

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

A
0
0
0
7
3
7
9
9
1
0



ATLANTIC READINGS

NUMBER 17

ON READING IN RELATION TO LITERATURE

BY

LAFCADIO HEARN



The Atlantic Monthly Press, Inc.

BOSTON

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO

Copyright, 1921, by

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

ON READING IN RELATION TO LITERATURE

BY LAFCADIO HEARN

As the term approaches its close, I wish to keep my promise regarding a series of lectures relating to literary life and work, to be given independently of texts or authorities, and to represent, as far as possible, the results of practical experience among the makers of literature in different countries. The subject for this term will be Reading — apparently, perhaps, a very simple subject, but really not so simple as it looks, and much more important than you may think it. I shall begin this lecture by saying that very few persons know how to read. Considerable experience with literature is needed before taste and discrimination can possibly be acquired; and without these, it is almost impossible to learn how to read. I say *almost* impossible; since there are some rare men who, through a natural inborn taste, through a kind of inherited literary instinct, are able to read very well even before reaching the age of twenty-five years. But these are great exceptions, and I am speaking of the average.

For, to read the characters or the letters of the text does not mean reading in the true sense. You will often find yourselves reading words or characters automatically, even pronouncing them quite correctly, while your minds are occupied with a totally different subject. This mere mechanism of reading becomes altogether automatic at an early period of life, and can be performed irrespective of attention. Neither can I call it reading, to extract the narrative portion of a text from the rest simply for one's per-

sonal amusement, or, in other words, to read a book "for the story." Yet most of the reading that is done in the world is done in exactly this way. Thousands and thousands of books are bought every year, every month, I might even say every day, by people who do not read at all. They only think that they read. They buy books just to amuse themselves, "to kill time," as they call it; in one hour or two their eyes have passed over all the pages, and there is left in their minds a vague idea or two about what they have been looking at; and this they really believe is reading. Nothing is more common than to be asked, "Have you read such a book?" or to hear somebody say, "I have read such and such a book." But these persons do not speak seriously. Out of a thousand persons who say, "I have read this," or "I have read that," there is not one perhaps who is able to express any opinion worth hearing about what he has been reading. Many and many a time I hear students say that they have read certain books; but if I ask them some questions regarding the book, I find that they are not able to make any answer, or at best, they will only repeat something that somebody else has said about what they think that they have been reading. But this is not peculiar to students; it is in all countries the way that the great public devours books. And to conclude this introductory part of the lecture, I would say that the difference between the great critic and the common person is chiefly that the great critic knows how to read, and the common person does not. No man is really able to read a book who is not able to express an original opinion regarding the contents of a book.

No doubt you will think that this statement of the case confuses reading with study. You might say, "When we read history or philosophy or science, then we do read very thoroughly, studying all the meanings and bearings of the text, slowly, and thinking about it. This is hard study.

But when we read a story or a poem out of class-hour, we read for amusement. Amusement and study are two different things." I am not sure that you all think this; but young men generally do so think. As a matter of fact, every book worth reading ought to be read in precisely the same way that a scientific book is read — not simply for amusement; and every book worth reading should have the same amount of value in it that a scientific book has, though the value may be of a totally different kind. For, after all, the good book of fiction or romance or poetry is a scientific work; it has been composed according to the best principles of more than one science, but especially according to the principles of the great science of life, the knowledge of human nature.

In regard to foreign books, this is especially true; but the advice suggested will be harder to follow when we read in a language which is not our own. Nevertheless, how many Englishmen do you suppose really read a good book in English? how many Frenchmen read a great book in their own tongue? Probably not more than one in two thousand of those who think that they read. What is more, although there are now published every year in London upwards of six thousand books, at no time has there been so little good reading done by the average public as to-day. Books are written, sold, and read after a fashion — or rather according to the fashion. There is a fashion in literature as well as in everything else; and a particular kind of amusement being desired by the public, a particular kind of reading is given to supply the demand. So useless have become to this public the arts and graces of real literature, the great thoughts which should belong to a great book, that men of letters have almost ceased to produce true literature. When a man can obtain a great deal of money by writing a book without style or beauty, a mere narrative to amuse, and knows at the same time that if he should give three,

five, or ten years to the production of a really good book, he would probably starve to death, he is forced to be untrue to the higher duties of his profession. Men happily situated in regard to money matters might possibly attempt something great from time to time; but they can hardly get a hearing. Taste has so much deteriorated within the past few years, that, as I told you before, style has practically disappeared — and style means thinking. And this state of things in England has been largely brought about by bad habits of reading, by not knowing how to read.

