do not make it easier for you to find a job or make a living, plant a better crop, build a better mousetrap, pick better securities for investment, or increase your worldly goods in any way. But they do afford a kind of pleasure, a disinterested pleasure of the mind. And the disinterested pleasures of the mind are among the greatest satisfactions in life—more enduring than passion, more comforting than worldly power or worldly success.

THE SMALLEST REFERENCE LIBRARY

The smallest reference library, I should say, would contain these books:

1. A good dictionary, the larger the better, but at least a desk dictionary, which clearly indicates how the words are pronounced and from what roots they are derived, is essential. Preferably the dictionary should be American. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, which holds a high place of honor among British scholars, is not only lacking in many words in common use in the United States; it also gives some pronunciations which, while current in England, are not current in
America, and its word definitions are always English, whereas we in America sometimes use the word the English use but with a different meaning.

2. The World Almanac for the current year.


4. A good handbook of common law embracing the statutes concerning proper rights, leases, contracts, patents, copyrights, titles, deeds, inheritances, insurance, and all rights and obligations with which you are liable to be confronted.

5. A good layman's handbook of practical nursing.

6. A reliable and up-to-date atlas.

Those are the essentials of a reference library. If the dictionary is unabridged it will contain a pronouncing biographical dictionary, a gazetteer, a section devoted to the arbitrary signs and symbols used in astronomy, botany, chemistry, mathematics, printing, medicine, meteorology, commerce, music, printing, electrical engineering, and proofreading. It will also contain a concise resume of important events in ancient, medieval and modern history; a concise geography, a dictionary of foreign words and phrases, and a comprehensive history of the origins and developments of languages.

Indeed, if one were able to absorb and retain no more than half of the information contained in a modern unabridged dictionary one would be a prodigy of information, the like of which has never been known on earth; it would be not merely an education but a miracle no less. It would also be, I should think, a bore to others and a nuisance to oneself; because the capacity of human memory is limited, and with so much information in one's head one would have no room for music, for poetry, for literature, for the sweet, pleasurable, usable things of life.

(The late Frank Moore Colby, who was a highly cultivated man and one of the finest essayists in the English language, was also an encyclopedist, the editor of the New International Encyclopedia and of the International Year Book. Although it was his profession to provide a source book of exact information on every subject under the sun, he had a horror of miscellaneous exact information such as goes into an encyclopedia, and he once wrote that after seeing a new encyclopedia through the press he spent months "picking facts out of" his mind, like cockleburs and thistles, and discarding them.)

The World Almanac and Book of Facts is an annual publication. It contains almost any information you are likely to require that is not to be found in a dictionary or encyclopedia, from athletic records to price ranges in common stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange and from the text of the Constitution to the personnel of every federal and state department. It is perhaps the most frequently consulted work of reference in the world, and it is the key and essential volume of every newspaper's reference library and of every bureau of information.

People would save themselves a great deal of money in legal and doctor's fees if they would have in their reference libraries Gould's "Medical Dictionary," or some other reliable book for simple hygiene and nursing, and a copy of "Common Legal Principles," by Frances Marshall, and learn how to consult them.

Of course, it is as unwise for the layman to depend upon his unprofessional knowledge of law and legal procedure in matters which only a court can adjudicate as it is for the layman to rely upon a home pharmacopoeia or household doctor book for the diagnosis and treatment of alarming symptoms, sudden acute pain or the approach of a rash with attendant dizziness, languor or headache. But before entering into a partnership, buying a piece of property, making a contract,
engaging in a dispute, one should know what are one's elementary rights and obligations, as these are established by law, and this knowledge may be easily gained by looking up the pertinent laws in a book like Marshall's "Common Legal Principles." Those hot-tempered would-be litigants who rush off to a lawyer and seek to file suit every time their egos are affronted or their demands challenged would often save themselves the legal fee a reliable lawyer will charge for telling them they have no basis for suit, or they would save themselves the legal fees, expenses and court costs in a hopeless suit which an unreliable lawyer will sometimes file for the legal fee alone, knowing full well that his client stands little, if any, chance of winning the suit or even of having it brought to trial.

In a dispute in equity where the law is not clear and unmistakable, lawyers must be retained on both sides and the matter threshed out before a judge and jury. In these matters the law is only what a judge or jury at any given moment decides it is; and just as a difference of opinion is said to make horse races, a difference of opinion most certainly makes law courts and licensed lawyers necessary to the proper functioning of society. But inasmuch as it is a legal axiom that "ignorance of the law" is no excuse, one should have a layman's legal handbook and know how to consult it.

To read a medical dictionary or a book describing diseases is not recommended to anyone except those in the medical profession who can take an objective and dispassionate attitude toward the information. Many people cannot read of the symptoms of any disease, however remote, without imagining they have these very symptoms. I myself cannot think of vermin or mosquitoes without beginning to itch and thus to scratch. And there are those who imagine they have cancer or tuberculosis or angina pectoris merely by reading about the symptoms and ravages of the diseases. Neurasthenics and self-absorbed persons, hypochondriacs and some who have too little to occupy their minds often put the puses of their physicians by running to them with every imaginable complaint. But diagnosis is a difficult and exacting thing in many larger and more serious complaints, and physicians and diagnosticians can go wrong on them. Some diseases which are radically unlike as diseases are almost identical in symptoms. Acute appendicitis is like acute indigestion or ptomaine poisoning. The symptoms of syphilitic paresis are like the indications of brain tumor, a high degree of imbalance in the glands, degeneration of brain tissue through alcoholic excess, or paralysis from accidental or other functional disturbances. A few degrees of fever in an adult is a serious matter requiring medical attention immediately; but a baby may run three or four degrees above normal and have nothing more serious than a temporary digestive disturbance or a need for a spoonful of water.

One should know how to treat cuts, burns, scaldings, even rather serious ones (except secondary burns which are extremely dangerous and sometimes fatal), without consulting a doctor. When one has young children one should know almost by heart Holt's "Care and Feeding of Children," for then one will be ready to meet almost any emergency without calling for a doctor. Croup, in children for instance, is an alarming thing for young and inexperienced parents; babies make serious-sounding chest and breathing noises, they have difficulty in getting their breath, they grow black and purple in the face. But if one knows one's Holt one readily and easily constructs a homemade vapor tent according to Dr. Holt's instructions and soon the afflicted child is breathing freely and easily.

**COLLECT YOUR OWN LIBRARY**

Once the habit of both purposeful and casual reading is formed, pride in one's library soon takes hold upon one's character. The library
is added to as one's character expands, naturally and inevitably, until
with the growth of a library one has an index and a reflection of the
owner's personality. "As a man thinketh, so is he"; and as a man
reads, his thinking process develops.

"Libraries are not made; they grow ... It is no doubt a pleasant
thing to have a library left you ... But good as it is to inherit a li-
brary, it is better to collect one. Each volume, then, however lightly
a stranger's eye may roam from shelf to shelf, has its own individ-
uality, a history of its own. You remember how you got it, and how
much you gave for it; and your word may be safely taken for the
first of these facts, but not for the second. The man who has a
library of his own collection is able to contemplate himself ob-
jectively, and is justified in believing in its own existence. No other
man but he would have made precisely such a combination as
his. Had he been in any single respect different from what he is,
his library, as it exists, never would have existed. Therefore, surely
he may exclaim, as in the gloaming he contemplates the backs of
his beloved ones, 'They are mine and I am theirs.'"

I shall indulge again in a bit of autobiography. The first book
I ever purchased out of my own earnings was a copy of Emerson's
"Essays" in a cheap reprint. I was 13 years old, and I bought the book
out of my salary of $1.50 a week as a carrier of a newspaper route
in a small town in Oklahoma. Proudly I pattered into that book an
oblong piece of paper on which was inscribed in ink, "Private Library
of Burton Rascoe, No. 1."

I had had other books, but they had been given to me by my
parents and friends, bought for me. I had early developed a habit of
reading. I was precocious in that regard, for my grandmother forced
my retention and co-ordination so that I was able to spell before I could
walk and read before I went to school. But my reading up until I was
12 years old was haphazard. I read wild west stories and lives of the
Presidents, books of adventure and exploration, the Horatio Alger, Jr,
and Henty books, romantic novels of the author's mother owned, Owen Wister
and Winston Churchill (the American), Mark Twain and Bret Harte,
the Bible, Dickens, and whatever books I could lay my hands on.

My people were not bookish. There were few books in our house
in my childhood—a large illustrated Bible, Dante's "Inferno" illustrated
by Gustave Dore, a pictorial history of the Spanish-American War, a
book of drawings by Frederic Remington, some novels by E. P. Roe, Hall
Caine, Marie Corelli, Charles Major, Amelia E. Barr, John Fox, Jr,
Gertrude Atherton's "The Conqueror" and a few other popular romances
of the day, an odd volume or two of Dickens, a book on arctic explo-
ation, and little else. I devoured all these and craved more. When a
public library was organized by the public-spirited citizens of the
pioneer town and opened in a barn-like room on the second floor of
a two-story office building, I was one of the first to make use of the
books bought and contributed. My thirst for knowledge began to de-
velop. Then I heard a Methodist preacher, Bishop Quayle, famous
for his oratory, deliver a sermon once in which he quoted so tan-
talizingly from Emerson that I looked up Emerson in the library and
read Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance." The essay fascinated me. I
resolved to own a book of Emerson's essays for my own. Moreover,
I then and there decided that someday I would own and cherish
a great number of books in a library I had added to myself.

It has been said that if you want something badly enough the
time will come when you have more than you want of it. This is certainly
true of me in regard to books. As a boy, as a youth, as a man, I wanted
nothing in the world so much as a good library. As a boy I felt a little
ashamed and embarrassed that in our home there were so few books—
fewer than in the house of any of my playmates. It did not make
me feel humble or envious if a schoolfellow lived in a finer house
or had better clothes or more money to spend. But I did feel acutely
a lack of books in our home. The time was to come when this lack
was, as the adage predicted, overcompensated. For years now I have
had so many books that to move them has been a great ordeal and
a great expense. I have weeded my library out, time and again, given
away books by the hundreds, sold books—only to buy and accumu-
late new ones. I have recently moved a private library of over 11,000
books. They are piled up now, as I write, in barrels and boxes in the
living room, the hallways, in my study; and it will be weeks before they
are all again neatly arranged on the shelves that are being built for
them.

At such a time as this a feeling of exasperation comes over me that
I am burdened with so many books. But I know, well and good, that I
shall not carry out my repeated resolution to get rid of a great part
of them. I have tried this wholesale weeding out, only to progress as
far as accumulating a pile of a hundred or so to send to a second-
hand dealer and then come upon a book I have not read in a long
while, hesitate before casting it among the outcasts, delve into it
and become lost in that enchantment books have always or nearly
always possessed for me, taking me out out of myself, introducing me into
a new, agreeable, better-ordered, more satisfying world of the imagi-
nation or of the mind and spirit. For reading is the most enduring
of pleasures, the one pleasure from which there is no satiety, the one
intoxication from which there is no aftermath of disturbed digestion
and frazzled nerves.

And as I contemplate this now-disordered pile of books all about
me, I pick up with a special fondness that book in badly faded, cheap
red-cloth binding, labeled in indistinct lettering, Emerson's "Essays,"
and read again the inscription in boyish handwriting, "Private Library
of Burton Rascoe, No. 1," and recall how from that book I was led on
to acquire and read, over a period of 30 years, a representative portion
of all the extant literature of the world, in Greek, Latin, French and
German in the original and in many tongues and dialects in trans-
lation, poetry and prose tales, philosophy, history, biography, mem-
oirs, comedy, tragedy, satire, farce, irony, facetiae—all classes and
kinds of emanations of the human spirit, products of talent and genius.
If from all this reading I have not grown great in wisdom or shown
supernal and many-faceted genius, it is the fault of my constitutional
endowment, not the fault of the writers with whose spirit I have com-
muned, not the fault of the poets who have spoken to me in a langu-
age I shall never be able to speak natively myself, not from lack of
diligence, humble appreciation, curiosity and joy, but because the
fairy godmothers did not shower me at birth with their more re-
splendent gifts.

EVERY MAN HIS OWN UNIVERSITY

It is related of Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher and math-
ematician, that when someone referred to Harvard as an educational
institution, he corrected the speaker with vehemence, saying, "A
university is not an 'educational institution.' That term is correctly
applied to reformatories or to schools for the rehabilitation of way-
ward girls. A university is a seat of learning."

By making this distinction Professor Whitehead was offering,
perhaps unwittingly, a cogent and pointed criticism of a misapprehension
that generally prevails in academic and pedagogical circles in this
country and that is common among parents who send their children
to college. It is unfortunately true that the whole educational system is
built upon a fallacy. The fallacy is the assumption that until a boy or
girl has been graduated and has received a degree certifying that he or she has received passing marks in a specified number of courses, he or she is still in the infantile or disciplinary stage of life, and that “education” is not “a bringing out” or “leading forth” of talent and abilities but the subjection of the pupil to a prescribed disciplinary routine of study. This means that college courses are ordinarily but a protraction of the sort of training that should be complete at the close of high-school or secondary period of instruction and should end there. By the time a boy or girl is ready to enter a university he or she is physiologically adult, and if he or she is not mentally adult that is the fault of the system of primary and secondary education. The characters of both boys and girls are readily formed before they enter college; their habits of mind and temperament have already been established. At that age, if ever, they are, or should be, ready to assume the responsibility of knowing their own needs, capabilities and talents and of directing their talents toward the attainment of their wants.

