Gateway to the Great Books

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INTRODUCTION
SYNTOPICAL GUIDE

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Note on Texts and Text Illustrations

The spelling and punctuation of certain texts in this set have been changed in accordance with modern British and American usage. Translations and transliterations added by the editors are enclosed in brackets.
Text illustrations in Volumes 8 and 9 have been revised and adapted to show modern equipment.

Portraits of authors in Volumes 2 through 10 are by Fred Steffen of Chicago

Introduction

I
The Ways–and Whys–of Reading

Great Books and the Gateway to Them

The works in this set are outstanding creations of the human mind, but they are not of the same order as the works included in *Great Books of the Western World*. They consist of short stories, plays, essays, scientific papers, speeches, or letters; and in some cases they are relatively short selections from much larger works. In contrast, *Great Books of the Western World* contains whole books or extensive collections of books.

The works in that set not only have a certain magnitude, but they also occupy a unique place in the formation and development of Western culture. Each of them represents a primary, original, and fundamental contribution to man's understanding of the universe and of himself. It has been said of them that they are books which never have to be written again, that they are inexhaustibly rereadable, that they are always contemporary, and that they are at once the most intelligible books (because so lucidly written) and the most rewarding to understand (because they deal with the most important and profound subjects). It has also been said of them that they are the repository and reservoir of the relatively small number of great ideas which man has forged in his efforts to understand the

world and his place in it; and that they are over everyone's head all of the time, which gives them the inexhaustible power to elevate all of us who will make the effort to lift our minds by reaching up to the ideas they contain.

These things can be said of few books, and the few books of which they can be truly said are truly great books, the only great books. The works included in *Gateway to the Great Books* not only lack the magnitude of the great books; they also have less seminal power. Nevertheless, they do have some of the special attributes which distinguish the great books. Some of the things which have been said of the great books can also be said of them.

The works in this set are, each of them, masterpieces of the imagination or intellect of man. Many of them are modern, even recent; some were written in ages past; but they are all forever contemporary. In whatever time or place we live, they speak to us of our own condition. Like the great books, they are readable again and again, with renewed pleasure and added profit. And like the great books, they throw light on as well as draw light from the great ideas. They, too, have the power to lift our minds up to new levels of enjoyment, new levels of insight, new levels of understanding. They have that power by virtue of holding out more to understand than most of us can manage to understand in a first reading. And if we make the effort to understand more in subsequent readings, they sustain such effort by the intellectual excitement they afford us—the excitement and the challenge of coming to closer grips with the great mysteries of nature and human nature, the order of the universe and the course of human history.

Like the great books in these respects, the selections included in this set are entitled to be regarded as proper companions to the greatest works of the human mind. That, however, does not fully describe the function they are intended to perform. They are more than just companion pieces. We have another and what seems to us a more important reason for associating the contents of these volumes with the contents of *Great Books of the Western World.*

Because this set consists of much shorter works and, on the whole, of things somewhat easier to read, we think that the reading of the selections here included will effectively serve as an induction into the reading of the great books. That is why we have called this set a *gateway* to the great books. The reader who opens his mind to all, or even to some, of the works in this set, has opened the gates for himself and is on the high road to the world of ideas and the lifetime of

learning which the great books, and only the great books, make accessible to him.

Their relative shortness is one reason, but not the only reason, why the selections included in this set are easier to read than the great books. Other things being equal, shorter works tend for the most part to be more manageable to young readers as well as to older ones who have not yet fully developed the skills and habits of the constant reader. In addition, these short works are more readily understandable. They tend to deal with easier and more familiar subjects.

More than half of the contents of this set consists of stories and plays, essays, speeches, and letters. Good writing of this kind almost has to be about things and experiences and feelings which are familiar to every human being; and when the writing is of a high order of excellence, as it is in the case of all the selections here included, it deals with the familiar aspects of life in a way that is at once lively and illuminating. The reader is quickly entertained and, to the extent that he is entertained (which means that his attention is held with delight), he reads—and learns.

While the political, scientific, and philosophical readings in *Gateway to the Great Books* must be read with more conscious effort to attend to what they try to teach us, they nevertheless remain easier than the basic political, scientific, and philosophical treatises in *Great Books of the Western World*. In part, this is due to their brevity; in part, it must be also said that what they try to teach us is more readily grasped.