For the first thing which a scholar should bear in mind is that a book ought not to be read for mere amusement. Half-educated persons read for amusement, and are not to be blamed for it; they are incapable of appreciating the deeper qualities that belong to a really great literature. But a young man who has passed through a course of university training should discipline himself at an early day never to read for mere amusement. And once the habit of the discipline has been formed, he will even find it impossible to read for mere amusement. He will then impatiently throw down any book from which he cannot obtain intellectual food, any book which does not make an appeal to the higher emotions and to his intellect. But on the other hand, the habit of reading for amusement becomes with thousands of people exactly the same kind of habit as wine-drinking or opium-smoking; it is like a narcotic, something that helps to pass the time, something that keeps up a perpetual condition of dreaming, something that eventually results in destroying all capacity for thought, giving exercise only to the surface parts of the mind, and leaving the deeper springs of feeling and the higher faculties of perception unemployed.

Let us simply state what the facts are about this kind of reading. A young clerk, for example, reads every day on the way to his office and on the way back, just to pass the

time; and what does he read? A novel, of course; it is very easy work, and it enables him to forget his troubles for a moment, to dull his mind to all the little worries of his daily routine. In one day or two days he finishes the novel; then he gets another. He reads quickly in these days. By the end of the year he has read between a hundred and fifty and two hundred novels; no matter how poor he is, this luxury is possible to him, because of the institution of circulating libraries. At the end of a few years he has read several thousand novels. Does he like them? No; he will tell you that they are nearly all the same, but they help him to pass away his idle time; they have become a necessity for him; he would be very unhappy if he could not continue this sort of reading. It is utterly impossible that the result can be anything but a stupefying of the faculties. He cannot even remember the names of twenty or thirty books out of thousands; much less does he remember what they contain. The result of all this reading means nothing but a cloudiness in his mind. That is the direct result. The indirect result is that the mind has been kept from developing itself. All development necessarily means some pain; and such reading as I speak of has been employed unconsciously as a means to avoid that pain, and the consequence is atrophy.

Of course this is an extreme case; but it is the ultimate outcome of reading for amusement whenever such amusement becomes a habit, and when there are means close at hand to gratify the habit. At present in Japan there is little danger of this state of things; but I use the illustration for the sake of its ethical warning.

This does not mean that there is any sort of good literature which should be shunned. A good novel is just as good reading as even the greatest philosopher can possibly wish for. The whole matter depends upon the way of reading, even more than upon the nature of what is read. Perhaps

it is too much to say, as has often been said, that there is no book which has nothing good in it; it is better simply to state that the good of a book depends incomparably more for its influence upon the habits of the reader than upon the art of the writer, no matter how great that writer may be. In a previous lecture I tried to call your attention to the superiority of the child's methods of observation to those of the man; and the same fact may be noticed in regard to the child's method of reading. Certainly the child can read only very simple things; but he reads most thoroughly; and he thinks and thinks untiringly about what he reads; one little fairy tale will give him mental occupation for a month after he has read it. All the energies of his little fancy are exhausted upon the tale; and if his parents be wise, they do not allow him to read a second tale, until the pleasure of the first, and its imaginative effect, has begun to die away. Later habits, habits which I shall venture to call bad, soon destroy the child's power of really attentive reading. But let us now take the case of a professional reader, a scientific reader; and we shall observe the same power, developed of course to an enormous degree. In the office of a great publishing house which I used to visit, there are received every year sixteen thousand manuscripts. All these must be looked at and judged; and such work in all publishing houses is performed by what are called professional readers. The professional reader must be a scholar, and a man of very uncommon capacity. Out of a thousand manuscripts he will read perhaps not more than one; out of two thousand he may possibly read three. The others he simply looks at for a few seconds — one glance is enough for him to decide whether the manuscript is worth reading or not. The shape of a single sentence will tell him that, from the literary point of view. As regards subject, even the title is enough for him to judge, in a large number of cases. Some manu-