The unhappy, the rather horrifying, result of all this is the adult infantilism among college graduates of which I spoke earlier in this book. It means that every year the colleges grind out thousands of certified graduates who not only have no true education but who have not the remotest idea what an education means. They associate it with an irksome period in their lives when they were under the thumbs of guardians and disciplinarians, under the guise of teachers, from whose dominance it was a lark to escape momentarily in campus high jinks, brawls, necking parties, athletic contests, fraternity shindigs, proms and other social activities and finally completely to escape into the competitive life of a college alumnus, with a diploma, class badge, fraternity pin, and the right to be addressed as “sir” by undergraduates.

Such a term of four years’ exposure to education and to the true means of an education, of course, rarely “takes.” But not until reform has taken place in our primary and secondary systems of education can there be expected to occur any welcome reform in the mentality of the generality of college graduates. Universities always will be seats of learning where those with minds disciplined as they should be at the close of adolescence, their characters formed and purposes established, can go for study, for specific help and instruction, for participation in the things of the mind along with scholars and men of taste and judgment and under the gentle inspiration of scholars and men of taste and cultivation.

This proper sort of education at a seat of learning presupposes, however, that the student either has leisure and means or that he has the usual fund of energy to earn his way in college and still have enough vitality left over to profit by what a seat of learning has to offer. Only a rarely exceptional person has this superabundance of energy, and, even when he has it, he is likely because of this very energy, to chafe against the rules and regulations of the college which are established for the discipline and in the interest of the background or infantile adult who in his twenties must be given homework, prescribed courses in collateral reading, grade marks, required courses and other disciplinary features of a kindergarten.

HOW TO READ

No book, however good, should ever be read as a task. If you do so read a book it is likely that you will not only get nothing out of it but that you will have toward the book and its author a repugnance that is unwarranted. You recall how this is when you think of the books you read or, rather, had to read in high school or college. If
you were taught as I was taught, you were not assigned books to read for pleasure.

You were given a "classic" and asked to write a "report" on it. You had to know the date the author was born and the date he died. These dates were, for some strange reason, important in the teacher's mind. If you got them wrong, your mark was low, even if you had manifestly read the book and got much out of it.

You were also required to absorb the notes in the back. The text was sprinkled with numbers, and when your eye lighted upon one of these numbers you were supposed to turn to the back of the book and read the note which was intended to clarify what you were reading.

They clarified all right, but they also interrupted the author's trend of thought and held up your interest in what you were reading. When you had finished the book you doubtless thought it was pretty tedious, and it is not likely that you have ever picked it up since. You have been willing to concede that it is a classic, but you haven't been willing to read it again. You may even have got the impression that all classics are dull. This is not the case: many of the classics are fresh, lively, delightful. Your wrong impression of them comes from having had to read them as a task.

You should not, therefore, read any book through an active sense of performing a disagreeable duty. You will be doing the author an injustice and you will gain no real profit from the endeavor yourself. On the contrary, you will, even if you have only the normal arrogance of pride in opinion, quite probably add merely another load to your insupportable prejudices.

I will give you a case in point. Mark Twain once said, "A good library could be started by leaving Jane Austen out." There is something funny about that remark: but it is not a just one. If you have tried to read Jane Austen and found her antipathetic to your taste in reading, you may have laughed out loud when you first heard that quip of Mark Twain's. But there are people (like myself) who enjoy Jane Austen and who believe that a good library could be started with a copy of "Pride and Prejudice."

I think it is likely that someone (maybe his old literary friend, William Dean Howells) told Mark Twain that he ought to read Jane Austen and that, in meek deference to Howell's superior knowledge of books, Mark did read a book by her, laboriously. Her subtleties are not the sort of thing that Twain (who expressed himself forcibly, colloquially and directly) would like. So, he exploded in that now-famous line, "A good library could be started by leaving Jane Austen out."

He was being unjust to her, but he was paying off a score against William Dean Howells (if Howells was the person who suggested his reading Jane Austen). He was asserting his independence and his originality. That is all very well for Mark Twain who was a genius. If he liked Jane Austen's way of writing too much it would have affected his own way of writing. It is a good thing he did not like her.

But not every reader is another Mark Twain. It is possible to enjoy Mark Twain and also to enjoy Jane Austen. It is a mistake to carry around a heavy load of easily acquired prejudices. It is a mistake to imagine that because Mark Twain thought Jane Austen's novels were terrible you are privileged to think they are, too, without reading them. You might try reading them and find that you liked reading Jane Austen even more than you liked reading Mark Twain.

THE ART OF READING

Don Marquis once made a quip in the days when it was thought smart to look down one's nose at the picture newspapers. He said the Hearst papers were edited for those who could not read without
moving their lips but that the tabloids were edited for the people who could not read at all. I have no prejudice against the tabloids; in at least one of them that I am familiar with the news is presented in a more honest, thorough, unprejudiced manner, in a clearer, more agreeable style, and in better taste than it is presented in some of the more pretentious newspapers and news magazines. But there are undoubtedly those, even among the fairly well educated, for whom reading is an actual physical effort resulting easily in fatigue. I purpose here to give some suggestions for avoiding this fatigue and for learning to read easily and rapidly.

There being eyesights and eyesights, I should say that the best light for reading is the one you find the most agreeable, the one of which you are not conscious either of its brightness or of its dimness. And, of course, it is a platitude to say that in order to read comfortably you should be comfortable; but it should be obvious also that you can be made too comfortable to read, so comfortable that you are quickly invited or impelled to doze or to sleep. In some instances where concentration is required, it is definitely an aid to reading to be slightly uncomfortable, for the muscles, being put to a slight exercise, force a certain general alertness. You know how this is so when you reflect that when your attention is most keenly engaged you do not slump in your chair but instinctively sit erect and probably on the edge of your chair.

The speed with which one reads is largely a matter of two things: (1) the nature of what is being read and (2) training. The training may be undirected, unconscious, and the mere incident and result of habit, so that it is axiomatic to say that those who read much develop the faculty of reading quickly. Reading has been so much a part of my habit and of my work—that I have found it easy to read six light novels in a single afternoon—and so to read them that I would not only be able to make a digest of what each novel was about but also to have observed any discrepancies in the character development of any of the novels or any flagrant mistake of the author. This may appear phenomenal to those who require nearly a week to read an ordinary novel or a whole season in which to read an "Anthony Adverse"; but it is, with me, a mere professional facility. It is not phenomenal to me, as is, for instance, the ability of many actors and actresses to see the script of a play for the first time in the afternoon, memorize their parts and cues, and give perfect performances in character at night. I can't remember the lines of a play in which I am supposed to play a minor part after a week of study and rehearsal. I know I can't; for I have tried it. I am one of the dumbest amateur actors any director ever had to put up with; at the most crucial moment I can be counted upon to achieve a completely blank, semiconscious expression while my brain frantically tries to recapture the words which have flown the coop of my memory. . . . And yet, off stage, I can quote—or better—write out verbatim long passages from books I have not read in years and tell you on just what page of what book is to be found something I have not read in a quarter of a century.

The phenomenon of the actor who can read a script for the first time in the afternoon and give a perfect performance of his part that same night is explained to me by actors who say they photograph the entire page in the "mind's eye" and that night, with the right emotional grimaces and "business", they "merely read off what is before the eye." I know what they mean: we professional readers, in a modified way, do pretty much the same thing when we "take in a page at a glance." The difference (possibly) between the actor and the professional reader in this instantaneous "eye photography" is that whereas the actor takes in, necessarily, every word, the professional reader takes in only the necessary words—the skeleton.
Any average layman can approach perfection in this rapid, skeletonized reading of the professional reader and can easily develop into a rapid reader by observing a few suggestions and practicing them.

In the first place, a highly technical piece of writing or an involved literary style, in which even the placing of a connective, a participle or a modifier has a definite relation to the peculiar sense and effect the author wishes to achieve, cannot be read very rapidly by any reader, no matter how professional, except perhaps someone trained in the use of the particular vocabulary used in a technical piece of writing. I find it extremely difficult to read a page concerning higher mathematics which any trained mathematician can read easily and quickly. I have encountered the work of some philosophers from whose pages no amount of time or concentration has enabled be to extract a single grain of sense. We must all at one time or another resignedly conclude that there are some things which are “over our heads” (at least until we can find the time to master them from their elementary principles on to a thorough understanding).

You yourself, if you count yourself a slow reader, can undoubtedly recall the fact that whereas it may have taken you considerable time to read a good novel in which you can honestly say you enjoyed “every word,” you have often read a detective story or light novel at a single sitting, between dinner and time to go to bed. The reason for this is that in the book you read quickly you not only did not “enjoy every word”; you did not read every word. You skipped all the words that were unimportant to the sense—the definite and indefinite articles, the prepositions, the conjunctions, even the more necessary but completely familiar words like “be,” “is,” “he,” “you,” “it,” etc. You read it, in fact, almost as though it were a cable or a telegram. The words you did not need were there, but you skipped them, unconsciously. The news stories which newspaper correspondents cable to their offices are usually in the form of “cable English,” which to the eye of the uninitiated looks like gibberish. Yet this same “gibberish” is of the words—and only the words—that register in even a layman’s rapid reading of a fast moving detective story. Once a news handler on the copy desk in a newspaper office acquires the knack of filling in the missing words of a story in “cable English,” it is as easy for him to read a cable as to read McGuffey’s First Reader.

The first essential to reading is that of concentration. One’s attention should be fixed upon one’s reading to the exclusion of all other considerations. If what you read proves to be consuming interest, the desired concentration will be achieved without any effort on your part. If the material lacks such attraction to you, you may have to work consciously to obtain the concentration needed to increase the speed of your reading.

Ordinarily a writer’s ideas, his sense, will be conveyed to you satisfactorily if you allow your eyes to be stopped only by the nouns and verbs, and, sometimes, conjunctions, as you glance along the printed line. Unless the matter is technical or otherwise difficult, a good reader can read a three-and-one-half to four-inch line on a book page in two or three eye stops. The superior reader can read many such lines at one glance.

Most of the highest forms of literature, of course, cannot be enjoyed in this way; for in the highest forms of literature the way in which a thing is said, is more important than the thing that is said, or, rather, the way in which a thing is said is the necessary, the essential, part of what is said: the saying and the thing said are one. There may be other ways of expressing something approximately; but there is always only one way of expressing it definitely, finally—and that is the way the artists in words try to express it and sometimes succeed.

The literary work that was the greatest single influence in the formation and development of English prose was the King James Ver-
sion of the Bible. The translation was the collaborative effort of 54 men who based their translation upon the previous work of St. Jerome, John Wyclif, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, William Whittington and other translators, rather than upon the original or derived texts of the original Hebrew. The oldest Hebrew text of the Old Testament has been lost; it has been lost more than a thousand years, for the oldest Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament that has come to light dates from the 19th century A.D. No one knows exactly in what form the story of creation as it appears in the Book of Genesis was first conceived and expressed; and, inasmuch as vowels were not used in Hebrew documents until about the 7th century A.D., the earliest form of the Book of Genesis cannot be known by us.

The 54 translators commissioned by King James did a remarkable thing for men of great learning; they abjured the very hallmarks of their learning (i.e., Latin forms and syntax) and made their translation in the simple, colloquial, "vulgar" (i.e., common) speech of the day—the language of the people. Hitherto English verse, particularly the early ballads, had used this language of the common people, but English prose had been heavy with Latin expressions, for Latin prose had long been used by the learned instead of English prose, and even after an English vocabulary had begun to be adopted by prose writers they clung to Latin syntax. The translator of the King James Version of the Bible emancipated English prose from Latinity.

This version, being, as it was, a synthesis in English of other translations, was not a literal or exact rendering of the known Hebrew texts. Not until our own time, specifically not until 1927, when an American translation of the Old Testament was published by the University of Chicago Press under the editorship of J. M. Powis Smith, has there been an exact rendering of the Hebrew text.

This exact rendering of the opening words of the Book of Genesis, as translated by Theophile J. Meek, reads:

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth being a desolate waste, with darkness covering the abyss and the spirit of God hovering over the water, then God said,

"Let there be light!"

And there was light; and God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness night. Evening came, and morning, the first day.

Is that not dry, juiceless and uninspired in comparison with these magnificent words of the King James Version?:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light day, and the darkness he called Night.

And the evening and the morning were the first day.

This King James Version has the four elements designated by Aristotle as requisite for good style: compactness, balance, metaphor and rhythm. The language is not metrical, for that would make it verse, not prose; but it has rhythm with appropriate and satisfying variations of the stressed syllables. This exalted beginning of an exalted work has an anacrusis in the very first line, as if a "Hush!" has been said and a slight pause made before the music begins. An anacrusis is a term in prosody denoting one or more unaccented syllables before the regular rhythm makes its appearance or, as in this case, before the theme word, accented, appears.

Without a pedantic analysis any reader can see that the King
James Version is compact where the literal version is diffuse, and that it has balance where the balance of the first sentence of the modern version is thrown out of kilter by the use of what grammarians call the “fused participle” in the phrase “the earth being a desolate waste”. Although this phrase is within the sentence, it is dangling there; for the word “earth” has no predicate but only a modifier in the form of a phrase “being a desolate waste.” The fused or dangling participle is universally condemned by advocates of good usage as a corrupt and corrupting mode of expression.

As to the third of Aristotle’s requirements for good style—metaphor—we have a beautiful use of it in the King James Version in the expression “darkness was upon the face of the deep” instead of the literal “darkness covered the abyss.” A metaphor is the application of a descriptive term to an object to which it is not strictly applicable. The “deep” or the “abyss” has no “face”, properly speaking: it has only “exterior” or “appearance”, so the translators here used a metaphor that is doubly happy in that by saying “darkness was upon the face of the deep” they convey a hint of the expression that is on the face of a person when that person is unhappy, unsatisfied or in sorrow, and they also avoid the more formal word “aspect” from the Latin aspectus and use instead the Old English derivation of the colloquial Latin word facies, which was a condensation of res facere or “to make things.”