All the works included in this set are comprehensible to any adult, young or old, who will give them the measure of attention which they require. That requirement is easy to fulfill, and can be fulfilled with pleasure, precisely because all these works have the quality of entertainment. Entertaining books invite and sustain our attention, delighting us at the same time that they profit us. The pleasure and profit that the reader derives from this set of books should—and, the editors think, will—help him to develop the habits and improve the skills which should make the great books easier for him to read, some at the same time, some later.

Kinds of Reading Matter

Different kinds of reading matter call for different kinds of reading. A reader must, first of all, decide what type of reading matter

he has in his hand; and he must then read it accordingly. Every piece of reading matter that comes before our eyes is not equally worth reading; nor do all make equal claims on our attention. All do not deserve from us the same devotion to the task of considering what the writer has in mind—what he is trying to teach us or to make us feel.

A telephone book, an air-line timetable, or a manual for operating a washing machine may be useful or even indispensable reading, requiring attention to certain details; but they certainly do not deserve sustained study or devoted consideration. Most periodicals that come our way do not deserve more than passing attention. And what is called "light reading" is no different from most television programs or motion pictures which succeed only if they give us the relaxation that we seek from them. Whatever use or value these things may have for us, they are seldom worth reading twice, and none of them is worth reading over and over again.

The great books, and the smaller masterpieces that constitute a gateway to them, exert a whole series of claims upon us that other kinds of reading seldom make. They have treasures to yield, and they will not yield their treasures without our digging. They will not give something to us unless we give something to them. Such works command our interest, our humility, and our fidelity. They have much to teach us—if we want to learn.

These are the things which are most worth reading for the first time, precisely because we will find, on that first reading, that they deserve to be read over and over again. It might almost be said that a book which is not worth rereading one or more times is not really worth reading carefully in the first place. Like the great books, the works in this set are not idle-hour affairs, mere time passers like picture magazines. None of them is a sedative compounded of paper and ink. Every one of them calls for and deserves active, as contrasted with merely passive, reading on our part.

Young people—and older ones—who in ages past had access to only a few books in a lifetime knew how to read them without being told. We all know to what good use young Abraham Lincoln, by the light of the log fire, put the Bible, Euclid, Blackstone, Bunyan, and a few other books. He, and others like him, read not only with eyes wide open but also with a mind fully awake—awake because it was intensely active in an effort to get, by reading, everything that the writer had to offer.

We need to remind ourselves of this bygone situation in which a book was a lifelong treasure, to be read again and again. Deluged as we are with a welter of printed words, we tend to devaluate all writing, to look at every book on the shelf as the counterpart of every other, and to weigh volumes instead of words. The proliferation of printing, on the one hand a blessing, has had, on the other, a tendency to debase (or, in any case, homogenize) our attitude toward reading.

What was true centuries ago is still true: there are great books and masterpieces of writing which can entertain us while they enlighten us; there are merely useful books or printed materials which we go to only for specific facts or instruction; there are trivial books which, like the average detective story, amuse us briefly or help us pass the time, and then disappear forever from mind and memory; and there is trash, like many magazine, paper-back, or even hard-cover romances which actually dull our taste for better things. Of these, only the first constitute the readables which deserve our effort to keep as wide awake as possible while reading. We can do that only by reading as actively as possible.

How does one do that? The answer is easier to give than to apply, but anyone who wants to get the most out of the things that are most worth reading can do what is required, if he applies his will to the task. And the more he is willing to do what is required, the easier he will find it to do.

What is required of the reader who wishes to be wakeful and active in the process of reading is simply the asking of questions. He must ask questions while he reads—questions which he himself must try to answer in the course of reading. Any questions? No. The art of reading a book or piece of writing consists in asking the right questions in the right order. They are as follows: (1) What is this piece of writing about? What is its leading theme or main point? What is it trying to say? (2) How does it say what it is trying to say? How does the writer get his central point across? How does he tell his story or argue for his conclusion to produce the effect in us that he is aiming at? (3) Is it true—factually or poetically—in whole or part? Has he won our assent or sympathy? And if not, what reasons do we have for disagreeing with or rejecting his view of things? (4) What of it? What meaning does it have for us in the shape of opinions or attitudes that we are led to form for ourselves as the result of reading this piece?

These four questions underlie and motivate all the specific things that we have to do in order to read well what is worth reading well. We shall state these more specific recommendations presently; but first it is necessary to observe the difference between fiction and nonfiction as objects of our active attention in reading; and, among nonfiction works, the difference between writings in the field of history and politics, writings in the sphere of natural science and mathematics, and writings in the realm of philosophy.