scripts may receive a minute or even five minutes of his attention; very few receive a longer consideration. Out of sixteen thousand, we may suppose that sixteen are finally selected for judgment. He reads these from beginning to end. Having read them, he decides that only eight can be further considered. The eight are read a second time, much more carefully. At the close of the second examination the number is perhaps reduced to seven. These seven are destined for a third reading; but the professional reader knows better than to read them immediately. He leaves them locked up in a drawer, and passes a whole week without looking at them. At the end of the week he tries to see whether he can remember distinctly each of these seven manuscripts and their qualities. Very distinctly he remembers three; the remaining four he cannot at once recall. With a little more effort, he is able to remember two more. But two he has utterly forgotten. This is a fatal defect; the work that leaves no impression upon the mind after two readings cannot have real value. He then takes the manuscripts out of the drawer, condemns two (those he could not remember), and re-reads the five. At the third reading everything is judged — subject, execution, thought, literary quality. Three are discovered to be first class; two are accepted by the publishers only as second class. And so the matter ends.

Something like this goes on in all great publishing houses; but unfortunately not all literary work is now judged in the same severe way. It is now judged rather by what the public likes; and the public does not like the best. But you may be sure that in a house such as that of the Cambridge or the Oxford University publishers, the test of a manuscript is very severe indeed; it is there read much more thoroughly than it is likely ever to be read again. Now this professional reader whom we speak of, with all his knowledge and scholarship and experience, reads the book very much in the

same way as the child reads a fairy tale. He has forced his mind to exert all its powers in the same minute way that the child's mind does, to think about everything in the book, in all its bearings, in a hundred different directions. It is not true that a child is a bad reader; the habit of bad reading is only formed much later in life, and is always unnatural. The natural and also the scholarly way of reading is the child's way. But it requires what we are apt to lose as we grow up, the golden gift of patience; and without patience nothing, not even reading, can be well done.

Important then as careful reading is, you can readily perceive that it should not be wasted. The powers of a well-trained and highly educated mind ought not to be expended upon any common book. By common I mean cheap and useless literature. Nothing is so essential to self-training as the proper choice of books to read; and nothing is so universally neglected. It is not even right that a person of ability should waste his time in "finding out" what to read. He can easily obtain a very correct idea of the limits of the best in all departments of literature, and keep to that best. Of course, if he has to become a specialist, a critic, a professional reader, he will have to read what is bad as well as what is good, and will be able to save himself from much torment only by an exceedingly rapid exercise of judgment, formed by experience. Imagine, for example, the reading that must have been done, and thoroughly done, by such a critic as Professor Saintsbury. Leaving out of the question all his university training, and his mastery of Greek and Latin classics, which is no small reading to begin with, he must have read some five thousand books in the English of all centuries — learned thoroughly everything that was in them, the history of each one, and the history of its author, whenever that was accessible. He must also have mastered thoroughly the social and political history relating to all

this mass of literature. But this is still less than half his work. For, being an authority upon two literatures, his study of French, both old and new French, must have been even more extensive than his study of English. And all his work had to be read as a master reads; there was little more amusement in the whole from beginning to end. The only pleasure could be in results; but these results are very great. Nothing is more difficult in this world than to read a book and then to express clearly and truly in a few lines exactly what the literary value of the book is. There are not more than twenty people in the world who can do this, for the experience as well as the capacity required must be enormous. Very few of us can hope to become even third or fourth class critics after a lifetime of study. But we can all learn to read; and that is not by any means a small feat. The great critics can best show us the way to do this, by their judgment.

Yet after all, the greatest of critics is the public — not the public of a day or a generation, but the public of centuries, the consensus of national opinion or of human opinion about a book that has been subjected to the awful test of time. Reputations are made not by critics, but by the accumulation of human opinion through hundreds of years. And human opinion is not sharply defined like the opinion of a trained critic; it cannot explain; it is vague, like a great emotion of which we cannot exactly describe the nature; it is based upon feeling rather than upon thinking; it only says, "we like this." Yet there is no judgment so sure as this kind of judgment, for it is the outcome of an enormous experience. The test of a good book ought always to be the test which human opinion, working for generations, applies. And this is very simple.