It is quite unnecessary, however, to be adept in rhetorical analysis in order to appreciate good writing, whether of prose or of verse; for literary appreciation is largely instinctive and, after the instincts of appreciation have been developed and cultivated by much reading of good books, one may well forget all the machinery of analysis and no longer remember the definitions of such terms as “enthymeme,” “syncope,” “periphrasis” and “metonymy.” William Dean Howells once said that he could write a passably good sentence but he could not recall any of the rules of grammar. It is safe to say, however, that if he had never formally drilled himself in those very rules of grammar until they had become a part of him to be used instinctively, he had read so much that good usage had been drilled into him subconsciously, otherwise he would not have been able to write “a passably good sentence.”

Comprehension of what you read depends upon the degree of attention you give to what you are reading. This is true of memory also. Memory is governed by nothing except the power of attention. If your power of attention is absolute in relation to any given piece of writing, it will be indelibly etched upon your memory. Happily there is little occasion for one to exercise this absolute power of attention; for one has no need or desire to remember verbatim most of the things one reads; it suffices that one remembers the substance, if the substance is worth remembering. (In the realm of simple diversion or light reading it is not desirable that one should remember for any length of time even the substance of what is read; for to do so would clutter the memory. It is, by the way, my contention that the memory capacity of all men of average brain power is about the same, and that the difference, for instance, between the memory store of the peasant and that of the scholar is only in the kind of things remembered; and that the scholar’s training and practice in the use of a vocabulary have made him articulate about the things he remembers, whereas the peasant’s lack of vocabulary and lack of training and practice cause him to be inarticulate about the things he remembers.

If your vocabulary is limited, it is unwise, I believe for you to look up in a dictionary immediately every word that you encounter that is new and unknown to you. I know that pedagogues have advocated this sort of interrupted reading; but I believe that in practice it not only
destroys the interest in what you are reading but also weakens your capacity to reason out the meaning of a sentence or paragraph. Moreover, I believe that when you interrupt your reading to look up a word in the dictionary you are also likely to forget the definition of the word soon after you have gone back to your reading.

It is far better, I think, to read through a whole chapter, or even a whole book, underlining with a pencil the words you do not know and endeavoring to derive their meaning from the context. Unless your vocabulary is woefully limited, it is not likely that you will miss much of the sense of what the author is trying to convey even if you find a great number of words which are not familiar to you. In fact, if you find an exasperating number of words that are unfamiliar to you in any given piece of literature you can almost automatically set the book down as not worth reading, anyhow, because the author has his thoughts so poorly ordered or else his sense of style is so bad that he has to employ a jargon of many-syllabled and unusual words to express himself.

Trade or professional jargon is villainous when it is employed in writing that is meant for general consumption. That is why lawyers, doctors, metaphysical philosophers and pedants are usually such dreary and futile writers when they offer any disquisition for popular or lay consumption: they are used to the cant or slang (slang, be it noted, can be composed of jawbreaking words as well as of the breezy coinages of the street) of their profession, and they do not know how to express themselves aptly without using it. No matter how long or Latin are the words they use, they are in exactly the same case as the guttersnipe who says, "I ain't going to take no rap in the clink for no rat what would croak a moll for a fin," because he doesn't know how to say, "I won't go to jail as a self-sacrifice to save the sort of man who would kill a woman for five dollars." The lawyer, doctor, or member of any other profession who uses the special terminology or jargon of his profession when he is addressing the layman does so either because his vocabulary is largely limited to the words used in his profession or he is trying to show off, to impress his readers by mystifying them. In either case he is a bad writer; for the aim of all good writing is not to mystify but to make clear, not to confuse the reader, but to please or enlighten him.

If you open a book and find that the writer is trying to impress you with his knowledge of long, unusual words or by his use of foreign phrases, quickly close the book with no sense of loss or of deficiency or of having missed anything; for the author has not learned how to write and perhaps never will, and there is no need for you to offer yourself as a sounding board for his incompetence. But if you discover that the author is demonstrably trying to make you see, or feel, or know, or understand, and is not merely strutting his long words vainly, give him attention even if he occasionally employs a word you do not know the meaning of. Underline the words with a pencil and read on. It is probable that if you give him attention his intention and meaning will become clear to you even if you do not know what a specific word that he has used means. It may turn out that the word is a good one, clarifying and exactly defining, and that you may want to add it to your vocabulary, not merely to recognize it when you meet it again, but to use it.

Read on, then, until you have heard the author out. Then look up the definitions of the words you did not know the meanings of. Observe how the author has used these words; then make up sentences of your own, using the words. Do not hesitate to use them in your conversation if the opportunity arises and your use of them does not stick out like a sore thumb. At first you may not use the words naturally and with ease; you may even call too much attention to them by your first
awkward or overemphasized use of them; but if you can brave the raised eyebrows of friends and acquaintances, the words, with continued usage, will become as natural a part of your vocabulary as the commonest words in it.

NATURAL BORN WRITERS

There are natural born writers, of this I am convinced, just as there are natural-born singers and dancers and acrobats. The grace of expression is as inherent in them as breathing; and they, like the natural-born singers, dancers and acrobats, improve in technique and facility by practice. But they have great qualifications of a writer in the first place: it is born with them and in them.

There are great writers, also, who are not natural-born writers and who, on the contrary, seem to have had to overcome the greatest natural handicaps and constitutional defects to become great writers. Of these certainly Gustave Flaubert, the French master of realism, was one; George Moore, the Irish storyteller, novelist and professional man of letters, was another; and, I believe, Oscar Wilde, the poet, playwright and epigrammatist, was another—although Wilde would probably appear to many people to have had inborn genius. He had—but his genius, I believe, was that of an actor, not of a writer. His great, his legendary dinner-table and drawing-room wit is evidence to me of his genius as an actor (an actor who had the ability to write his own lines, it is true) whereas all of his literary work is that of ingenious contriving, not a natural, inevitable or easy welling up and out of the natural born writer. His most brilliant work, therefore, has the mark of artificiality: all of his work, it seems to me, is the product of the intellect, not of the emotions, mechanically contrived by a superb mechanician, to be sure, but a mechanician nevertheless. And it is the trade of the actor to produce the semblance of emotion and the semblance of living, by artificial or mechanical means, without feeling any emotion whatever.

The natural-born writer achieves his effects often without knowing how or why he achieved them. That is the difference, in the main, between him and the excellent writer who is not naturally born with the gift: the latter is always at great pains to achieve a particular effect; he constructs his sentences with great care; he weighs his words; he looks to every angle, every gadget, of fine workmanship in writing.

The work of the greatest artists in words—the immortal dramatists, poets, storytellers and essayists—comes largely from the subconscious mind. Their minds are stored with great varieties of images, impressions, things seen and felt but long lost to their immediate, conscious memories; and these memories are awakened and unchained subconsciously and almost without direction, and they flow out of the writer’s mind in beauty, in unusual combinations and in certain compelling and exciting strangeness.

The great writer, whether he be a novelist, playwright, poet, essayist or biographer, cannot plan with any degree of exactness what he is going to write; he can merely have a sketch or a notion which will give his subconscious mind a start; after that the characters in his play take on a life of their own, independent of his direction; his people engage in actions and engage in dialogue which he has not foreseen. He may start out to write one thing but, when his subconscious takes over the work, he sees words come out on paper which are a great surprise to him because they are entirely unlike what he started out to write. Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Lucian, Horace, Villon, Rabelais, Cervantes, Montaigne, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Mark Twain are among those who are natural-born writers. They all had that chaos in them that gives birth to dancing stars.
Flaubert I take as a magnificent and monumental example of the great novelist who was not a natural-born writer such as Honore de Balzac unquestionably was. Novels, biographies, short stories, essays, fabulæ, works of popular philosophy, flowed out of Balzac, easily, prodigiously, unedited, uncorrected, unrevised, in an overwhelming stream, from an imagination gargantuanly vital and alive. Balzac published 96 novels and tales. Flaubert's entire literary output was only five novel and three short stories, although from youth to his death in his 50th year he lived a hermitlike bachelor existence devoted exclusively to literature. Balzac was capable of writing a full-length novel in three weeks, and he often had three novels in progress at the same time. Flaubert took seven years in writing "Madame Bovary," another seven years to write "Sentimental Education," and 18 years to write his final version of "The Temptation of St. Anthony."

Literary composition for Flaubert was work so exact, so exciting and so painful, that it is a wonder he ever chose literature as a profession or, having chosen it, continued to pursue it; throughout his voluminous correspondence with Louise Colet and Maxime du Camp his will against the difficulties of writing is constant: He complained that every sentence he wrote was like a laceration of his flesh. He had a mania for the mot juste, or the exact word, and he was not content until he found it, or thought he had found it, had weighed its meaning carefully and then had fitted it into a sentence with the same exquisite care a jeweler employs in adjusting a delicate part to the tiny but perfect mechanism of a finely jeweled watch. He strove to make the image and the rhythm of the sentence in which the image occurred correspond.

This conscientiousness of Flaubert's has been made much of by literary critics, so much, in fact, that they have often been quite absurd about it. "Flaubert is so difficult to translate," wrote Arthur Symons in a highly laudatory essay on Flaubert, "because he has no fixed rhythm; his prose keeps step with no regular march music. He invents the rhythm of every sentence, he changes the cadence with every mood or for the convenience of every fact."

That sounds deeply profound, doesn't it? It is enough to scare the uninstructed away from Flaubert forever. But do not be deterred from reading Flaubert by any such high-sounding nonsense as that. Whatever else Symons may have had in mind, all he says there is that Flaubert wrote prose. It is of the essence of prose that the rhythm of its sentences should be varied, that the cadence should alter with the mood or for the convenience of every fact; otherwise it would not be prose; it would be poetry.

Because Flaubert was not a natural-born writer it is likely that the painful trouble he found it necessary to take in composition was caused by a natural awkwardness in his mode of expression, a defect he had to overcome by care and revision. It does not mean that, as Symons implies, he deliberately set about fitting his thoughts to an arbitrary arrangement of dactyls, spondees, anapests, trochees and iambics. It merely means that any sentence Flaubert would write naturally would be knotty with consonants or cumbersome in form and, therefore, he had to exercise extreme care to carpenter out these blemishes and make his sentences smooth with vowels and easy upon the eye and ear.

George Moore was another writer who had no natural gift for expression but who, nevertheless, by infinite pains, became a stylist who, at his best, is of the first order in English prose. It would appear from an examination of existing original drafts of Moore's writings that, by nature, he was almost incapable of writing a literate sentence. When he first began his literary career he not only did not know how to spell; he did not know those first elementary rules of grammar which are dinned into the unwilling heads of grade-school boys. If he wished
to describe something, the wrong adjective would pop into his head; if
he wished to emphasize something, he would be sure first to write
a sentence in which the greatest stress would fall upon the wrong
word, so that the sentence might very well convey the opposite of
what he wished or meant to say.

To overcome this natural inability to write with ease and grace,
Moore, like Flaubert, dedicated his life and nearly all of his energies
to the business of writing. I suspect he had to, or we should never
have heard of George Moore. We should never have had that beautiful
and astonishing evocation of the Jerusalem and Palestine of the dim
past in “The Brook Kerith.” We should never have had that comical
and endearing picture of Dublin literary life at the time of the teeming
Irish Renaissance, the “Hail and Farewell” trilogy, in which W. B.
Yeats, James Stephens, George Russell, Lady Gregory, Padraic
Colum, John Eglington and the Dublin poets, playwrights and story-
tellers come humanly to life. Like Demosthenes overcoming the orato-
rical handicap of a stutter by speaking to the waves of the Aegean with
pebbles in his mouth, Moore had to overcome an impediment to the
written word by sheer arduous labor, by care, revision, again revision,
and still more revision.

When you read a writer such as Flaubert or a writer such as George
Moore, you will find that, with tortuous trouble to himself, he has
made the way more or less easy for you. So, if you are of a generous,
not a petulant or impatient, nature, you will remember that these
men dedicated their lives, their energies, to please you; that they
forewent many, and perhaps most, of the ordinary joys of life
in order that you might have their contributions to the joys of reading.

Therefore you will give them attention. You will not read them
hastily, ignoring the little points of subtlety, such as a carefully
thought-out metaphor or a sentence inverted for a particular effect;
you will not let your eyes race over their commas without the slight
pause which a comma indicates; you will not ignore their semicolons,
or half stops, within each of which an idea is completed but is related
to a sustained idea from the beginning of the first sentence (as in this
one) to this period or full stop three words away.

If you do not know, or if you have forgotten, what the elementary
textbooks of grammar and rhetoric have to say about the structure of
the sentence, the structure of the paragraph and the structure of the
chapter, or what they have to say about the significance of the com-
ma, the semicolon, the colon, the dash, the parentheses, the brackets
and the full stop, you should brush up your mind by the study of such
textbooks, if you find you have any difficulty in following compound
or complex sentences.

It would make reading easier for all of us if all authors refrained
from using anything except the simple declarative sentences, without
a comma or commas setting off a parenthetical phrase or clause, and
coming pointedly to the full stop. But literature and the enjoyment
of literature would be indefinitely the worst for it; and the monotony
of such a universal use would be so great that after 10 or 20 pages
we should be exhausted.