The Four Colors

In the binding of *Great Books of the Western World*, four different colors, based on traditional academic insignia for the various arts and sciences, are used to signify four types of subject matter to be found in the great books. Yellow in the binding signifies works of the imagination—epic and dramatic poetry, novels, and essays. Blue in the binding signifies biographies and histories, treatises in politics, economics, and jurisprudence. Green in the binding signifies major contributions to the fields of mathematics and the natural sciences. Red in the binding signifies the great works in philosophy and theology.

The writings included in *Gateway to the Great Books* are similarly ordered. A patch of color on the spine of each volume indicates the character of the works contained therein. Volumes 2, 3, 4, and 5, identified by a patch of yellow, contain works of the imagination. Fiction, in the form of short stories or excerpts from novels, is to be found in Volumes 2 and 3; and, in Volume 4, in the form of plays. Critical essays, largely concerned with the world of imaginative writing and writers, are to be found in Volume 5. Identified by a patch of blue, Volumes 6 and 7 contain writings about man and society, in the form of biographies and histories, letters and speeches, political documents and political treatises, together with works on a variety of related subjects such as education, war and peace, population growth, money, taxes, and trade. Then in Volumes 8 and 9, identified by a patch of green, we have scientific and mathematical papers: the scientific papers cover the range of the natural sciences —astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology—and include as well writings about science and about scientists; the mathematical papers are largely about the nature, methods, uses, and study of mathematics, though there are also some discussions

of specific mathematical notions and applications. Finally, Volume 10, identified by a patch of red, contains philosophical essays, concerned with the life of reason, aspects of nature, and with ways of thinking and living.

Gateway to the Great Books is divided into these four kinds of writing for good and sufficient reason. We have but to consider the subject matter of the various courses that we take in high school and college—no matter what their titles—to realize that most of them of importance fall into one or another of these four categories. Nor is there any mystery about it: all writing may be thus partitioned because the resulting parts represent four aspects of ourselves as we use words to communicate what we know, think, feel, or intend.

First, we are all storytellers, listeners to stories, and critics of the stories we hear. Imaginative literature, represented by Volumes 2–5 of this set, is native to the life of every human being.

Second, as free men and citizens, we have always had the responsibility, now heavier than ever before, to deal with the social and political problems which are considered in Volumes 6 and 7. We are called upon to examine ourselves in the light of man's past and future. These are illuminated by the historical and biographical writings contained in Volumes 6 and 7.

Third, the most distinctive characteristics of our modern world are the product of inventions and technology which are, in turn, the product of scientific discovery and mathematical theory, the two inseparable subjects dealt with in Volumes 8 and 9. Some understanding of these fields is essential if we wish to feel at home in the rapidly changing environment of the twentieth century.

Finally, every man and woman who has ever lived has asked himself, from childhood and youth on, What am I? How should I think? What is the meaning of life? How should I live? These are some, if not all, of the philosophical questions which men of wisdom, in every age, have considered and tried to answer. Such considerations appear in Volume 10 of *Gateway to the Great Books*.

To say that these are four different kinds of writing—writings about four different kinds of subjects—is not enough. They represent four different kinds of thinking, too. And they reflect four different aspects of our one human nature. They are four in one, at once different and the same. Since these four kinds of writings all spring from the mind of man, and since that is a unity, so in the end all thought is unified.

The mind is not four separate compartments. No single thought is unrelated to any other. Our ideas, beliefs, sentiments, and fancies do not exist in isolation, to be collected artificially and arbitrarily. Neither is a set of volumes representing all the major aspects of human thought and feeling an aggregation of snippets. For all its diversification of content, *Gateway to the Great Books* has an underlying unity—the unity of the human mind itself.

Most of the writers in this set, though they lived at different times and had special interests and abilities, are talking to each other across the centuries. Like the authors of the great books, they are engaged in a continuing conversation. They are talking to each other through the walls that seem to separate the physicist from the novelist, the philosopher from the historian; for all are involved in a common adventure—the unending exploration of man, of his mind and imagination, of his earth-home, and of the illimitable cosmos of which he is, though a small part, by far the most interesting member. He who reads and rereads all the selections in this whole set—and that may take a long time—will in the end gain a vision of this common adventure and sense the unity which underlies the whole.