The test of a great book is whether we want to read it only once or more than once. Any really great book we

want to read the second time even more than we wanted to read it the first time; and every additional time that we read it we find new meanings and new beauties in it. A book that a person of education and good taste does not care to read more than once is very probably not worth much. Some time ago there was a very clever discussion going on regarding the art of the great French novelist, Zola; some people claimed that he possessed absolute genius; others claimed that he had only talent of a very remarkable kind. The battle of argument brought out some strange extravagances of opinion. But suddenly a very great critic simply put this question: "How many of you have read, or would care to read, one of Zola's books a second time?" There was no answer; the fact was settled. Probably no one would read a book by Zola more than once; and this is proof positive that there is no great genius in them, and no great mastery of the highest form of feeling. Shallow or false any book must be, that, although bought by a hundred thousand readers, is never read more than once. But we cannot consider the judgment of a single individual infallible. The opinion that makes a book great must be the opinion of many. For even the greatest critics are apt to have certain dullnesses, certain inappreciations. Carlyle, for example, could not endure Browning; Byron could not endure some of the greatest of English poets. A man must be many-sided to utter a trustworthy estimate of many books. We may doubt the judgment of the single critic at times. But there is no doubt possible in regard to the judgment of generations. Even if we cannot at once perceive anything good in a book which has been admired and praised for hundreds of years, we may be sure that by trying, by studying it carefully, we shall at last be able to feel the reason of this admiration and praise. The best of all libraries for a poor man would be a library entirely composed

of such great works only, books which have passed the test of time.

This then would be the most important guide for us in the choice of reading. We should read only the books that we want to read more than once, nor should we buy any others, unless we have some special reason for so investing money. The second fact demanding attention is the general character of the value that lies hidden within all such great books. A great book is not apt to be comprehended by a young person at the first reading except in a superficial way. Only the surface, the narrative, is absorbed and enjoyed. No young man can possibly see at first reading the qualities of a great book. Remember that it has taken humanity in many cases hundreds of years to find out all that there is in such a book. But according to a man's experience of life, the text will unfold new meanings to him. The book that delighted us at eighteen, if it be a good book, will delight us much more at twenty-five, and it will prove like a new book to us at thirty years of age. At forty we shall re-read it, wondering why we never saw how beautiful it was before. At fifty or sixty years of age the same facts will repeat themselves. A great book grows exactly in proportion to the growth of the reader's mind. It was the discovery of this extraordinary fact by generations of people long dead that made the greatness of such works as those of Shakespeare, of Dante, or of Goethe. Perhaps Goethe can give us at this moment the best illustration. He wrote a number of little stories in prose, which children like, because to children they have all the charm of fairy tales. But he never intended them for fairy tales; he wrote them for experienced minds. A young man finds very serious reading in them; a middle aged man discovers an extraordinary depth in their least utterance; and an old man will find in them all the world's philosophy, all the wisdom of life. If one is very

dull, he may not see much in them, but just in proportion as he is a superior man, and in proportion as his knowledge of life has been extensive, so will he discover the greatness of the mind that conceived them.

This does not mean that the authors of such books could have preconceived the entire range and depth of that which they put into their work. Great art works unconsciously without ever suspecting that it is great; and the larger the genius of a writer, the less chance there is of his ever knowing that he has genius; for his power is less likely to be discovered by the public until long after he is dead. The great things done in literature have not usually been done by men who thought themselves great. Many thousand years ago some wanderer in Arabia, looking at the stars of the night, and thinking about the relation of man to the unseen powers that shaped the world, uttered all his heart in certain verses that have been preserved to us in the Book of Job. To him the sky was a solid vault; of that which might exist beyond it, he never even dreamed. Since his time how vast has been the expansion of our astronomical knowledge! We now know thirty millions of suns, all of which are probably attended by planets, giving a probable total of three hundred millions of other worlds within sight of our astronomical instruments. Probably multitudes of these are inhabited by intelligent life; it is even possible that within a few years more we shall obtain proof positive of the existence of an older civilization than our own upon the planet Mars. How vast a difference between our conception of the universe and Job's conception of it. Yet the poem of that simple-minded Arab or Jew has not lost one particle of its beauty and value because of this difference. Quite the contrary! With every new astronomical discovery the words of Job take grander meanings to us, simply because he was truly a great poet and spoke only the truth that was in his