There is nothing worse on the nerves than a tune played over
and over again unless it be a long succession of simple declarative
sentences. There are authors who can use them without tiring or
exasperating us, and one of these is Anatole France. He abjured the
semicolon as a “bastard stop” and mostly declined to use it. He liked
a short sentence better than a long one. But Anatole France’s mind
was so brilliant, so unusual, that he could use a word in such a way
that it acted as a full stop even if there was no comma or semicolon
or period near it: the word would be such a nice surprise that
you would stop to savor it, and it would not be an unusual word but
merely a usual word used in an unusual way.
Let me give you an example from "Penguin Island" (I use the A. W. Evans translation because, even if Mr. Evans was not a particularly gifted translator, Anatole France wrote with such clarity, simplicity and distinction that his effects cannot be wholly spoiled by any translator):

Draco the Great attained great renown as a man of war. He was defeated more frequently than the others. It is by this constancy in defeat that great captains are recognized.

There are at least two full-stop words in that quotation. They are "defeated" and "constancy." The word "defeated" stops you, because the word you expect is "victor" because of the sentence that precedes the one in which "defeated" is used. If a man is renowned as a man of war you naturally expect that it is because he has won many battles, not because he has been defeated in so many. So your eye is caught by the unexpected use of "defeated" and your mind is stopped to consider it and to savor it and wonder how he is going to explain its use, for you are sure he is going to explain it.

He does—in the next sentence. He doesn't say that great captains attain their renown by being defeated in war; for that would be flat and incredible, and it would appear as if the real explanation were lacking. France says that it is by "constancy" in defeat that great captains are recognized. "Constancy" there is a full-stop word because it is so apt, so amusing and so explanatory. By the insertion of that noun a strange thing happens: a statement that is unconvincing without it suddenly would become more emphatically untrue or unconvincing by being emphasized. But observe Anatole France's result. He has made an observation about the foibles of human nature and about the way things often turn in this life which, although it may not be true in some given instance, is rather true in general. There is no doubt whatever that even Napoleon exists as a great general in the popular mind not because of his victories at Jena, Austerlitz or Marengo but because of his defeat at Waterloo.

**ON MAKING NOTES AND MARGINAL COMMENTS**

The joy experienced in reading a fine work of literature that is owned by somebody else from whom you have borrowed it is, somehow, not quite the same, not quite as deep, as the joy experienced in reading the same book when you own it, when it is yours to read not in haste but at will, to read and reread as the mood prompts you, to look upon as something that is not only yours but a part of you, that contains a reflection of your essential self or embodies your most exalted feelings, your deepest aspirations.

And such a book, even if you own it, is never really quite your book until you have underscored passages in it that you have liked or disagreed with and have made pencil notes in the margins. You cannot, or at least you should not, do this with a borrowed book, a book taken from the shelves of a public library, or a book from a renting library. It is not right for you to underscore passages or make marginal notations on such a book; for not only do you thus deface property which does not belong to you, but you have also interjected your personality between the author and other readers of the book.

You know how this is so when you have come across a public-library book in which there are the underscorings and notes of someone else. Your eye catches these markings and the passages the very first thing, and they distract your attention from the other parts of the page which you have not read. If you have been enjoying a book up to a point where you encounter these pencillings and your eye has
been jerked by them from the orderly presentation of the author's ideas, the effect upon you is like that when someone rudely breaks in upon and interrupts a charming discourse to which you have been attentively listening. Your first instinctive reaction is at least one of resentment and anger; your passions are thus called into action when you mind has been composed and peaceful or when, if your emotions had been aroused by the author, those emotions had not yet been allowed to run their normal course. You cannot brook this rudeness; let the interrupter be as brilliant, as witty, as engaging as you like, still he is an interrupter, and his action is a discourtesy; he is a boor, and his act, though all right when staged at the proper place and time, has here a hint of indignity, even of indecency, in it.

"Indecency"? Ah yes, that unpleasant word is there in its proper place and usage; for, although undressing is a necessary daily ritual, it is a private one and it becomes an indecency when it is performed in public. You undrape your mind when you underscore a passage or write upon the margin of a page; this is an intimate act and should not be subjected to the view of others. It is a private communication you have with the author by whom you have been pleased or with whom you are in dispute. This communication is usually cryptic, in a kind of shorthand of your own, sometimes legible or comprehensible only to yourself. It is therefore a further offense when it is written in a book you do not own, for it makes you come before the reader and between him and the author not merely as an annoyance but as an enigma also.

Buy books, then, that you have read with profit and pleasure and hope to read and reread. Buy books that you may underscore passages and write upon the margins, thus assuring yourself that the book is your own. Keep the books that mean the most to you close at hand, one or two, if possible, on a table at your bedside. Do not hide away your favorite books or keep them locked in enclosed shelves. Do not keep them under glass.

This last injunction against keeping your favorite books under glass brings to my mind at this point a necessary digression. There is no necessary connection nowadays between the term "bibliophile" and the term "lover of literature," although the Greek compound from which the word "bibliophile" is derived means a lover of books, i.e., a lover of literature. Although there are some lovers of literature among the bibliophiles nowadays bibliophiles are, in the main, collectors of rare and first editions, books in fine bindings and books which are costly for one reason or another and bought as items of conspicuous luxury like jewels and ermine coats or bought as a speculation against an expected rise in price.

Such books as these are, of course, not bought to be read. In the catalogues advertising them, it is often specified that the pages are uncut, therefore commanding a higher price than the same books with the pages cut. Sometimes the bibliophiles who invest in these items of rarity are like misers with their gold: they fondle them possessively and enjoy great satisfaction over owning things of such great value; but, like the misers, they make no further use of them.

Collecting books without reference to their contents and with reference only to their monetary value or their rarity, which is represented by monetary evaluation, is a harmless enough hobby so long as it is not confused with the enjoyment of literature; but it seems to me an eminently vulgar vice when it is practiced by men who care nothing about literature as literature, and who read no books, not even the books they collect. Let us permit such "bibliophiles" to employ their time and money like stock-exchange gamblers who neither know nor care anything about the industries in the securities of which they speculate; but let us never confuse their activities with a serious concern for the things of the mind and spirit.
There is nothing more decorative for the home than shelves filled with books. New books should be kept in their dust jackets until these paper coverings are dirty and torn, for modern dust jackets are in a variety of colors, and it will be found that the variegated colors of the jackets of new books do not jangle but give a pleasing and lively effect to the decorative scheme of a room.

Rare, costly, "untouchable" books may be, and probably should be, kept under glass and under lock and key; but other books should be on open shelves in the home. They should be easy of access. Their titles should be easily visible as your eye roam along the shelves; for in this way you will find yourself taking down a book you have not read in a long time or which you have been meaning to read and, then and there, sitting down to read it. If your books are behind glass doors or under lock and key you will rarely have this impulse. In fact, a book which you own that is hard to get at is, for all intents and purposes, lost to you. You may own it for years and be aware that you have it, but you will not be seized with an impulse to read it; it will not be in a place or position to invite you to read it. Good books should be on your own open shelves tantalizing you to take them down and read them.

And as you read your own books in your home, you should have a pencil handy to underscore passages which impress you as being worth remembering and that are especially well expressed, or passages about which you may wish to register a disagreement with the author by a marginal notation, or to add to what you have learned from the author something that occurs to you.

Books of light entertainment may be read rapidly in the manner I have suggested elsewhere; but the more distinguished works of literature should be read slowly. Lane Cooper, in his fruitful work, "Two Views of Education" has these well-stated suggestions about serious reading:

"The process of making monotonous black characters on the page vividly stir the latent sense-perceptions is relatively slow and irksome. Few people have ever learned to do it consistently; and hence, it is fair to say, few have ever truly learned to read. The moral is, read slowly. Take ample time. Pause where the punctuation bids one pause; note each and every comma; wait a moment between a period and the next capital letter. And pause when sense bids you pause, that is, when you have not understood. As the lines of sentences come filing before the window of your soul, examine each individual expression with the animus, and more than the animus, you would maintain were you paying-teller in a bank: saying to yourself continually, "Do I know this word?" and "What is this phrase worth?" Toward what they say in print, many people, otherwise shrewd and sensible, are strangely credulous; what they find in a book they instinctively think must be true. Yet books are not more trustworthy than the men who write them; the number of misguided and misleading books is infinite. Good books are rare."

Professor Cooper enjoins us to read aloud (when one can, of course, in company or to a friend or to a member of one’s family); to read slowly; to read suspiciously. . . And, to reread. "The best-read man," he says, "is the one who has oftenest read the best things; who goes through Homer, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and the Bible once a year." I should omit Dante and Milton from these requirements unless one is attracted to Dante and Milton on first reading them; but I defer to a fine scholar and fine teacher, the quality of whose mind and the grace of whose writings I admire so much. Dr. Cooper points out that if one should make it a point to turn at least 10 pages (and no more) of the best literature every day, that would
make 3,650 pages every year, "which is about equivalent to Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and the Old Testament in texts or versions easily accessible." And 10 pages of reading, even slow and digressive reading, means about 20 minutes a day!

And to what end should thus devote these 20 minutes every day in the year? What good comes of this use of time? How does it profit a man or woman to read 3,650 pages of the best literature a year? Lane Cooper has answered these questions so succinctly and so pertinently that I cannot forbear to quote him:

"Good reading enables a man to work more freely and sanely and rapidly in his special vocation. This is not fancy, but solid fact. General reading is an act of recuperation . . . Good reading nourishes and builds up the worn tissues of the mind . . . We have heard about the old ideal of education: "a sound mind in a sound body." Reconstructed to meet the conditions of the present day, this ideal should be stated thus: a specifically trained mind, in a well nourished soul, in a healthy frame . . . such a man will not often be troubled by fear. From the Greeks down, the greatest poets and critics have been almost unanimous in recognizing that a primary function of the best literature is to release men from fear, to imbue them with an exalted and reverent courage . . . Fear is the subtle and destructive enemy of all original thought and action, of that personal independence which every man must preserve if he is to be deemed free. Little as men realize it, the atmosphere they live in is supercharged with an infectious terror, blighting their personal happiness, thwarting their services to the commonwealth. In the long run, the most potent of all incentives and deterrents with respect to individual action is the fear of what others may say or think. And thus men live so continuously in a state of anxiety, which is another name for fear, that they are not aware of the disease. They believe, because it is common, that it is a state of health. Yet is it both chronic and vulgar. The anxiety to be like other people, only bigger and richer, is, like nearly all the forms of fear, unspeakably vulgar; as vulgar now as when Aristotle observed that epic poetry and tragedy, in the hands of Homer and Sophocles, gave men pleasure by relieving them of certain disturbing emotions, one of which is fear. The antidote to individual and communal fear may be had in a few volumes."

HOW TO JUDGE LITERARY VALUES

You will not have progressed far in the enjoyment of good literature before you will have found that good critics are creators, and you will be going to them for help in increasing your understanding and enjoyment. Muttonheads of minor talent have been known to disparge criticism as the occupation of disappointed artists; but if you inquire into the reason for this disparagement you will discover, usually, that some honest critic has been able to observe that the "creator's" talent is meager, imitative and without distinction and has offended the "creator" by exercising his function as a critic and saying so.

There are bad critics, just as there are bad artists, of course; but as your ability to discern good and bad qualities in art develops, so will your ability to distinguish between good and bad critics develop. Critical shoddiness is as apparent to the person of cultivation as the shoddy in art, perhaps even more readily apparent, for criticism is expository and analytical and therefore must depend upon logic which has simple, fundamental rules, whereas all of the greatest art is the expression of idiosyncrasy, the idiosyncrasy of genius, which is necessarily illogical.
You must ponder and get used to the paradox that all great art in literature, in music, in painting is, from the common and commonplace point of view, absurd, that is “contrary to reason; inconsistent with plain common sense.” Critical opinion, to be good, dare not be absurd; but the high merit of the last act of the greatest of all Shakespearean plays, “King Lear,” lies precisely in the absurdity of those speeches being made by the given characters in the given circumstances: therein is the essence of tragic emotion. “Alice in Wonderland,” “Don Quixote,” “Gulliver’s Travels,” the “Odyssey” are all absurd from the point of view of logic; but the authors have created in each of these masterpieces a logic of their own, transcendent and sublime.

The critic who is called upon professionally to pass judgment currently on books just off the press is rarely impelled to bring to the aid of his judgment the severest standards governing great literary art. His function is largely to infect you with his own enthusiasm for what he has read or to warn you against the defects and limitations of the writer, to acquaint you with the nature of the book and to give you an idea of the quality of the author’s mind and talent. To apply the principles of Aristotle or Lessing to “Gone With the Wind” or “You Can’t Take It With You,” the Pulitzer prize winners in the fields of the novel and the drama, would be so grotesque a misapplication as in itself to be a violation of the principles of Aristotle and Lessing.

Yet from that great and still unsurpassed exposition of first principles in art, the “Rhetoric” of Aristotle, come even those few rules which it is permissible for the critic or reviewer to have in mind when giving an account of a new book or a new play. Thus Aristotle says that “a good composition will have an air of novelty,” hence it will not be, in our colloquial idiom, “old stuff.” He reminds us, too, that the sincerity of the author has nothing whatever to do with the sincerity of art; for the author may be thoroughly sincere and yet be a fool and a sentimentalist, and therefore the very product of his sincerity will be foolish and sentimental: he will use inappropriate poetic terms and bad figures of speech in an attempt to give a tragic or pathetic effect, and he will succeed only in making the audience laugh. It is essential to good style, Aristotle says, that emotion and character be expressed in a language in proportion to the subject. “By proportion,” Aristotle says, “is meant that weighty matters shall not be treated in a slipshod way, nor trivial matters in a solemn way; nor should ornamental epithets be attached to commonplace nouns, or the effect will be comic.”