But in the beginning, as the reader threads his way among the many different strands here woven together, he would be well advised to observe the differences in the four kinds of writing included in this set. They have to be read differently. Each of them has to be approached with a special attitude, a particular frame of mind. Confusion and bewilderment would result from our addressing a poet as if he were a mathematician, a philosopher as if he were a historian, or a historian as if he were a scientist. So, too, we would tend to confuse and bewilder ourselves if we failed to distinguish between fiction and nonfiction, or between philosophy and science, history and mathematics, and read them as if they were all the same.

These different kinds of writing require different kinds of reading on our part, because to read them well—with an active mind—we must ask different sorts of questions as we read. Unless we know what to look for (and how to look for it) in each kind of reading that we do, we shall demand of fiction knowledge it cannot give us, ascribe to history values it does not have, ask science for opinions that lie wholly outside its scope, and expect philosophy to produce a mode of proof that is impossible for it to achieve.

Some Rules of Reading

So basic are the differences among various kinds of writing that it s almost impossible to formulate rules of reading which are general enough to apply to every kind of writing in the same way. But there s one rule which takes account of this very fact; for it recommends hat we pay attention, first of all, to the character of the writing before us. Is it fiction or nonfiction? And if the latter, what sort of expository writing is it—criticism, history, political theory, social commentary, mathematics, science, or philosophy?

There is one other rule which applies to every piece of writing, in o far as it has the excellence that is common to all pieces of writing hat are works of art, whether they are imaginative or expository writing. A work of art has unity. The reader must apprehend this unity. It may be the unity of a story or of a play, or the unity of a historical narrative, a scientific theory, a mathematical analysis, a philosophical argument. But whatever it is, it can be stated simply as a kind of summary of what the whole work or piece of writing s about. The reader should make the effort to say what the whole is about in a few sentences. When he has done this, he has answered or himself the first of the four questions which should be asked about anything worth reading actively and with a mind fully awake.[1] Since a work of art is a complex unity, a whole consisting of parts, he reader should also try to say what the major parts of the work re and how they are ordered to one another and to the whole.

The rules to which we now turn apply most readily to nonfiction expository writing of all sorts), though, as we shall presently see, corresponding rules can be stated for guidance in the reading of maginative literature.

The writer of an expository work is usually engaged in solving a problem or a set of problems. Hence the reader, in dealing with such works as wholes, should try to summarize the problems which the author set before himself and tried to solve. What are they? How re they related to one another? Knowing the author's problems is necessary to any understanding of the answers he tries to give and o the judgment we make of his success or failure in giving them.

Examining a piece of writing as a whole and as an orderly arrange-

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[1] See p. 19 above for an enumeration of the four questions.

ment of parts is only one approach to it. It constitutes one way of reading a book or anything less than a book which has artistic unity. A second approach involves attention to the language of the author, with concern not only for his use of words and the manner in which he expresses his meaning, but also for the verbal formulation of his opinions and the reasons that he has for holding them. Here the reader should do a number of things, in successive steps, each a way of trying to get at the thought of the writer by penetrating through his language to his mind.

He should, first of all, try to come to terms with the author, that is, try to discover the basic terms which express the author's central notions or ideas. This can be done only by noting his words carefully and discovering the five or ten (rarely more than twenty) which constitute his special vocabulary. Finding such words or phrases will lead the reader to the writer's basic terms. Thus, for example, a careful reader of Calhoun's "The Concurrent Majority" from *A Disquisition on Government* (Volume 7) can come to terms with Calhoun only by discovering what he means by such words or phrases as "constitution," "numerical majority," "concurrent majority," "interposition," "nullification," and "veto."

A term is a word used unambiguously. It is a word tied down to a special meaning which does not change within the context of a particular piece of writing. We come to terms with an author by noting the one or more meanings with which he uses the words in his own special vocabulary. Good writers are usually helpful, indicating explicitly by verbal qualifications, such as quotation marks, underlining, or parenthetical explanations, that a word is now being used in one sense and now in another; but even the best writers frequently depend upon the context to provide such qualifications. This requires the reader to do the work of interpretation which is involved in coming to terms.

Language is a difficult and imperfect medium. For the transmission of thought or knowledge, there must be communication, which can occur only when writer and reader have a common understanding of the words which pass from one to the other. Terms made by the one and discovered by the other produce communication.

Coming to terms underlies all the subsequent acts of interpretation on the part of the reader. Terms are the building blocks of propositions, and propositions are put together in arguments. The

next two steps in the process of interpretation concern the author's propositions and his arguments—represented on the printed page by sentences and paragraphs, just as terms are represented there by words and phrases.