heart thousands of years ago. Very anciently also there was a Greek story-teller who wrote a little story about a boy and girl in the country, called *Daphnis and Chloe*. It was a little story, telling in the simplest language possible how that boy and girl fell in love with each other, and did not know why, and all the innocent things they said to each other, and how grown-up people kindly laughed at them and taught them some of the simplest laws of life. What a trifling subject, some might think. But that story, translated into every language in the world, still reads like a new story to us; and every time we re-read it, it appears still more beautiful, because it teaches a few true and tender things about innocence and the feeling of youth. It never can grow old, any more than the girl and boy whom it describes. Or, to descend to later times, about three hundred years ago a French priest conceived the idea of writing down the history of a student who had been charmed by a wanton woman, and led by her into many scenes of disgrace and pain. This little book, called *Manon Lescaut*, describes for us the society of a vanished time, a time when people wore swords and powdered their hair, a time when everything was as different as possible from the life of to-day. But the story is just as true of our own time as of any time in civilization; the pain and the sorrow affect us just as if they were our own; and the woman, who is not really bad, but only weak and selfish, charms the reader almost as much as she charmed her victim, until the tragedy ends. Here again is one of the world's great books that cannot die. Or, to take one more example out of a possible hundred, consider the stories of Hans Andersen. He conceived the notion that moral truths and social philosophy could be better taught through little fairy tales and child stories than in almost any other way; and with the help of hundreds of old-fashioned tales, he made a new series of wonderful stories that have become a part of

every library and are read in all countries by grown-up people much more than by children. There is in this astonishing collection of stories, a story about a mermaid, which I suppose you have all read. Of course there can be no such thing as a mermaid; from one point of view the story is quite absurd. But the emotions of unselfishness and love and loyalty which the story expresses are immortal, and so beautiful that we forget about all the unreality of the framework; we see only the eternal truth behind the fable.

You will understand now exactly what I mean by a great book. What about the choice of books? Some years ago you will remember that an Englishman of science, Sir John Lubbock, wrote a list of what he called the best books in the world — or at least the best hundred books. Then some publishers published the hundred books in cheap form. Following the example of Sir John, other literary men made different lists of what they thought the best hundred books in existence; and now quite enough time has passed to show us the value of these experiments. They have proved utterly worthless, except to the publishers. Many persons may buy the hundred books; but very few read them. And this is not because Sir John Lubbock's idea was bad; it is because no one man can lay down a definite course of reading for the great mass of differently constituted minds. Sir John expressed only his opinion of what most appealed to him; another man of letters would have made a different list; probably no two men of letters would have made exactly the same one. The choice of great books must, under all circumstances, be an individual one. In short, you must choose for yourselves according to the light that is in you. Very few persons are so many-sided as to feel inclined to give their best attention to many different kinds of literature. In the average of cases it is better for a man to confine himself to a small class of subjects — the subjects best

according with his natural powers and inclinations, the subjects that please him. And no man can decide for us, without knowing our personal character and disposition perfectly well and being in sympathy with it, where our powers lie. But one thing is easy to do — that is, to decide, first, what subject in literature has already given you pleasure; to decide, secondly, what is the best that has been written upon that subject, and then to study that best to the exclusion of ephemeral and trifling books which profess to deal with the same theme, but which have not yet obtained the approbation of great critics or of a great public opinion.

Those books which have obtained both are not so many in number as you might suppose. Each great civilization has produced only two or three of the first rank, if we except the single civilization of the Greeks. The sacred books embodying the teaching of all great religions necessarily take place in the first rank, even as literary productions; for they have been polished and repolished, and have been given the highest possible literary perfection of which the language in which they are written is capable. The great epic poems which express the ideals of races, these also deserve a first place. Thirdly, the masterpieces of drama, as reflecting life, must be considered to belong to the highest literature. But how many books are thus represented? Not very many. The best, like diamonds, will never be found in great quantities.