The literature of criticism and of critical analysis is vast, and it should form an important part in one’s progress in cultivation. I believe that the young should be introduced as quickly as possible to such classics of literature as they have capacity to enjoy and to their directly, without their being informed of what great critics and other writers have said about them: they should not be prejudiced or apprised of what they should get out of the classics by reading introductions or prefaces, nor should they be asked to answer silly questions about the author’s use of words, the exact dates of the author’s birth and death and other irrelevancies with which misguided pedagogues plague schoolboys and thereby tend to kill early and forever whatever interest in good literature schoolboys might develop of themselves.

But after one has been exposed to good literature and the pleasant infection has set in, books of criticism and analysis will deepen their enthusiasm for literature, enable them to appreciate beauties they had not perceived before, enrich their experience and give them a new joy in reading—the joy of reading the creative critics.

The virtue of the critic is his ability to communicate to the reader a curiosity about, and an enthusiasm for, books of merit. An
essential quality in any work of literature is that of aliveness—and it is an aliveness that is perpetual and immortal; for Sappho, Horace, Lucian, Montaigne, Cervantes, Villon are as alive today as when they lived. All good works of literature also have in them that element of strangeness which is necessary to beauty and is the result of the individuality of the author. They have also the force and power to evoke the emotions, exalt the sentiments, cause the mind to reflect. A great writer can triumph over many defects that would be intolerable in a lesser writer. Balzac’s style was often slipshod, his sentences awkward, his metaphors and similes undistinguished; but Balzac was a great novelist in spite of this, because his imagination was so fertile and abundant. Theodore Dreiser earned the right to write slovenly sentences because the cumulative effect of what he had to say had breadth and depth and power. The rules of rhetoric, the principles of art, indeed, have their great value as standards, but they are not to be finically applied, for there has never been a great genius in literature who has not brushed many of them unheedingly aside.

AUTHORS: A GOSSIP ON THEIR WAYS OF LIFE AND WORK

“Genius,” once wrote Guy de la Bauchardiere, “is a deformity like a clubfoot. Possession of genius does not prevent a man from being an imbecile in other respects.”

Authors are people. Take them away from their books and you have as miscellaneous a lot of rogues and heroes as ever tormented or ennobled the human race. Except for their books there is no way to classify them. Not by habitat or social position, not by character or reputation or ability in other fields. They come out of garrets and basements and even, occasionally, palaces. They stay exactly where they and born and they travel to the ends of the earth; in imagination they range the universe.

They come from cities and farms, the desert and the sea, from pulpits and ribbon counters and prisons and parliaments and slums. They live on breadcrusts and caviar. They are scholars, physicians, lawyers, thieves, drug addicts, liars, and even murderers. They are violent propagandists, they despise art, they devote their lives to art for art’s sake. They live happily and unhappily with their own or someone else’s husband or wife. They die magnificently for their principles.

They write in agony and bitterness and despair, in joy and peace and exaltation. They write to amuse themselves, to reform the world, to become rich and famous. They write because they cannot help themselves, and when they die they are buried in paupers’ graves and Westminster Abbey. When histories of literature are written about them the historians pick their way carefully through the wreckage, lest young minds be damaged by too violent contact with life, for there is no thing that the rest of mankind has done that authors have not done. With this difference: authors write about it afterwards. And with this further difference: some of them do not bother to do anything, they just write.

Men began writing—that is, they began composing poems and stories—even before they had an alphabet, but there is still no way to predict where the gift for writing will fall—until after it has fallen. As Kipling has expressed it, “If I tinker in Bedford gaol; if a pamphleteering shopkeeper, pilloried in London; if a muzzy Scot; if a despised German Jew; or a condemned French thief, or an English Admiralty official with a taste for letters can be miraculously afflicted with the magic of the necessary word, why not any man at any time?” (Readers will hardly need to be reminded that he is referring in the order named to Bunyan, Defoe, Boswell, Heine, Villon and Pepys.) There have been famous writing families like the Brontes and the
Rossetti and, in more recent times, the Sitwells, the Waughes, the Bensons, and the Powyses, but the gift seems not to come by inheri-
tance. George Meredith was the son of a tailor, Charles Dickens of a
government clerk. Chaucer was the son of an upholsterer, Defoe of a
butcher, Rousseau of a watchmaker. Hans Andersen was the son of a
cobbler, Oliver Goldsmith of an obscure Irish clergyman, E. F. Ben-
son of the late archbishop of Canterbury. Erskine Caldwell's father
preaches in Wrens, Ga., Dante, Wordsworth and Galsworthy were sons
of lawyers. Olive Schreiner was, and Pearl Buck is, the daughter of
missionaries. Keats's father kept a livery stable. Hall Gaine's father
was a blacksmith, Anatole France's father was a bookseller. Christopher
Morley's father is a professor of higher mathematics. Rabindranath
Tagore was the son of a prince. Ivan Bunin is a member of the late
Russian nobility. So was Tolstoi. The British peerage has contributed
such names as Byron and Bertrand Russell, among others.

Yet it would be rash to say that the gift does not occasionally
descend by inheritance. Else how shall we account for William and
Henry James and their sister Alice, all of whom showed literary traits
in direct line with those of their remarkable father? A glance at the
ancestry of Aldous Huxley seems to indicate that for him a writing
career was inescapable. His father was Leonard Huxley, editor, poet,
and biographer. His grandfather was Thomas Huxley, no less famous for
his magnificent contributions to science than for the magnificent words
in which he clothed them. His mother was Julia Arnold, niece of
Matthew Arnold and sister of Mrs. Humphrey Ward, whose "Robert
Elsmere," published in 1888, was one of the sensations of its time.

Virginia Woolf is another who seemed destined for authorship.
She was the daughter of the late Sir Leslie Stephens, first editor of
the great British Dictionary of National Biography. James Russell
Lowell was her godfather, and her childhood was blessed by intimate
contact with such men as George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, John Mor-
ley, James Bryce and Edmund Gosse. Her older sister, Vanessa, married
Clive Bell, the art critic; she herself married Leonard Woolf, novelist
and editor. Her friends were such authors as E. M. Forster, V.
Sackville-West, the late John Maynard Keynes, and the late Lytton
Strachey.

David Garnett is another. His father is Edward Garnett, celebrated
not only as an author but as a discoverer of other authors (e. g., Joseph
Conrad). His mother is Constance Garnett, to whose beautiful trans-
lations many great Russian novelists owe much of their reputation
in English-speaking countries. Edward Garnett's grandfather and
father were in turn assistant keeper and keeper of printed books
in the library of the British Museum. David is probably the only really
promising young author to whom his father never gave a word of
encouragement in his apprentice days, but he wanted the family to get
away from books. So David set out to be a botanist, discovered a new
species of mushroom, went to war, came back home and started a
bookshop, and, in 1923, at the age of 33, published his first book, "Lady
into Fox." There was no use in his trying to be anything but an
author.

For the Waughes, Alec and Evelyn, writing careers might have been
predicted. Their father is Arthur Waugh, author and critic, chairman
of the well-known London publishing house, Chapman and Hall
(which first sponsored Dickens) and author of "A Hundred Years
of Publishing." Richard Harding Davis inherited his talent from his
mother, Rebecca Harding. W. B. Maxwell's mother was M. E. Braddon,
novelist. Albert Payson Terhune's mother was Marion Harland, whose
name was nationally famous for novels and cook-books. Samuel Taylor
Coleridge had a son, Hartley, whose name is remembered in nearly
all collections of poetry. Nathaniel Hawthorne left a son, Julian, and
a daughter, Hildgarde, both of whom were possessed with more than
ordinary literary talent. Joel Chandler Harris’ son, Julian, has distinguished himself as a journalist. We might continue with this type of thing indefinitely, but in the end we should reach the same two conclusions: (1) literary talent is inherited; (2) literary talent is not inherited.

The fact that biographers of authors nearly always find manuscripts (mostly published) in the trunks and attics of their ancestors is not conclusive evidence that even the instinct for writing is handed down from one generation to the next. The same kinds of manuscripts could probably be found in the trunks and attics of ancestors of butchers and truck drivers and bankers and lawyers and bakers. There are few of us who have not had aunts or grandmothers who once thought they could write poetry and tried their hand at it.

“A literary man,” said Oliver Goldsmith, “is no better than another, so far as my experience goes; and a man writing a book, no better nor no worse than one who keeps accounts in a ledger, or follows any other occupation.”

Many authors do follow other occupations. Goldsmith himself was a publisher’s hack, and while this involved writing, it was not the writing he wanted most to do. Some of our finest books have been written by men and women whose primary job was something else. “Alice in Wonderland” is a book of this kind. The author, Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), was a professor of mathematics at Oxford. Three other classics for children were written by a spare-time author: “The Golden Age,” “Dream Days,” and “The Wind in the Willows” by Kenneth Grahame, secretary to the Bank of England. Walter de la Mare went into the office of the Anglo-American Oil Company as bookkeeper in 1890 and remained there for 18 years. Much of his best poetry was written during this period. Charles Lamb stayed with the East India Company as an accountant for 33 years, writing his famous essays (including the series of “Essays of Elia”) after office hours.

John Burroughs wrote his first book, “Wake Robin,” which is one of his best, while he was a government clerk in Washington. Edgar Lee Masters as a young lawyer wrote the “ Spoon River Anthology” between telephone calls and other interruptions on slack Saturday afternoons. Edith Wharton wrote “Summer” in the midst of active work for the soldiers during the World War. A. Edward Newton did his writing and book collecting in the time that was left after he had fulfilled his duties as president of the Cutter Electric Company.

Longfellow and Lowell, William James and George Santayana are remembered as college professors as well as authors. Santayana has resigned from academic work but happily is still writing. Stephen Leacock was a professor of political economy at McGill University in Montreal. Robert Frost has taught at Amherst and at the University of Michigan. The names of William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti are enrolled in histories of art as well as in histories of poetry. The fact that William Hazlitt was also a painter is better forgotten; he would wish it to be. But Benjamin Robert Haydon hoped to be remembered for his gigantic canvases and is remembered almost solely as the author of one of the few really first-rate autobiographies in English.

Diplomacy since the time of Chaucer, who served in three or four embassies, has been an honored calling for men of letters. Distinguished Americans who belong in this roll include Washington Irving, James Russell Lowell, William Dean Howells, Thomas Nelson Page, Walter Hines Page, Robert Underwood Johnson, Brand Whitlock, and more recently Claude Bowers and Meredith Nicholson. Englishmen who have served recently include Maurice Baring, Bertrand Russell and Harold Nicholson. No doubt two Frenchmen be forgotten, M. Jusserand and M. Paul Claudel, two of America’s favorite ambassadors.
Pierre Loti was a naval officer. Hawthorne worked in the Salem customs house. Rabelais and Sir Thomas Browne were physicians. Schnitzler gave up a successful practice to have more time for writing. Keats, Conan Doyle, Chekhov and Somerset Vaughan set out to be doctors. A. P. Herbert, Emil Ludwig, John Galsworthy, Philip Guedalla, and Francis Hackett began as lawyers. Robert Burns was a tax collector. Stuart Chase was a public accountant. P. G. Wodehouse tried to be a banker. Joseph Lincoln worked in a broker's office. Robert Nathan in an advertising agency. Those fiction writers who received part of their training on newspapers include Zona Gale, Edna Ferber, Ring Lardner, Ben Hecht, Irvin S. Cobb, Vincent Sheean, Floyd Dell, Ernest Hemingway and Katherine Brush.

Theodore Dreiser edited a woman's magazine. So did Arnold Bennett. Paul Green was a cotton picker. Booth Tarkington served in the Indiana legislature. Mary Roberts Rinehart began as a nurse. Archibald MacLeish, Stark Young, Thornton Wilder, Hugh Walpole, Erich Remarque and Hervey Allen taught school. David Garnett, Lynn Riggs and Paul Engle worked in bookshops. Knut Hamsun was a longshoreman, a motorman on a streetcar in Chicago, a dairymen and a lecturer on French literature. John Masefield worked in a saloon in Greenwich Village. George S. Kaufman was a stenographer for the Pittsburgh Coal Company. Sinclair Lewis was subeditor for a magazine for teachers of the deaf. Dorothy Parker wrote captions for a fashion magazine. Sean O'Casey was a hod carrier and a stone breaker. Carl Sandburg drove a milk wagon, shifted scenes in a theater, and worked as carpenter's assistant, house painter, and janitor. Sigrid Undset served for 10 years as a secretary in a lawyer's office. James Joyce ran the first motion picture theater in Dublin. Thomas Mann and Eden Phillpotts worked for fire-insurance companies. Thomas Hardy and Hall Caine set out as architects. Robert W. Chambers wanted to be a sculptor, and Owen Wister wanted to be a musician. Mark Twain was a pilot on the Mississippi, and when he went back to the great river to get material for "Life on the Mississippi" he said, "I'd rather be a pilot than anything else I've ever done in my life."

In their hobbies and recreations authors follow as diverse patterns as those traced by any other group of people. G. B. Shaw in the British Who's Who lists under Recreation: "anything except sport." Hugh Walpole listed walking and talking as his favorites. Phyllis Bottome declares herself for reading, conversation and travel. Zane Grey held several world records for landing big fish. Ernest Hemingway is another deep-sea fisherman, with a taste on the side for bullfighting. Mary Roberts Rinehart is a noted sportswoman. Edith Wharton was an expert gardener. Virginia Woolf's hobby, printing, was closely allied with her work as a writer. Gertrude Stein collected paintings. Ellis Parker Butler collected stamps. T. S. Stribling likes golf and chess. James Joyce found his recreation in singing. Other authors with an interest in music include Konrad Bercovicz, Willa Cather, Rupert Hughes, Margaret Kennedy, Vicki Baum, Robert Nathan, Robert Hichens, Erich Maria Remarque, Louis Untermeyer, Agatha Christie, and Romain Rolland, who said that he composed his books like a musician and not, as most authors do, like a painter.