The reader should try to find out what the author is affirming and denying—what his bedrock assertions are. To do this, he must spot the crucial sentences in the text, the sentences in which the author expresses the opinions which are central in his mind. Most of the sentences in a piece of writing are not crucial. Only a few set forth the propositions which the author is undertaking to defend. Spotting these is not enough. The reader must know what they mean.

There are two simple ways in which we can test our understanding of the crucial sentences in an author's work. First, can we say precisely in our own words what the author is saying in his; that is, can we extract the author's meaning from his words by translating it into another form of speech? Second, can we think of examples that clearly illustrate the author's meaning or apply it to concrete experiences?

The third step of interpretative reading requires us to look for and find the key paragraphs which express the writer's basic arguments in support of the opinions that he wishes to persuade us to accept. An argument is a sequence of propositions, having a beginning in principles and an end in conclusions. It may be simple, or it may be complex, having simpler arguments as parts. Sometimes the writer will put his whole argument down in one place in the form of a summary paragraph; but more frequently the reader must piece together the parts of the argument by connecting sentences, or parts of paragraphs, which are on different pages.

The first of the suggested approaches to reading a book or piece of writing is analytical: it dissects a whole work into its parts and relates the parts. The second is interpretative: it attempts to construe what a writer means from what he says. There is a third approach, which should follow and complement the other two. It is critical.

Here the task is to judge a piece of writing in terms of the truth and falsity of its basic propositions, both its principles and its conclusions, in terms of the cogency or soundness of its arguments, and in terms of the adequacy or completeness of its analysis. It is at this stage or in this phase of reading that the reader must decide

whether he agrees or disagrees with the writer, or determine the extent of his agreement or disagreement. In doing this, he should be governed by a number of rules or maxims.

The first is that the reader should neither agree nor disagree with an author until he is sure that he understands what the author is saying. To agree with what you do not understand is inane; to disagree in the absence of understanding is impertinent. Many readers start to disagree with what they are reading almost at once—before they have performed the tasks of analysis and interpretation which should always precede that of criticism. In effect, they are saying to an author: "I don't know what you are talking about, but I think you are wrong." It would be just as silly for them to say "right" as it is for them to say "wrong." In either case, they are expressing prejudices rather than undertaking genuine criticism, which must be based on understanding.

This rule calls for patience and humility on the reader's part. If he is reading anything worth reading—anything which has the power to instruct him and elevate his mind—he should be loath to judge it too soon, for it would be rash to presume that he has so quickly attained an adequate understanding of it. If he suspects that he has fallen short in his understanding, he should always blame himself rather than the author. Not only is that the proper attitude if the author is worth reading at all; but, in addition, such an attitude may keep the reader's mind on the task of interpretation. There is always time for criticism after that is well done.

A second maxim by which we should be guided can be stated thus: there is no point in winning an argument if we know, or even suspect, that we are wrong. This is an important rule of intellectual behavior in face-to-face discussions—one, unfortunately, which is frequently violated. It is even more important in the very special one-way conversation that a good reader carries on with an author. The author is not there to defend himself. Disagreement with an author demands the utmost in intellectual decency on the part of the reader.

A third closely related maxim recommends to the reader that he should not undertake criticism unless he is as willing to agree as to disagree—unless he is prepared to agree intelligently as well as to disagree intelligently. In either case, the critical reader should be able to give reasons for the position that he takes.

The reasons for disagreement can be roughly grouped under four

readings. We may disagree (1) because we think that the author is uninformed on some essential point that is relevant to his conclusions; or (2) because we think that he is uninformed about some equally essential consideration, which would alter the course of his argument if he were aware of it; or (3) because we think that he has committed some fallacy or error in reasoning; or (4) because we think that his analysis, however sound in its bases and its reasoning, is incomplete. In every one of these instances, we are under an obligation to be able to prove the charge that we are making. Men and their works are finite and fallible, every last one; but a writer of eminence is ordinarily more competent in his field than the reader, upon whom, therefore, the heavy burden of proof is imposed.