Besides such general indications as I have thus ventured, something may be said regarding a few choice books — those which a student should wish to possess good copies of and read all his life. There are not many of these. For European students it would be necessary to name a number of Greek authors: But without a study of the classic tongues such authors could be of much less use to the students of this country; moreover, a considerable knowledge of Greek

life and Greek civilization is necessary to quicken appreciation of them. Such knowledge is best gained through engravings, pictures, coins, statues — through those artistic objects which enable the imagination to see what has existed; and as yet the artistic side of classical study is scarcely possible in Japan, for want of pictorial and other material. I shall therefore say very little regarding the great books that belong to this category. But as the whole foundation of European literature rests upon classical study, the student should certainly attempt to master the outlines of Greek mythology, and the character of the traditions which inspired the best of Greek literature and drama. You can scarcely open an English book belonging to any high class of literature, in which you will not find allusions to Greek beliefs, Greek stories, or Greek plays. The mythology is almost necessary for you; but the vast range of the subject might well deter most of you from attempting a thorough study of it. A thorough study of it, however, is not necessary. What is necessary is an outline only; and a good book, capable of giving you that outline in a vivid and attractive manner would be of inestimable service. In French and German there are many such books; in English, I know of only one, a volume in Bohn's Library, Keightley's *Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy*. It is not an expensive work; and it has the exceptional quality of teaching in a philosophical spirit. As for the famous Greek books, the value of most of them for you must be small, because the number of adequate translations is small. I should begin by saying that all verse translations are useless. No verse translation from the Greek can reproduce the Greek verse — we have only twenty or thirty lines of Homer translated by Tennyson, and a few lines of other Greek poets translated by equally able men, which are at all satisfactory. Under all circumstances take a prose translation when you

wish to study a Greek or Latin author. We should of course consider Homer first. I do not think that you can afford not to read something of Homer. There are two excellent prose translations in English, one of the Iliad and one of the Odyssey. The latter is for you the more important of the two great poems. The references to it are innumerable in all branches of literature; and these references refer usually to the poetry of its theme, for the Odyssey is much more a romance than is the Iliad. The advantage of the prose translation by Lang and Butcher is that it preserves something of the rolling sound and music of the Greek verse, though it is only prose. That book I should certainly consider worth keeping constantly by you; its utility will appear to you at a later day. The great Greek tragedies have all been translated; but I should not so strongly recommend these translations to you. It would be just as well, in most cases, to familiarize yourselves with the stories of the dramas through other sources; and there are hundreds of these. You should at least know the subject of the great dramas of Sophocles, Æschylus, and above all Euripides. Greek drama was constructed upon a plan that requires much study to understand correctly; it is not necessary that you should understand these matters as an antiquarian does, but it is necessary to know something of the stories of the great plays. As for comedy, the works of Aristophanes are quite exceptional in their value and interest. They require very little explanation; they make us laugh to-day just as heartily as they made the Athenians laugh thousands of years ago; and they belong to immortal literature. There is the Bohn translation in two volumes, which I would strongly recommend. Aristophanes is one of the great Greek dramatists whom we can read over and over again, gaining at every reading. Of the lyrical poets there is also one translation likely to become an English classic, although

a modern one; that is Lang's translation of Theocritus, a tiny little book, but very precious of its kind. You see I am mentioning very few; but these few would mean a great deal for you, should you use them properly. Among later Greek work, work done in the decline of the old civilization, there is one masterpiece that the world will never become tired of — I mentioned it before, the story of *Daphnis and Chloë*. This has been translated into every language, and I am sorry to say that the best translation is not English, but French — the version of Amyot. But there are many English translations. That book you certainly ought to read. About the Latin authors, it is not here necessary to say much. There are very good prose translations of Virgil and Horace, but the value of these to you cannot be very great without a knowledge of Latin. However, the story of the *Æneid* is necessary to know, and it were best read in the version of Conington. In the course of your general education it is impossible to avoid learning something regarding the chief Latin writers and thinkers; but there is one immortal book that you may not have often seen the name of; and it is a book everybody should read — I mean the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius. You have this in a good English translation. It is only a story of sorcery, but one of the most wonderful stories ever written, and it belongs to world literature rather than to the literature of a time.