Hobbies are adopted by choice, but many authors have no choice when it comes to working at other jobs besides their writings. It has always been difficult for them to support themselves with their pens (the ancients did not even try; they wrote only for fame), but authors must eat and somebody must supply the food. Patrons used to do it, but authors were apt to find it difficult to keep their patrons and their self-respect too. Virgil and Horace were fortunate in having Maecenas, who seems to have known something about the springs from which poetry rises, but Maecenas was equally fortunate in having Virgil and
Horace. He wanted poets to sing the glories of the Augustan age, and those two were willing to do it.

The patron was usually a man who had made or inherited money; he was himself seldom a creator and often had little sympathy with the perversities of the creative mind. If the author's output remained up to expectations (or rose higher) the patron was satisfied, but if the author found himself biting his thumbs and trying to think of something to write, he was apt to find himself without a patron. When the author reached the gutter, the patron dropped him. Coleridge's patron dropped him there; a friend picked him up.

As to the financial rewards of literature, Coleridge once wrote in advice to would-be authors, "the beginning, middle and end converge to one charge: never follow literature as a trade. The italics are his. He said that with one exception (probably Wordsworth) he had never known a man, least of all a man of genius, who could be healthy or happy without regular employment. He was addressing men of genius, and he pointed out that while talent did not include genius, genius did include talent. Therefore a man of genius, if he be wise, will "devote his talents to the acquirement of competence in some known trade or profession, and his genius to objects of his tranquil and unbiased choice." He felt that it was good for an author—good for his books as well as for his mental and spiritual life—to work in a factory or counting house, to practice as a lawyer or physician, to follow a profession or trade of some kind, to have a family and live and write in the midst of it. To prove that a distinguished literary life was not incompatible with parallel distinction in another field he cited, among others, Cicero and Xenophon, Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon, and referred to, but did not call by name, the great clergymen whose names are imperishably a part of the history of English literature: Robert Herrick and John Donne, Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne. No one (except critics and journalists) in France who is without private means ever thinks of pursuing literature as a vocation, so small is the margin on books and so slight the financial reward even of popularly successful authorship.

"Whatever be the profession or trade chosen," wrote Coleridge, "the advantages are many and important, compared with the state of a mere literary man, who in any degree depends on the sale of his works for the necessaries and comforts of life. In the former a man lives in sympathy with the world in which he lives. At least he acquires a better and quicker tact for the knowledge of that, with which men in general can sympathize. He learns to manage his genius more prudently and efficaciously. His powers and acquirements gain him likewise more real admiration; for they surpass the legitimate expectations of others. He is something besides an author, and is not therefore considered merely an author. The hearts of men are open to him, as to one of their own class, and whether he exerts himself or not in the conversational circles of his acquaintance, his silence is not attributed to pride, nor his communicativeness to vanity. To these advantages I will venture to add a superior chance of happiness in domestic life . . ."

Fine, brave, sensible words, and Coleridge meant them, every one. He was about 45 years old when he wrote them and as a poet already burned out. He was estranged from his wife and most of his friends. He had for many years been under the influence of opium and at intervals been saved from starvation only through the charity of friends. He was by way of becoming a derelict when he was saved insofar as he could be saved by one of these men for whom, like Severn, who took care of Keats, and William Newton, the landlord who looked after Haydon, there must be reserved a special place in heaven. This was Dr. James Gillman, a surgeon of Highgate, London, with whom Coleridge
came to live in 1816 and with whom he remained until his death in 1834. Here he was surrounded by care and thoughtfulness, here he wrote some of his best critical work, and here, out of the fullness of his heart, he wrote, or at least published, his "affectionate exhortation" to literary young men.

The "mere literary man." To most authors there is an invidious meaning in the word "literary." It smells too much of the lamp and affectation. When Carl Sandburg said of Julia Peterkin that she was the only writer he knew who was not a literary person, he meant it as a compliment. Mark Twain despised the purely literary man, and we have it on the high authority of his biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, that "from the very beginning Mark Twain's home meant always more to him than his work." Whitman said, "No one will get my verses who insists upon viewing them as literary performances or as aiming towards art and aestheticism." Booth Tarkington always had a horror of being thought "literary."

"I am not a man of letters," Blasco Ibanez used to boast. "I prefer to live my novels rather than write them on paper." He lived a hundred novels and managed more than 40 on paper. One of them was "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

"I am just a yarn-spinner. I am not what you fellows call a literary man," said E. Phillips Oppenheim, whose grand total of books is more than 120 volumes.

It may be worth adding that Shakespeare was not a literary man. Nor, though he was a scholar, was Milton. Milton has always been a source of distress to admirers of "pure" poetry. He began wonderfully at an early age he deliberately set out to prepare himself to be a poet and retired to the country to fit himself for it. This preparation resulted in "L' Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Comus," and other poems of almost equal beauty. Then he traveled abroad, receiving from scholars (including Galileo, whom he visited in prison) the sort of welcome they thought fitting for so distinguished a member of their fraternity. He had an income sufficient for his needs (this, alas, is something that most poets must have), and there was no reason why he should not continue to the end of his days as a poet and scholar—no reason except his Puritan conscience.

Word of the Civil War called Milton back to England. "I thought it base to be traveling for amusement abroad," he said, "when my fellow citizens were fighting for liberty at home." The next 20 years of his life he gave to the fight, abandoning poetry for prose (except for occasional sonnets) and writing vigorously in favor of church reform, parliamentary rights, divorce, education and freedom of the press, risking his life and ruining his eyesight in the cause of the Commonwealth. It was not until blindness and the Restoration forced him into retirement that he went back to poetry again. It is the Milton of this period who is most familiar: "blind, old, and lonely," as he sits in darkness dictating to his half-comprehending daughters the great cathedral music of "Paradise Lost."

Writing is not a substitute for living any more than books are a substitute for life; in the end an author's books must come out of his own experience, whether it is real, vicarious or imaginative. There is no other source. The complete disembodied author does not exist. Writers may withdraw from life as Proust did; in such cases they write from memory; it is no accident that his great work is called "Remembrance of Things Past."

Authors may be invalids like Gamaliel Bradford, who built something new for himself out of what he read in books by other men, or like Robert Louis Stevenson, who imagined the experiences he would have enjoyed and wrote them down in books like "Treasure Island." Gifted recluses may dig deep into their own souls, like Emily Dickinson, the first major poet among American women, in her re-
treat at Amherst. Emily lived in retirement, but she knew what the big world was like; she stayed out of it from choice. Writers may despise men, as Swift did, and write books like "Gulliver's Travels," or love them as Dickens did and write books like "David Copperfield."

The experience of life need not be violent to make a good writer. Jane Austen lived a quiet and uneventful life and yet managed to attain as high a niche in the hall of fame as was ever accorded to a woman. Domestic infidelity will not make a great author, though many authors (as well as many actors, lawyers and businessmen) have been unhappy with their wives. On the other hand, an author may be perfectly content at home and still write good books in spite of what James Branch Cabell has to say in that engaging credo of his "Beyond Life": "For to be quite contentedly married may be taken as proof positive that a writer has no striking literature genius, and being able to outdo nature in creating women, is satisfied to put up with her makeshifts."

In many instances the previous condition of servitude seems to have little or no influence upon the work of the author, but Schnitzler and Maugham and Conan Doyle were much indebted to their training in medicine. A. P. Herbert could hardly have written "Holy Deadlock" if he had not been familiar with the technicalities of British law from the inside. It took a lawyer, Arthur Train, to create Tutt and Mr. Tutt. Booth Tarkington's year in the Indiana legislature may not have been blazoned a page on the history of the state, but it gave him many side lights on the Hoosier character. O. Henry hated the years he spent working in a drug store, and the years in prison were a horror to him to the end of his days, but both the drug store and the prison were writ large in his stories. Defoe got his material for "Robinson Crusoe" out of another man's experience; he got the "Journal of the Plague Year" out of what he had heard about it and wrote it so skillfully that it gave him the reputation of being the greatest liar in Christendom; he got "Moll Flanders" out of his own prison terms. Dickens knew the debtors' prison, the Marshalsea, because his father had been incarcerated there. Gertrude Stein perhaps would not have been herself if it had not been for her years as a brilliant student of psychology under William James. Or would she?

Sometimes a book has value chiefly because of some extraordinary exploit or experience of the author. The memoirs of soldiers, statesmen and businessmen generally belong in this group. So also the books of most explorers, Lindbergh's "We," Byrd's "Little America," and the books of William Beebe and T. E. Lawrence, Vilhjalmur Stefansson, and Sven Hedin belong in this category. Their origin need not belittle their quality. William Beebe and T. E. Lawrence would have front seats in any gathering of modern authors. In fact a book which many critics call "the greatest work of prose written in English during the 19th century" might be called an exploit book. This book is "Travels in Arabia Deserta" by Charles M. Doughty. As in all other worth-while books in this classification, the previous training of the author went a long way toward bringing the book to its final point of excellence.

As a young man Doughty tried to get into the British navy, but failed because of an impediment in his speech. At the age of 18 he turned to natural science, specializing in geology. After his graduation from Cambridge he went to Norway, where he spent a year in learning the language and studying glaciers. This was followed by a year in Holland learning Dutch. He traveled in France, Italy and Spain. In Egypt he heard of Medain Salih, an Arabian name for a group of inscribed monuments some days' travel out of Damascus. No white man had ever seen them; Doughty determined that he should be the first. He tried, without success, to get the British Association and the Royal Geographical Society to finance him. Undaunted, he started out to learn Arabic and in November, 1876, started for Damascus clothed as a
Syrian. He carried a few books, including a 17th century edition of Chaucer, and reached his objective in December. He copied the inscriptions on the monuments, left the caravan with which he had been traveling and went into the desert with some Bedouins. A year and a half later he returned to Jidda half dead from months of hardships and exposure. He went to Bombay, then back to England, where he wrote an account of his journey. His interest in philology and in the early English poets had given him a theory of what language he should use—a bare Elizabethan prose undebased by later words and locutions. This style, which is now considered one of the greatest virtues of a book which is not by any means lacking in others, as first stood in the way of getting it published. When the Cambridge Press finally undertook it, they lost money on it, but the author's fame was established; and time has served only to increase its brilliance.

It would not be possible fully to appreciate the "Arabia Deserta" without knowing something of the life of the author. The same is true of many books, but sometimes the details of the life of the author clutter the judgment to such an extent that one is tempted to wish that all work, especially all great work, could be published anonymously. It is not Wordsworth's illegitimate daughter who makes Wordsworth important, and it is unfortunate if any reader lets her get in the way of his enjoyment of "Tintern Abbey" or the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." The fact that Lord Byron had to diet to keep thin; that Coleridge used to sit by the fire drying Hartley's diapers on his knee, that Shakespeare wanted to go back to Stratford as the Home-Town Boy Who Made Good and that Sir Walter Scott hoped to establish one of the great English houses—these are humanizing touches, but that is all.

So far as posterity is concerned, the life of an author matters little so that the work is good. We have mainly to guess at what the lives of Homer (if there was a Homer) and Shakespeare were like. Even if we knew what they suffered, we should not greatly care, in comparison with the way we care what Lear and Hamlet and Priam and Andromache suffered. With Keats it is different. His agony breaks our hearts, but this is because he has given it to us in magic immortal words of beauty and pain.

The life of the author is nearly always implicit in the writing. Anyone who had read "The Good Earth" could have guessed that Pearl Buck knew China. But it is interesting to be told that while most of her life was spent in that country, she was born in the United States in Hillsboro, W. Va. She was taken into the far interior of China while she was yet a small child. There in the home of her missionary parents she grew up under the care of a Chinese nurse; often the only non-Chinese she saw were members of her own family. She spoke Chinese as naturally as she spoke English, and by the time she was 15 and ready for a boarding school in Shanghai, she said, "I have almost ceased to think of myself as different, if indeed I had ever thought so, from the Chinese." Her education in the United States, at Randolph-Macon College, served only to intensify her memories of China, for her life had been too different from that of her college mates to make it easy to bridge the gap. When she married a young American missionary, she went with him to North China. Here they lived through famine and bandit raids. Finally they came to Nanking, and it was here that "The Good Earth" was written.

"My chief interest and pleasure," Mrs. Buck says, "has always been people, and since I live among the Chinese, the Chinese people. When I am asked what they are like I do not know. They are not this and that, but people. I cannot describe them any more than I can my own blood kin. I am too near them and have shared too closely their lives." The almost biblical style of her writing came from her
familiarity with the Scriptures; it was her mother who taught her
that, she too, could imprison beauty in words.

Joel Chandler Harris claimed that he simply wrote down the
Negro stories that he had heard all his life; and when the Uncle Remus
tales appeared neighbors said, "Now, Joel, why didn't I think of that?
I knew those stories as well as you did." (Of course they did, but
Joel Chandler Harris was an artist; there is a difference.) Owen Wister
wrote "The Virginian" out of his love for Wyoming, gained during a
summer spent on a ranch for his health and increased by other ex-
peditions. Constance Lindsay Skinner, who has staked a literary claim
on the Northwest, was born at a Hudson Bay trading post in British
Columbia 500 miles from a railroad. Her father was factor, and her
childhood companions were Indians, fur traders, and mounted police-
men. Sinclair Lewis was born in the small-town Middle West of which
he has become chief prophet and interpreter.