The foregoing rules, as already pointed out, apply primarily to expository writing rather than to imaginative literature—fiction in the form of novels, short stories, or plays. Nevertheless, they do suggest analogous recommendations for the reader to follow in reading fiction. As terms, propositions, and arguments are the elements involved in the interpretative approach to expository writing, so the cast of characters, their actions and passions, their thought and speech, the sequence of events, and the plot together with its subplots are the things with which the reader must concern himself in interpreting a work of fiction. As factual truth and logical cogency are central considerations in the criticism of expository writing, so a narrative's verisimilitude or credibility (its poetic truth) and its unity, clarity, and coherence (its artistic beauty) are important objects of criticism in the case of fiction.

It is possible to offer a few other recommendations that are especially appropriate to imaginative literature, and applicable to the varied assortment of stories and plays in Volumes 2, 3, and 4.

In every piece of fiction to be found there, the subject matter of the writer is men and women. But he approaches this subject matter in a way that is quite different from that employed by the historian, the psychologist, or the moral philosopher, all of whom are concerned with human character and conduct, too. The imaginative writer approaches this subject matter indirectly and, in a sense, subjectively.

He sees men and women partially, in terms of his own limited temperament, his own overriding passions, and also in terms of their willingness, as it were, to subject themselves to the particular

pattern or frame that he has in mind. Dickens, in *The Pickwick Papers*, and Mark Twain, in *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, are placed side by side in Volume 2. But in other ways they are far apart. To sense the distance separating them, the reader need only ask this simple question after he has read these two stories: Which seems to *like* mankind more? He will then become aware that these two storytellers hold different views of mankind—each his own partial view with its own partial truth.

To read fiction with pleasure, the reader must abandon himself for the moment to the writer's partial vision. As he reads more and more imaginative literature, he will begin, almost unconsciously, to obtain new insights from each of them.

Finally, it may be helpful to point out a few differences between imaginative and expository literature, from the point of view of what is involved in reading them carefully and well.

A story must be apprehended as a whole, whereas an expository treatise can be read in parts. One cannot read enough of a story, short of the whole, "to get the idea"; but one can read a portion of a scientific or philosophical work and yet learn something of what the author is driving at.

An expository work may require us to read other works by the same or different authors in order to understand it fully, but a story requires the reading of nothing outside itself. It stands entirely by itself. It presents a whole world—for us to experience and enjoy.

The ultimate unity of an expository work, especially in the fields of political theory, natural science, mathematics and philosophy, lies in a problem or a set of related problems to be solved. The unity of a narrative lies in its plot.

There is a fundamental difference in the use of language by imaginative and expository writers. In exposition, the aim of a good writer is to avoid ambiguity by a literal or precise use of words. Imaginative writers often seek to utilize ambiguity and they do this by recourse to metaphor and simile and other figures of speech. The use of language moves in one direction when its ultimate aim is to accord with fact, and in another when its ultimate aim is to give wings to fancy.

And, lastly, the difference between imaginative literature and expository writing calls for different types of criticism on the reader's part. Aristotle pointed out that "the standard of correctness is not the same in poetry and politics," which we can generalize by

aying that the soundness of a fictional narrative is not to be judged n the same way as the soundness of a scientific or philosophical xposition. In the latter, the standard is objective truth; in the ormer, internal plausibility. To be true in its own way, fiction need ot portray the world as it actually is. Its truth is not that of simple actual realism or representation. Its truth depends upon an internal ecessity and probability. Characters and action must fit together o make the narrative a likely story. However fanciful the story may e, it has the ring of truth if it is believable as we read it—if we can eel at home in the world that the imaginative writer has created or us.

The differences that we have pointed out between imaginative nd expository writing should not be allowed to obscure the fact hat there are mixed works—works which somehow participate in he qualities of both types. One example of this will suffice. Historical narratives are, in a way, mixtures of poetic and scientific or hilosophical writing. They offer us knowledge or information about he past, gained by methodical investigation or research, but that nowledge or information comes to us in the form of a story, with a equence of events, a cast of characters, and a plot. Hence histories nust be read in both ways. They must be judged by the standard of bjective truth—truth of fact—and also by the standard of internal lausibility—truth of fiction.

Some Further Suggestions to the Reader

One way of putting into practice the rules of reading outlined in the preceding pages is to read with a pencil in hand—to mark the pages being read, without scruples about damaging the volume. Marking a book is not an act of mutilation, but one of love. Of course, no one should mark a book that is not his. But the books that a man buys, he is at liberty to mark or write in as he reads.

Buying a book is only a prelude to owning it. To own a book involves more than paying for it and putting it on the shelf in one's home. Full ownership comes only to those who have made the books they have bought part of themselves—by absorbing and digesting them. The well-marked pages of a much handled volume constitute one of the surest indications that this has taken place.