But the Greek myths, although eternally imperishable in their beauty, are not more intimately related to English literature than are the myths of the ancient English religion, the religion of the Northern races, which has left its echoes all through our forms of speech, even in the names of the days of the week. A student of English literature ought to know something about Northern mythology. It is full of beauty also, beauty of another and stranger kind; and it embodies one of the noblest warrior-faiths that ever existed,

the religion of force and courage. You have now in the library a complete collection of Northern poetry, I mean the two volumes of the *Corpus Poeticum Boreali*. Unfortunately you have not as yet a good collection of the Sagas and Eddas. But, as in the case of the vaster subject of Greek mythology, there is an excellent small book in English, giving an outline of all that is important — I mean necessary for you — in regard to both the religion and the literature of the Northern races, Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*. Sir Walter Scott contributed the most valuable portion of the translations in this little book; and these translations have stood the test of time remarkably well. The introductory chapters by Bishop Percy are old-fashioned, but this fact does not in the least diminish the stirring value of the volume. I think it is one of the books that every student should try to possess.

With regard to the great modern masterpieces translated into English from other tongues, I can only say that it is better to read them in the originals, if you can. If you can read Goethe's *Faust* in German, do not read it in English; and if you can read Heine in German, the French translation in prose, which he superintended, and the English translations (there are many of them) in verse can be of no use to you. But if German be too difficult, then read *Faust* in the prose version of Hayward, as revised by Dr. Buchheim. You have that in the library; and it is the best of the kind in existence. *Faust* is a book that a man should buy and keep, and read many times during his life. As for Heine, he is a world poet, but he loses a great deal in translation; and I can only recommend the French prose version of him; the English versions of Browning and Lazarus and others are often weak. Some years ago a series of extraordinary translations of Heine appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*; but these have not appeared, I believe, in book form.

As for Dante, I do not know whether he can make a strong appeal to you in any language except his own; and you must understand the Middle Ages very well to feel how wonderful he was. I might say something similar about other great Italian poets. Of the French dramatists, you must study Molière; he is next in importance only to Shakespeare. But do not read him in any translation. Here I should say positively, that one who cannot read French might as well leave Molière alone; the English language cannot reproduce his delicacies of wit and allusion.

As for modern English literature, I have tried in the course of my lectures to indicate the few books deserving of a place in world-literature; and I need scarcely repeat them here. Going back a little further, however, I should like to remind you again of the extraordinary merit of Malory's book the *Morte d'Arthur*, and to say that it is one of the very few that you should buy and keep and read often. The whole spirit of chivalry is in that book; and I need scarcely tell you how deep is the relation of the spirit of chivalry to all modern English literature. I do not recommend you to read Milton, unless you intend to make certain special studies of language; the linguistic value of Milton is based upon Greek and Latin literature. As for his lyrics — that is another matter. Those ought to be studied. As there is little more to say, except by way of suggestion, I think that you ought, every one of you, to have a good copy of Shakespeare, and to read Shakespeare through once every year, not caring at first whether you can understand all the sentences or not; that knowledge can be acquired at a later day. I am sure that if you follow this advice you will find Shakespeare become larger every time that you read him, and that at last he will begin to exercise a very strong and very healthy influence upon your methods of thinking and feeling. A man does not require to be a great scholar in order to

read Shakespeare. And what is true of reading Shakespeare, you will find to be true also in lesser degree of all the world's great books. You will find it true of Goethe's *Faust*. You will find it true of the best chapters in the poems of Homer. You will find it true of the best plays of Molière. You will find it true of Dante, and of those books in the English Bible about which I gave a short lecture last year. And therefore I do not think that I can better conclude these remarks than by repeating an old but very excellent piece of advice which has been given to young readers: "Whenever you hear of a new book being published, read an old one."

18033



A 000 737 991 0

Teachers everywhere are cordially welcoming our series of *Atlantic Readings*; for material not otherwise available is here published for classroom use in convenient and inexpensive form. In most cases the selections reprinted have been suggested by teachers in schools and colleges where a need for a particular essay or story has been urgently felt. Supplied for one institution, the reprint has created an immediate market elsewhere.

The Atlantic Monthly Press most warmly invites conference and correspondence that will suggest additions to this growing list. It is of course apparent from the titles below that the material is chosen only in part from the files of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

The titles already published follow:—

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. THE LIE
By Mary Antin 15c | 9. THE PRELIMINARIES
By Cornelia A. P. Comer 15c |
| 2. RUGGS—R.O.T.C.
By William Addleman Ganoe 15c | 10. THE MORAL EQUIVALENT
OF WAR
By William James 15c |
| 3. JUNGLE NIGHT
By William Beebe 15c | 11. THE STUDY OF POETRY
By Matthew Arnold 15c |
| 4. AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S MES-
SAGE
By Mrs. A. Burnett-Smith 15c | 12. BOOKS
By Arthur C. Benson 15c |
| 5. A FATHER TO HIS FRESH-
MAN SON
By Edward Sanford Martin 15c | 13. ON COMPOSITION
By Lafcadio Hearn 15c |
| 6. A PORT SAID MISCELLANY
By William McFee 15c | 14. THE BASIC PROBLEM OF
DEMOCRACY
By Walter Lippmann 15c |
| 7. EDUCATION: THE MASTERY OF
THE ARTS OF LIFE
By Arthur E. Morgan 15c | 15. THE PILGRIMS OF
PLYMOUTH
By Henry Cabot Lodge 25c |
| 8. INTENSIVE LIVING
By Cornelia A. P. Comer 15c | 16. AFTER THIRTY-FIVE YEARS
By Professor Frederick J. E.
Woodbridge 15c |
| 17. ON READING IN RELATION
TO LITERATURE 15c
By Lafcadio Hearn | |

We are constantly adding new titles to this series

Address The Educational Department

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS, INC.
8 ARLINGTON STREET, BOSTON (17)

ATLANTIC TEXTS

TEXTBOOKS IN LIBRARY FORM

ATLANTIC CLASSICS, <i>First Series</i>	\$1.50
ATLANTIC CLASSICS, <i>Second Series</i>	1.50
Both volumes collected and edited by ELLERY SEDGWICK, Editor of the <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> . For classes in American literature.	
ESSAYS AND ESSAY-WRITING.....	1.25
Collected and edited by WILLIAM M. TANNER, University of Texas. For literature and composition classes.	
ATLANTIC NARRATIVES, <i>First Series</i>	1.25
For college use in classes studying the short story.	
ATLANTIC NARRATIVES, <i>Second Series</i>	1.25
For secondary schools. Both volumes collected and edited by CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS, Editorial department of the <i>Atlantic Monthly</i> Press, and Lecturer at Harvard University.	
ATLANTIC PROSE AND POETRY.....	1.00
Collected and edited by CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS and HARRY G. PAUL of the University of Illinois. A literary reader for upper grammar grades and junior high schools.	
THE PROFESSION OF JOURNALISM.....	1.25
Collected and edited by WILLARD G. BLEYER, University of Wisconsin. For college use.	
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY AND ITS MAKERS....	1.00
By M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE, Editorial department of the <i>Atlantic Monthly Press</i> . Biographical and literary matter for the English class.	
WRITING THROUGH READING.....	.90
By ROBERT M. GAY, Simmons College. A short course in composition for colleges and normal schools.	
THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS: The Principle and the Prac- tice.....	2.50
Edited by STEPHEN P. DUGGAN, College of the City of New York. A basic text on international relations.	
THE LIGHT: An Educational Pageant.....	.65
By CATHERINE T. BRYCE, Yale University. Especially suitable for public presentation at Teachers' Conventions.	
PATRONS OF DEMOCRACY.....	.80
By DALLAS LORE SHARP, Boston University. For classes interested in discussing democracy in our public schools.	
AMERICANS BY ADOPTION.....	1.50
By JOSEPH HUSBAND. For Americanization courses.	
THE VOICE OF SCIENCE IN NINETEENTH-CEN- TURY LITERATURE.....	2.00
Collected and edited by ROBERT E. ROGERS and HENRY G. PEARSON, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.	

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS, INC.
8 ARLINGTON STREET, BOSTON (17)