But sometimes the birthplace of an author seems fantastic, com-
pares with his later development. Look at this list of elect moderns—
and note the towns and cities in which they first saw light: Gertrude
Stein, Allegheny, Penn.; T. S. Eliot (now in London), St. Louis, Mo.;
Ezra Pound, Hailey, Idaho; Cary Van Vechten (now in New York),
Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Ernest Hemingway (now probably out fishing),
Oak Park, Ill.

Except for Van Vechten, who is a cosmopolite, the above authors
are more like exotics than like authors identified with the United
States. Louis Bromfield tried exiling himself in France but gave it up as
a bad job. And there are other authors who have never wavered in their
affection for the native scene. Carl Sandburg loves Chicago. Dorothy
Canfield would not be herself without her love for Vermont. Robert
Frost is a part of New Hampshire. Da Bose Heyward and Herbert Pau-
ensel Bass belongs to Charleston, S. C. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings has
made Florida her own. And there is an unforgettable picture of Willa
Cathers weeping in the wheat fields of France, like Ruth among the
alien corn, homesick for Nebraska.

Authors begin writing at all ages. Some hardly wait to get out
of their cribs. Like Alexander Pope, they lisp in numbers because the
numbers come. Margaret Kennedy began at so early an age that she
had to ask someone to write down her composition for her. Zona Gale
produced her first book, written, printed, bound and illustrated by
herself, at the age of seven. Phyllis Bentley gave her father an illus-
trated poem of her own when she was six. Edna St. Vincent Millay as
a little girl in grammar school began publishing verses in St. Nicho-
las. "Renascence," her first poem to receive national attention, was
written when she was 19. Rachel Crothers says that one of her earliest
memories is sitting on the floor making plays with dialogue for her
paper dolls. She wrote her first play at the age of 12. A. A. Milne,
H. L. Mencken and Scott Fitzgerald began at 12. Fitzgerald wrote an
opera for the Triangle Club while he was a freshman at Princeton.
He wrote his first novel (unpublished) while he was in the army.
"This Side of Paradise" appeared in 1920, when he was 24.

Ellen Glasgow began her revolt against the sentimental Southern
tradition at the age of 16 with a book called, characteristically enough,
"Sharp Realities." It was published, but "The Descendant," begun
when she was 18, was praised by no less than the late Walter Hines
Page and accepted for publication by his firm when she was 23.

James Gould Cozzens wrote an article on student government at
Kent School in Kent, Conn., and had it published in the Atlantic
Monthly when he was 16. His first novel was written while he was a
freshman at Harvard, published under the title, "Confusion," and
promptly forgotten. Fame came at the age of 26 with the publication
of "S. S. Van Pedro." "The Last Adam" was published when he was
30.
But the 11th hour seems as good as any other for an author to arrive, providing he brings the right books. One of the most celebrated of the late comers is William De Morgan. His primary interest was ceramics. When he was about 33 years old he established a pottery factory of his own which became noted for the luster of its products. He read little except books connected with his craft, and his first publication work was an official report for the Egyptian government on the facilities for making pottery in Cairo. When he was 62 he sat down in an idle hour, wrote two chapters of a novel and threw them into the wastebasket, whence they were retrieved by his wife. Three years later his hand became so crippled with neuritis that he had to give up his pottery work. Financial troubles, influenza and other complications followed. To lighten his despondency his wife brought him the two chapters and told him to go on with them. Entirely for diversion he did so and discovered the keenest delight in doing it. He had no plan and made no effort to contrive a plot; the characters worked it out for him as he went along. When the book was published in 1906 as “Joseph Vance,” the author was 67 years old. It was instantly successful, and so were the other novels he produced in the 11 short years of his writing life.

Laura Adams Armer, whose “Waterless Mountain” won the Newbery Medal in 1932 as “the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children” that year, was 58 years old and a grandmother when she began to write. Norman Douglas, author of “South Wind,” was 48 before he turned to creative writing. Anatole France and Thomas Hardy began writing for publication after 40. Galsworthy was nearly 30 when he started. Mazo de la Roche began publishing short stories when she was 19. She wrote articles, reviews, plays and three novels before she set to work on “Jalna.” This is the novel that won the Atlantic Monthly prize in 1927, when she was 42 years old. Lloyd Cassel Douglas published his amazingly successful “Magnificent Obsession” when he was 52 years old. Axel Munthe was 72 when “The Story of San Michele” was published. Both this book and “Magnificent Obsession” waited more than a year before they reached the best-seller lists, but once they got there, they stayed.

Willard Huntington Wright established himself as a critic of art, literature, music and drama, and wrote a number of books which gave him a reputation as a scholar: “What Nietzsche Thought,” 1914; “Richard Hovey and His Friends,” 1914; “The Great Modern French Stories,” 1918; and “The Future of Painting,” 1923. “Europe After 8:15,” published in 1913, was written in collaboration with H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan. Wright himself was at the time editor of the Smart Set. In 1925, at the age of 37, he succumbed to a serious illness followed by a long convalescence. To entertain himself, he began writing a mystery story, “The Benson Murder Case,” which turned out to be the first of the famous Philo Vance series. In order to avoid confusion between this and his previous work, he adopted a pen name, S. S. Van Dine.

From the time of her marriage to William George Peterkin until she was about 40, Julia Peterkin lived a rich and happy life as mistress of Lang Syne plantation near Fort Mott, S. C. She acted as godmother, judge, physician and father confessor to the hundreds of Negroes on the place and amused herself with a variety of hobbies, like raising setters, pigeons and turkeys, and growing beautiful roses and rare fruits. She discarded her hobbies one after another as they ceased to interest her. Finally she took up music and began making trips to Columbia, the state capital, about 40 miles away, for the purpose of taking lessons. One day, after the tragic death of her Negro foreman, she told his story to her teacher. The foreman had been a big man—six foot four—but disease had made it necessary to amputate his legs.
at the hips. His dying request was for a man-sized coffin, "a man-size-box-I've-been-six-feet-fo'". When she had finished, the music teacher said, "You ought to write that story. You tell stories much better than you play." The result was, first of all, "Green Thursday," a collection of sketches describing the Gullah Negroes at Lang Syne. The second was "Black April," the story of the Negro foreman, six feet fo'. "Scarlet Sister Mary" (Pulitzer Prize, 1928) and other books followed these.

Margaret Ayer Barnes was born of a prominent Chicago family of New England origin. She was educated at Bryn Mawr, returned to Chicago, married a lawyer and had three sons. She had not thought of writing professionally until 1926 (she was 40 years old) when a long convalescence from a motor accident in France sent her into an apparently endless period of enforced leisure. She began writing short stories and within a few months sold one to the Pictorial Review. Presently she had enough to make a book, "Prevailing Winds," which was published in 1928. Her first novel, "Years of Grace," was brought out in 1930 and won the Pulitzer Prize for that year.

Forty is generally accepted as the crucial age, whether one believes it the point where life begins or the point where it should be quietly brought to an end. But if life begins at 40, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Chatterton, Robert Burns, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger, Emily Bronte and Marie Bashkirtseff would never have lived. Indeed, all of them except Byron, Burns and Emily Bronte died in their twenties. Emily was exactly 30 when she died and "Wuthering Heights" was a year old. Poe died in his 41st year. Among the great books written before the authors were 40 are "Pride and Prejudice," "Vanity Fair," "David Copperfield," "Hamlet," "Treasure Island," "Alice in Wonderland," and (in part at least) the "Divine Comedy."

Among the famous books published while their authors were in the forties are "Romola," "The Scarlet Letter," "Huckleberry Finn," "Tristram Shandy," "Robinson Crusoe," "The Old Wives' Tale," and "Of Human Bondage." Shakespear wrote "The Tempest," his final play, when he was 47. Famous books produced in the fifties include "Pilgrim's Progress," "Paradise Lost," "Don Quixote," and "Gulliver's Travels." Famous books in the sixties include "The Compleat Angler," "Les Miserables," and "Candide." Hardy completed his great epic, "The Dynasts," at the age of 68.

Sometimes the sparks that set off the creative fire are remarkable only for their insignificance. Conrad in a semi-serious essay once attributed the whole of his writing career to his none-too-intimate acquaintance with a man in Borneo named Almayer, whose picturesque distinctions included the possession of the only flock of geese on the East Coast, a dejected man of grandiloquent plans, sufficiently mysterious to inspire a 31 year old sea captain to write a novel about him. Conrad could never find a reason for his writing. It was not for money, it was not because he was bored, and it "was not the outcome of a need—the famous need of self-expression which artists find in their search for motives . . . ." It was "a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon." Up to the time he began the novel he had never written anything but letters, "and not very many of them." He had never kept a note-book, and he had never found a picture of himself as an author among the careers he had conjured up for himself in his daydreams; and yet when he had finished the first page of "Almayer's Folly" (about 200 words) he knew that the die was cast. He was going to write a book.

Unlike most authors who build an imaginary person on the basis of a real one, Conrad did not bother to change Almayer's name. Seventeen years later he was still wondering how Almayer would have felt about it if he had known. "But remember," he says in a gently chiding passage in "A Personal Record," that all the toil and all the pain were mine. In your earthly life you haunted me, Almayer. Consider
that this was taking a great liberty. Since you were always complaining of being lost to the world, you should remember that if I had not believed enough in your existence to let you haunt my rooms in Bessborough Gardens, you would have been much more lost."

Almayer was not the only trivial person to give rise to a work of art. In his "Journal" Arnold Bennett gives an account of his meeting with the fat anonymous woman who set his mind to work on "The Old Wives' Tale." He went into a restaurant in Paris, started toward his usual chair, when he saw that an unattractive middle-aged woman was sitting opposite. He made a movement to go elsewhere, but the waiter ushered him to his regular place. When he sat down the woman got up and moved away, much to the amusement of the other patrons. She was, as Bennett describes her, "thoroughly repulsive," but the thought came that she had not always been thus. He planned to put her into a 10,000 or 15,000 word short story which he tentatively called, "The History of Two Old Women," for his imagination immediately gave her a sister. This was on November 18, 1903, and he had other work to do before he could begin the story, not to mention carrying on of his private life which involved getting engaged to one woman and shortly afterwards marrying another. He did not begin the writing until October 3, 1907.

In the meantime the story stayed in his mind and, while he was at work on other projects, he kept planning it. On February 15, 1904, he mentions the death of a pretty Englishwoman from Liverpool "who gave lessons in English to a constant stream of monsieurs chics, and expired alone at 7 Rue Breda after being robbed by a Spanish male friend..." It seemed to me I might use up a lot of stuff in "The History of Two Old Women." The account of the boorish conduct of a certain member of the Royal Academy led to a long paragraph analyzing his character to which was appended the note: "I might use him up as the husband of the stay-at-home sister in 'The Old Wives' Tale.'" (The story had by this time acquired the title under which it was published.)

Somerset Maugham is another who has often given meaning to insignificance. In his introduction to a collection of 30 of his short stories, published under the title "East and West," he tells how he came to write the most famous of the group, the one first published in Smart Set magazine as "Miss Thompson," later rechristened "Rain." "I was traveling from Honolulu to Pago Pago," Mr. Maugham wrote, "and, hoping they might at some time be of service, I jotted down as usual my impressions of such of my fellow-passengers as attracted my attention. This is what I said of Miss Thompson: "Plump, pretty in a coarse fashion, perhaps not more than 27. She wore a white dress and a large white hat, long white boots from which the calves bulged in cotton stockings." There had been a raid on the Red Light district in Honolulu just before we sailed, and the gossip of the ship spread the report that she was making the journey to escape arrest." Mr. Maugham never spoke with her, but he talked once with a missionary and his wife who were on their way back to the Gilbert Islands. These later grew into the Davidson's of the story. The conversation was not about Miss Thompson, Pago Pago or Honolulu, but about the heathen customs of the natives of the Gilberts. The story itself was made out of whole cloth.

Out of the 30 stories in "East and West," Mr. Maugham says, three were told to him: The 'Letter,' "Footprints in the Jungle," and "The Book-Bag," stories that had been bandied up and down the coast from Singapore to Penang by a thousand tongues until he wove them into permanence. Many authors have thus builted upon more or less uninspired material that lay at hand. Shakespeare nearly always took someone else's story or play for the basis of his dramas. Some of Burns's loveliest songs ("Auld Lang Syne," "John Anderson, My Jo," etc.) were traditional songs of the Scottish people—rewritten.
Sophocles used to write some of his plays with definite actors in mind. Shaw wrote “Pygmalion” for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and Barrie wrote “Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire” for Maude Adams. Robert Browning was inspired to his great “murder poem,” “The Ring and the Book,” by an old yellow book that he picked out of a scrap heap in Florence. A Latin record of the trial of 1698 of one Franceschini for the murder of his wife, Pompilia, Keats wrote one of his most famous sonnets after a night spent with a friend, Charles Cowden Clarke, reading a borrowed copy of George Chapman’s translations of the “Iliad,” and another after visiting the newly acquired Elgin marbles with his friend, Benjamin Robert Haydon. “Treasure Island” began with a map which Robert Louis Stevenson and his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, contrived for their own amusement. The sinking of the Vestris gave James Gould Cozzens the background for “S. S. San Pedro.”

Sir Walter Scott turned to the writing of prose romances (the Waverly Novels) because Lord Byron was completely overshadowing him as a narrative poet. Meredith Nicholson switched to the novel of character because he was ashamed of his popular success on the strength of melodramatic fiction.