Too many persons make the mistake of substituting economic possession or physical proprietorship for intellectual ownership.

They substitute a sense of power over the physical book for a genuine grasp of its contents. Having a fine library does not prove that its legal owner has a mind enriched by books. It proves only that he was rich enough to buy them. If a man has a handsome collection of volumes on his shelves—unread, untouched—you know that he regards books as part of the furnishing of his home. But if his books, many or few, are dog-eared and dilapidated, shaken and loosened by continual use, marked and scribbled in from cover to cover, then you know that he has come into the full ownership of his books.

Why is marking a book so important a part of reading it? It helps to keep you awake while reading—not merely conscious, but mentally alert. And since reading, if it is an active process, involves thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written, writing in the book enables the reader to express his thoughts while reading. Marking a book thus turns the reader into a writer, engaged, as it were, in a conversation with the author.

There are many ways of marking a book intelligently and fruitfully. As one discovers the terms, propositions, and arguments in an expository work, one can mark them by underlining or by asterisks, vertical lines, or arrows in the margin. Key words or phrases can be circled; the successive steps of an argument can be numbered in the margin. Imaginative works can be similarly treated: underlining or marginal notations can be used to mark significant developments in character, crucial turns in plot, or revelations of insight by the author himself. In addition, one should not hesitate to use the margin, or the top or bottom of the page, to record questions that the text arouses in one's mind, or to jot down one's own comments about the significance of what is being read.

The margins of a book, or the space between its lines, may not afford enough room to record the thoughts of an intensive reader. In that case, he should read with a scratch-pad in hand. The sheets of paper on which the notations have been made can then be inserted into the book at appropriate places.

The person who marks a book cannot read it as quickly as one who reads it passively or merely flips its pages inattentively. Far from being an objection to marking books, this fact constitutes one of the strongest recommendations for doing it. It is a widely prevalent fallacy that speed of reading is a measure of intelligence. There is no right speed for intelligent reading. Some things should be read quickly and effortlessly, some should be read slowly and

even laboriously. The sign of intelligence in reading is the ability to read different things differently according to their worth. With regard to the great books, or with regard to the selections in this set, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather to see how many can get through you—how many you can make your own.

Most things worth reading carefully are likely to present some difficulties to the reader on a first reading. These difficulties tend to slow us up. But we should never allow them to stop us in our tracks. The reader who bogs down completely because he cannot fully understand some statement or reference in the course of his reading fails to recognize that no one can be expected to achieve complete understanding of a significant work on the first go at it. A first reading is bound to be a relatively superficial one, as compared with the reading in greater and greater depth that can be done when one rereads the same work later.

The reader who realizes this should adopt the following rule in reading worth-while materials for the first time. The rule is simply to read the work through without stopping to puzzle out the things one does not fully understand on that first reading. Failure to clear all the hurdles should not lead one to give up the race. The things which may be stumbling blocks on the first reading can be surmounted on later readings, but only if they are not allowed to become insuperable obstacles that prevent the first reading from being completed.

The first reader should pay attention to what he can understand, and not be stopped by what he does not immediately grasp. He should go right on reading past the point where he has difficulties in understanding, and he will soon come again to paragraphs and pages that he readily understands. He should read the work through, undeterred by paragraphs, arguments, names, references, and allusions that escape him. If he lets himself get tripped up by any of these stumbling blocks, if he gets stalled by them, he is lost. In most cases, he would not have been able to puzzle the thing out by sticking to it. He will have a much better chance of understanding it on a second reading, but that requires him to have read the work *through* at least once.

Reading it through the first time, however superficially, breaks the crust of the book or work in hand. It enables the reader to get the feel or general sense of what he is reading, and some grasp, how-

ever incomplete, of what it is all about. It is necessary for him to get some grasp of the whole before he can see the parts in their true perspective—or, sometimes, in any perspective at all.

Most of us were taught in school to pay attention to the things we did not understand. We were told to go to a dictionary when we met with an unfamiliar word. We were told to go to an encyclopedia or some other reference work when we were confronted with allusions or statements we did not understand. We were told to consult footnotes, scholarly commentaries, or other secondary sources in order to get help. Unfortunately, we never received worse advice.

The tremendous pleasure that comes from reading Shakespeare was spoiled for generations of high school students who were forced to go through *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* scene by scene, to look up all the words new to them in a glossary, and to study all the scholarly footnotes. As a result, they never read a play of Shakespeare's. By the time they got to the end of it, they had forgotten the beginning and lost sight of the whole. Instead of being forced to take this pedantic approach, they should have been encouraged to read the play through at one sitting and discuss what they got out of that first quick reading. Only then, if at all, would they have been ready to study the play carefully, and closely, because they would have understood enough of it to be able to learn more.

What is true of reading a play by Shakespeare applies with equal force to all the works included in this set, both the fiction and the nonfiction. What a first reader of these works will understand by reading each of them *through*—even if it is only 50 per cent or less—will help him to make the additional effort later to go back to the difficult places which he wisely passed over on the first reading. Even if he does not go back, understanding 50 per cent of something really worth reading is much better than not understanding it at all, which will certainly be the case if he allows himself to be stopped by the first difficult passage he comes to.

There are some technical books—usually written by professors for professors, and in the jargon of the trade—which are not only difficult for a first reader, but impossible for the nonprofessional to understand by any means. Such books are difficult because they are written in a way that is not intended for the person of ordinary background and training. In contrast, the great books, and to a lesser extent the masterpieces included in this set, are difficult for a quite different reason.

It is not because the author has not tried to make himself clear to the ordinary reader. It is not because the author is not a good writer. The difficulty, where it exists, lies in the subject matters being treated and in the ideas being conveyed. Precisely because the authors of *Great Books of the Western World* and the writers represented in *Gateway to the Great Books* have a mastery of these difficult subject matters or ideas, do they have the power to deal with them as simply and clearly as possible. Hence they make such material as easy as it can be made for the reader.

No major subject of human interest, nor any basic idea, need be a closed book to the ordinary man. On every one of them, there exist great books or masterpieces of writing which afford enlightenment to anyone who will make the effort to read them. However difficult the subject matter being treated or the idea being expounded, these writings help the ordinary and inexpert reader to make some headway in understanding if he will only follow the rule of cracking a tough nut by applying pressure at the softest spot. That, in other words, is the rule of paying maximum attention to what you do understand, and not being deterred by what you fail to understand, on the first reading of these works.

A Word about What Follows

The succeeding sections of this introductory essay will attempt to acquaint the reader with the four types of subject matter which are represented in *Gateway to the Great Books*. Section II will discuss the works of the imagination that are included in Volumes 2–5; Section III, the writings about man and society that are included in Volumes 6 and 7; Section IV, the works in natural science and in mathematics that are included in Volumes 8 and 9; and Section V, the philosophical writings that are included in Volume 10.

Each of these sections will try to provide a general framework in which the writings indicated above can be read. Illustrative materials from *Great Books of the Western World*, as well as references to particular selections in *Gateway to the Great Books*, will be utilized to bring the reader face to face with the ideas and themes appropriate to each kind of writing, and to fill him in on the basic background in each field. In addition, reference will be made from time to time to the *Syntopicon*, which, under the title of *The Great Ideas*, comprises Volumes 2 and 3 in *Great Books of the*

Western World. The quotations from the *Syntopicon* are drawn from the introductions which open its chapters, 102 in all, one on each of the great ideas.[2]

A word should be said about the style of the references that will appear in parentheses in the pages to follow.

Where the reference is to a passage in *Great Books of the Western World*, it is indicated by the letters GBWW, followed by the number of the volume in that set, and the citation of the particular page or pages on which the passage occurs. Sometimes these page numbers are accompanied by letters, *e.g.*, 129a, or 321b-c. These letters indicate sections of the page. In volumes of GBWW which are printed in a single column, "a" and "b" refer to the upper and lower halves of the page. In volumes which are printed in two columns, "a" and "b" refer to the upper and lower halves of the left column, "c" and "d" to the upper and lower halves of the right column.

Where references are made to authors or works included in this set, they will be accompanied simply by a parenthetical citation of the number of the appropriate volume in *Gateway to the Great Books*.

And where reference is made to the *Syntopicon*, the reference will be to either Volume 2 or Volume 3 in GBWW, and to the appropriate pages in that volume.

[2] The reader who wishes to acquaint himself with the 102 great ideas will find them listed on the rear endpapers of each volume of *Great Books of the Western World*. He can also find the list of authors included in that set by examining the front endpapers of any volume. If he does that, he will discover that some of the authors included in *Great Books of the Western World* are also represented, by other and somewhat easier works, in *Gateway to the Great Books*.