Noel Coward cherished for a long time the plan of writing a play on a big scale to produce at the Coliseum in London. He thought of using the French Revolution or the Second Empire as the background, but his final choice was determined by his accidentally picking up a back number of the London Illustrated News showing a troopship leaving for the Boer War. The result was “Cavalcade.” “Now that the whole thing is done . . .” he said later, “I can meditate blissfully upon the good fortune that prompted me to pick up just that particular number of the Illustrated News, instead of one of a later date depicting the storms of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburgh.”

Mr. Coward is nettled when the critics delve for his reason for writing. “They search busily behind the simplest of my phrases,” he says, “like old ladies peering under the bed for burglars, and are not content until they have unearthed some definite, and usually quite inaccurate, reason for my saying this or that. This strange mania I can only suppose is the distinctive feature of a critical mind as opposed to a creative one. It seems to me that a professional writer should be animated by no other motive than the desire to write, and, by doing so, to earn his living.”

“I had to earn my living,” says Agnes Repplier, “and writing was the only thing I could do.”

Kate Douglas Wiggin’s first and most famous book, “The Birds’ Christmas Carol,” was written to raise money for a kindergarten.

It was an injury to his eye which caused the rodeo rider, Will James, to turn to sketches and stories of the life of the cowboy.

Louisa Alcott’s aim was ‘to pay all the debts, fix the house, send May (her sister) to Italy, and keep the old folks cosy.’ After the success of “Little Women” she wrote in her diary, “Paid all the debts, thank the Lord!—every penny that money can pay—and now feel as if I can die in peace. My dream is beginning to come true . . .”

Selma Lagerlof wrote “The Wonderful Adventures of Nils” because the Swedish school authorities asked her to write a reader for the children which would help preserve the rich folklore of the country and at the same time teach some of the wonders of its geography. The book and its successor, “The Further Adventures of Nils,” have become classics in many other countries besides Sweden.

Authors are among the most obstinate of men; it is hard to discourage one who has his heart set on his calling. Booth Tarkington, after he decided to write instead of illustrate, stayed at it steadily for eight years and earned exactly $22,50 before recognition came with “Monsieur Beaucaire” and “Cherry.” During his first nine years in London Shaw earned six pounds from his literary efforts. S. N. Behr-
man worked for eleven years before he sold a play. Fannie Hurst had 36 rejection slips from the Saturday Evening Post before she sold a story. Joseph Hergesheimer wrote for 14 years without being able to sell a story. Hendrik Van Looen's first three books were unsuccessful. Sinclair Lewis's first book, a story for boys, sold less than 800 copies. Robert Browning, Marcel Proust and Knut Hamsun paid to get their first books published, and so, not to put too fine a point on it, did Zane Grey. Matthew Arnold's family thought his poems silly and the critics damned his "Empedocles on Etna" with such happy abandon that he withdrew it from publication. But he kept on writing. Your true author always keeps on writing.

When Hugh Walpole was a young teacher in a provincial school in England, he gave the manuscript of his second novel (he had already shown himself a man of spirit by tearing up his first) to a fellow master there. The fellow master kept it quite a while before he returned it with this comment: "I have tried to read your novel, Walpole, but I can't. Whatever else you may be fitted for, you aren't fitted to be a novelist." But a publisher's opinion differed. The public, however, seemed to agree with the schoolmaster, for only 700 copies were sold. The author's royalty was not enough to cover the cost of typing the manuscript, but the publisher still believed in him. The next novel sold 1,100 copies and brought Mr. Walpole little money but a vast deal of recognition. The rest, to coin a phrase, is history.

Even language, the great tool of authorship, need not be a barrier. Spanish is the mother tongue of George Santayana, but English (he says) is the only one in which he can write with assurance. Conrad the Pole who wrote in English, said, "The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born." Russian is the native language of John Cournos and of Maurice Hindus. And a word here might be said of the great translators like Edward FitzGerald, who made the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam sing in English Quatrains; Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who transferred the "Vita-Nuovo" into exquisite English; and F. Scott-Moncrieff, who first brought Proust's books to us.

Some determined authors deliberately model themselves upon others. Benjamin Franklin studied Addison to improve his style, and Robert Louis Stevenson played the "Sedulous ape" to the writers whose work he admired. These are not the only mentors the modern youth with literary ambitions has at his disposal. Colleges and universities have added how-to-write courses to their curricula, and the woods are full of books which explain how to become successful authors, but all the study and practice for all the days and nights in a life of three-score years and 10 will not turn the trick unless the gift is there. A writer of the 18th century, Alexander Pope, has said the final word on this subject. He was himself a stylist, but the couplet seems to be in modern slang. Unless the gift is there:

You beat your pate, and fancy wit will come.
Knock as you please—there's nobody at home.

An author writes best of what lies close to his heart, though readers more interested in style may care less for the subject than for the way it is treated. Swift's Stella said that "for all we know the Dean could write beautifully about a broomstick." But Stella was speaking sourly, for she had in mind that other women in the dean's life, Vanessa. Most of us prefer what the dean has written about the Lilliputs to what he might have written about broomsticks. Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner" before he had ever been on a ship, but he had steeped himself in the voyages of other men. Anthony Trollope created his famous arch-deacon before he had ever spoken to an archdeacon, but he knew men and saw no reason why arch-deacons should be exempt from the failings common to the rest of humanity.
Authors are ubiquitous. And “books,” said Conrad, “may be written in all sorts of places.” He was speaking specifically of his own first novel, “Almayer’s Folly,” which he began in a small lodging-house in Bessborough Gardens, London, in 1889. He took the first seven chapters with him when he went back to Poland to visit his uncle and carried them with him to the Congo, where he almost lost them when his canoe was upset in the river. It was in the Congo that he became so ill with fever that he had to come back to Europe for his convalescence. He wrote the eighth chapter while he was getting well in Geneva, Switzerland. He wrote the ninth in England, then took the manuscript with him to Australia, apparently without adding anything on the way, for he recorded that he wrote the 10th in Rouen, France. He carried it back to Poland a second time and almost lost it again in the Friedrichstrasse railway station in Berlin. He finally finished it in England—after six years of wandering. Destiny was apparently watching Almayer.

O. Henry would not have agreed with Conrad. He was not one who could write “in all sorts of places.” He almost had to be in New York City. Toward the end of his life, when for his health’s sake it seemed imperative to get him into the country, he went to Asheville, N. C., but he did not stay. “I could look at these mountains a hundred years and never get an idea,” he said, “but just one block downtown and I catch a sentence, see something in a face—and I’ve got my story.” And again, in Asheville: “There was too much scenery and fresh air. What I need is a steam-heated flat with no ventilation or exercise.” It was his belief that “you can’t write a story that’s got any life in it by sitting at a writing table and thinking. You’ve got to get out into the streets, into the crowds, talk with people, and feel the rush and throb of real life—that’s the stimulant for a story writer.”

Marcel Proust at a little more than 30 years of age locked himself in a dark, cork-lined room and worked for 17 years on what many critics consider the finest of all modern novels. He seldom emerged from his self-imposed prison, and then it was usually after midnight. He kept in touch with the world through letters and gave himself up to the “Remembrance of Things Past.”

The homes of many authors have become famous because the authors have shared them with us. One of Selma Lagerlöf’s most beautiful books bears the name of Lagerlöf’s manor house, “Marbacka,” in the province of Varmland, Sweden. Beverley Nichols is not the only one who has enjoyed his thatched roof in Huntingdonshire. Alexander Woolcott’s readers have delighted in the felicities of Wit’s End, his charming apartment on the East River in New York City. Henry Beston has made “The Outermost House” on Cape Cod famous, and Will Cuppy has done as much for his shack on the south shore of Long Island in “How to Be a Hermit.”

When it comes actually to writing, most authors want quiet. Byron dashed off poetry with a facility which would put a popular novelist to shame (80,000 lines, according to Mr. Drinkwater’s computation, in 16 years) but he wanted to be left alone while he was doing it. When his wife came to the door and asked if she disturbed him, he said, “Yes, most damnably.” O. Henry got his ideas and wrote his stories in his head as he moved about, but when he set them down—in pencil on yellow pads of paper—he came back to his rooming house to do it. Robinson Jeffers’ study in his seaside home on Carmel Bay, Cal., contains only a table and chair. The study of Willard Huntington Wright is said to have been exactly the kind that his maddening learned detective, Philo Vance, should have: a large room lined as high as he could reach with bookshelves containing one of the best of detective libraries, a collection of Egyptology including papyri, volumes on art, science, medicine, criminology and literature. Above
the shelves the walls were hung with modern paintings, remarkable for their bright colors. Phyllis Bentley's is another of the bare studies. She says that she cannot write out of doors or facing a window because it is too distracting. "So I just have to sit at a desk looking at a blank wall broken only by a picture of an old pack-horse road climbing a West Riding hill and writing away."

Sinclair Lewis wrote his first stories on commuting trains shuttling back and forth between Long Island and Manhattan. He wrote "Main Street" in Washington, D. C., "Babbitt" in England and Italy. "Arrowsmith" was conceived in Hartford, Conn., and traveled with the author to New York City the Virgin Islands, the Barbados, Trinidad, Venezuela and London. But in this case there was a reason for wandering; much of the time he was doing research for the background of the novel. Francis Hackett traveled over France and England gathering material for "Henry VIII." From France he wrote, "Henry shall be finished if the gas holds out."

James Joyce wrote "Ulysses" in Trieste, Zurich and Paris. Ellen Glasgow wrote at her home in Richmond, Va. "Anthony Adverse" was written in Break Loaf, Vt., Pelham and Cazenovia, New York, and in Bermuda.

Coleridge used to like to compose "walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of copsewood." Sir Walter Scott composed some of his poems on horseback. Robert Burns composed "To a Mouse" while he was ploughing. John Buchan and A. E. Housman have spoken of composing while they were shaving. And here is a picture of a young poet at work, not at all the traditional picture: "Whenever I find myself growing vaporish, I rouse myself, wash, and put on a clean shirt, brush my hair and clothes, tie my shoe strings neatly and in fact adonize as if I were going out. Then, all clean and comfortable, I sit down to write. This I find the greatest relief." The young poet is Keats. He wrote the "Ode to a Nightingale" in the spring under a plum tree shortly after breakfast. It was written the same year that he wrote the letter to his brother from which the above quotation is taken.

Writing is a lonely business, but some authors find inspiration in groups. What Wordsworth and Coleridge owed to each other and to their association with Dorothy Wordsworth is well known. The Bloomsbury group in England (Virginia Woolf, et al.) is famous. The Chicago group (now dissolved) produced some fine work, including as it did such men as Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, Harry Hansen, Keith Preston, Vincent Starrett, Ben Hecht, J. P. McEvoy and Edgar Lee Masters. Anatole France liked to write in a room full of people. Lamb had to have congenial people around him. When he gave up his desk at the office of the East India Company and moved to the country, his life as an author was practically over. The accountant and the writer died together.

The original manuscripts that we have of great works in English show us that many of our authors have toiled endlessly over their written words. Some of the giants kept notebooks—Milton and Shelley for example—and many of them continued revision to the very jaws of the printing press. Keats's poems—and surely there are few which seem more spontaneous—show this. It is said that Shakespeare never blotted a line, but there are many lines, as Ben Jonson pointed out, which might well have been blotted. But Shakespeare belongs among those opulent geniuses whose superb gifts are sufficient to cover up all imperfections. And we do not know how long his lines sang in his head before he put them on paper.

The classic example of the meticulous writer is the great French author of "Madame Bovary," Gustave Flaubert, who used to spend as much as a week toiling over a single page. Anatole France used to rewrite his books in proof. He required at least six proofs from the
printer and made extensive revisions on all of them. Some of the compositors who had to handle them must be in the madhouse, for he cut the galley proofs apart, shifting his sentences hither and yon, rewriting with scissors and paste as well as with pen and ink, and looking, so his secretary, Jacque Brousson, has said, "like a needle woman cutting out an embroidered festoon." Only a compositor can tell what havoc this works in a printing house.

Marcel Proust was another who rewrote in proof. It has been said that he treated his proofs as other authors treat the first rough drafts of their manuscripts. He planned "Remembrance of the Past" for three volumes; it grew to 16, and a large part of the additional material was added in proof. He had a passion for revision just as he had a passion for the verification of details. Shortly before his death he called for one of his books: "I have several revisions to make there," were almost his last words.

The late Elinor Wylie wrote between five and eight hours a day and said she was satisfied if she produced three or five pages in that time. Winston Churchill rewrote "Richard Carvel" five times. P. G. Wodehouse composes on the typewriter with remarkable facility but writes every story at least three times. "Lady Chatterley's Lover" was written three times. James Joyce spent 10 years on "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." Seven years of research went into Francis Hackett's "Henry VIII." Douglas Freeman's life of Robert E. Lee was 10 years in the making. John Erskine wrote "The Private Life of Helen of Troy" in six months, working between 11 at night and 1 in the morning. Oscar Wilde wrote "The Importance of Being Earnest" in three weeks and said, "I could write one every two months with the greatest ease. It all depends on money. If I need money I shall write half-a-dozen plays next year." There is irony enough in these words without matching dates: The Importance of Being Earnest" was written in 1895, the same year that Oscar was sent to prison. There were no more plays.

In the final summing up it must be said that the author, if he be an artist, is not like other men. He has, above all else, a zest and gusto for life; it is his purpose to share this with us, to share it in beautiful and unforgettable words. "The Artist," says Conrad, and no one has improved upon his statement, "appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and therefore more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery not surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity and beauty, and pain: to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle, but invincible, conviction of solidarity that knits together the loveliness of innumerable hearts to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn."