Such I take to be the position of Ruskin. He was the prophet of beauty of design in furniture and architecture. He taught those of his generation how to weave beauty about the home—whether it be a cottage or a palace—and the things in every-day use. He showed them how health and cheerfulness might be promoted by drawing the curtain aside in the dim or darkened room and letting in a ray of sunshine. He called their attention to the beauty of the passing cloud, and the blue sky, and the green fields, and the way-side flower. He awakened in them the almost dormant sense of beauty. And his lesson has been well learned. The present generation knows the value of observation, and is trained to take in at a glance whatever it perceives to be striking or beautiful. His books, so cleverly written, so intensely earnest, were a revelation to his day and generation, but they no longer evoke the enthusiasm that greeted their first appearance. Not that we cannot still find much to learn from Ruskin. He has nurtured his own mind upon high thought, and he would have all other minds equally nurtured. He holds up noble ideals of life. He would see men and women harboring elevating thoughts, pure of heart, honest in their convictions, unselfish in their pursuits, each extending a helping hand, each living for the highest and best. And these are lessons for all ages. He hates shams with the honest soul of Dr. Johnson; he scorns the worship of getting-on to the exclusion of the free exercise of the higher faculties with the unfettered soul of Epictetus; he loves the Gothic past, and he finds little in our modern world to love outside of Turner's pictures and Walter Scott's novels. All else in modern life is censurable. He quarrels with our railroads, and our smoking manufactories, and our modern methods of money-getting. Pages of his books are as charming as ever grew under the driving pen, but his digressions are more than his subjects. He lacks ballast. There is in him too much of what he himself has graphically described as "the wild writhing, and wrestling, and longing for the moon, and tilting at windmills, and agony of eyes, and torturing of fingers, and general spinning out of one's soul into fiddlestrings."*

So it is with Carlyle. He insistently taught the lesson that the world is moving, that time and tide wait for no man, that what has been done cannot be undone, that the great secret of living is to be up and doing—doing something—doing well whatever one puts hand to; and that other lesson in his great prose poem, *The French Revolution*, that neither class nor creed is privileged against the pursuit of a Nemesis, for deeds ill-done, goods ill-got, and responsibilities ill-discharged. These are lessons that cannot be too often repeated, but they were spoken rather loud-mouthedly, and with them were mingled large drafts of cant. He sought to compel the world's admiration for mere brute force in its triumphs over right and justice. He was out of joint

* *The Queen of the Air*, p. 170.

with his time, and because men refused to take his rantings seriously, he raved and indulged in nick-names worthy of Billingsgate in its most unsavory day. However tonic may have been his jeremiads in his own day and generation, they have now lost their power. And so Carlyle may step down and out. Our age is hard-pressed with other questions seeking a solution. We also have our prophets, if we would only recognize them; and if we do not make the mistake of stoning them we may profitably listen to their lessons.

VII. Be honest in your researches. Read both sides of every human question under proper guidance. Individual judgments are misleading, and it is only by comparison of various opinions that you can get at the real state of the case. It is the duty of the historian to go back of a statement to the author first making the statement, and inquire into the spirit by which he is animated. But this duty the historian does not always discharge. And yet, what is of more importance than to know if it is a friend or an enemy of the person or the people who is relating the story? Under no circumstances is the censure of an enemy to be accepted unchallenged and unsifted. Don't be afraid of the truth. It may tell against your favorite author, or favorite principle, or favorite hobby. But facts are of more worth than misplaced admiration or misconceived theory. Let in the light. What we want is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Keep clear of whitewashing

books. Whitewash is not lasting; it scales off and reveals the deformities beneath. It were better from the beginning that we know men as they lived, events as they happened, opinions as they were held. We Catholics fear no truth, have no apology to make for any truth, have no hesitancy in accepting all proven truth. Our Holy Father, in throwing open the Vatican Library to historical research, has clearly defined the spirit in which history should be written: "The first law of history," says His Holiness, "is to dread uttering falsehood; the next, not to fear stating the truth; lastly, that the historian's writings should be open to no suspicion of partiality or of animosity." *

When you find a history, whether of Church or of state, with its chief personages stalking over the page possessing neither spot nor blemish of character, making no blunder in conduct or policy, perfect in all things, you may set that history down as misleading. No man is infallible. The life of every man is strewn with the wrecks of his mistakes. The wise man blunders, and from his blunders learns the larger experience and the more prudent mode of action; the holy man blunders, and out of his blunders builds unto himself a citadel of sanctity that becomes his protection against temptation. The book that would reveal to us a soul passing through all the stages of its existence from the first dawnings of reason, and making of its failures and failings and short-

* Letter to Cards. de Luca, Pitra, and Hergenrœther, Aug. 18, 1883.

comings stepping-stones to higher and better things, would be a priceless boon. But is it not still an unwritten book?—

So also, in a study of the clashings of the various schools and systems of philosophy, may you find some scintillations suggestive of trains of useful thought. But there is one subject which I would urge upon you with all the earnestness of my soul to hold in reverence. It is the most precious inheritance that you possess. It is more to you than broad acres and heaps of gold; more than knowledge and power; more than fame and human greatness; more than life itself. It is the heritage of your Catholic Faith, that has been nurtured in the blood of your forefathers, and handed down to you as a most sacred trust. It is too holy a thing to be trifled with. Put far away from you books calculated to undermine the groundwork of that precious heritage. Cherish it within your heart of hearts; guard it there with jealous care. Do I so exhort you because I think your faith cannot bear the light? Far from me be such a thought. It were but ill in keeping with the solemn words of the Father of the faithful. He says: "Nor must we pass by in silence, or reckon of little account, that fuller knowledge of our belief, and, as far as may be, that clearer understanding of the mysteries of the faith, which Augustine and other Fathers praised and labored to attain, and which the Vatican Synod itself decreed to be very fruitful." * During eighteen hun-

* Leo XIII., Encyclical *Æterni Patris.*

dred years and more sophistry in every guise has been attacking that faith, and it shines to-day with greater splendor than ever. There are popular books disseminating plausible objections that might vex and annoy you because you could not answer them satisfactorily. A sneer can sap the foundations of a great religious truth in the unwary mind. Any scoffer can raise objections that only a life-study could answer. It is the absence of such learning that the Psalmist finds good: "Because I have not known learning, I will enter into the powers of the Lord." * We do not hold our faith merely upon the evidence of reason, or as a matter of private opinion. It deals with truths and mysteries beyond the grasp of human reason. We hold it solely and simply on the authority of God speaking to us through His Church. We hold it because God gives us the grace so to hold it. It matters little to us whether certain parts of the Book of Daniel have been written by Daniel, or by Esdras, or by any other scribe or prophet. † Our faith is not grounded upon this or that passage of Scripture. It is based upon the infallible authority of God's Church, which is the pillar and ground of truth, and the depositary of revelation, and which alone has the key to what is or is not of inspiration in the Sacred Books. This is our stand-by. A recent novel has depicted the sad instance of an Anglican clergyman tortured by

* Psalms, lxx. 17.

† See, for instance, Abbé Vigouroux, *Cosmogonie Mosaïque.* Susanne: Caractère véridique de son Histoire, pp. 345–349.

doubt, and his faith crumbling away at the touch of a sceptical hand. It is the story of hundreds within the Church of England at the present moment. And it is so because they hold the most sacred truths of Christianity not with the certitude of faith, but with the probability of private opinion. * The light of faith penetrates far beyond the light of reason; having lost the grace of faith, those men can no longer retain their hold upon the truths of faith.

VIII. Seek to master the book you read. To every book there is a positive and a negative side. In order to get at the positive side place yourself in sympathy with the author. Read the book from that point of view from which he wrote it. Divest yourself, for the time being, of your own hobbies and your own standard of criticism. You thus stand out of your own light. Afterwards look to the negative side of the book. Note how far the author has gone over the ground of his subject-matter, and wherein he falls short in his treatment. There are times when what an author does not say is as expressive as that which he says. His omissions are an important clue to his frame of mind. They reveal his likes and dislikes, his aptitudes, his tastes and tendencies. Sometimes they reveal how far he falls short in grasping the full bearing of his subject; sometimes they point to his prudence in steering clear of

* See Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, chap. vii., § 2, 5.

mooted questions barren in result; sometimes they prove him an artist of consummate skill, who knows what not to say as well as what to say. Then, again, the omission may be designed suppression. An example will best illustrate the point I would make. Take the first and last master-pieces of George Eliot. *Adam Bede* breaks upon the reader with all the freshness and truth of nature. Every element influencing character is expressed in the workings of the very souls of the rural, half-educated folk acting out their lives according to their conscience, their early training, and their personal character. Their beliefs are there, and their lives are colored by their beliefs. *Daniel Deronda* deals with human nature on lines diametrically opposite. All its men and women, except the fanatical Mordecai and the priggish Deronda, live and move without religious beliefs and religious comforts, the creatures of environment, acting not as they would but as they must. The ordinary reader throws the light of his own religious belief upon the characters as they pass before him, and takes it for granted that the author assumes throughout religious feeling and religious motive. But he is reckoning without the author. George Eliot cast off the shreds of Christianity that had hung about her when she first began to write, and in her later works suppressed all Christian influence as false and pernicious, substituting in the stead necessity and environment. Here is the fountain whence flows the poison permeating

this gifted writer's later works. It is by taking into account these various aspects of authors and books that one learns to master the book one reads.

IX. In your readings give one another mutual support and encouragement. Therefore read aloud in the family circle. After you have read a chapter, discuss freely the author, the style, the characters, the statements. This is a good old custom that was in greater vogue a hundred years ago, when books were scarce and education was not so generally diffused. You all remember how charmingly Goldsmith, in that most charming of classics, *The Vicar of Wakefield*—a work that contributed so largely towards the awakening of the genius of Goethe—describes the practice at tea-time in the family-circle of Dr. Primrose.* Little did Goldsmith think that he was therein painting a relic of Catholic England, which had passed into a family custom out of the convents and colleges and monasteries of mediæval days. The custom is improving in many directions, and worthy of being preserved. Another praiseworthy means of mutual help is that of organizing reading-circles among your friends. Let some competent person cut out your work for you; prepare your portion well, and when the circle meets, enter with all earnestness into the discussion of your subject. You will find this a source of great improvement.

X. Read perseveringly. Keep at your book or your

* Chapter v.

subject-matter till you shall have finished it. Do not yield to discouragement because you are not making the progress you had anticipated. I have known young men who were too sanguine in their expectations, and who, upon seeing the little headway they were making, would throw up their work. We, all of us, at times feel inclined so to act, and have ample opportunity to fight against this impulse. But fight we must, bravely and manfully. Were naught else to come of this steady reading habit than the mental discipline that follows, we would be the gainers. It would help us to a better grasp of our daily affairs. But the habit brings with it much more. Even should we have read but a single book in the course of the year, and above all, should we have made that book our own, we would be amply compensated. Intellectual progress is not to be measured by the number of pages, or the number of volumes one has read. A short passage may suffice to mark an epoch in one's intellectual growth. He who has let Wordsworth's nobly chiseled Ode to Duty in all the beauty of its classic severity sink into his soul, or who has read and re-read Cardinal Newman's eloquent sentences on the power and awful grandeur of the Mass, till their whole force has come home to him,* or who has imbibed the truth and beauty of George Eliot's magnificent tribute to Thomas à Kempis,† has opened up to him a new vision

* *Loss and Gain*, pp. 326–329.

† The Mill on the Floss, bk. iv., chap. iii.

of these subjects. His horizon is enlarged. His intellectual sight is strengthened. And such is the educational effect of every masterpiece when it has been diligently read.

XI. Lastly, remember that that is the best reading which tends to growth of character as well as to intellectual development. Every good book dealing with human life in its broader phases has that effect. But we Catholics read a certain class of books that are prepared especially for the culture of our spiritual sense. They remind us of our last end; they probe our consciences and lay open before us our failings, and frailties, and shortcomings; they reveal to us the goodness and mercy and sanctity of God, the life and passion and merits of our Redeemer, the beauty and holiness of the Church; they teach us how to prepare for the profitable reception of the sacraments; they place before us for our model and imitation the ideal Christian life. They rebuke our sins, they soothe our anxieties, they strengthen our resolves. With such friends we should become very intimate. And if I may be permitted to give advice upon a subject that belongs more especially to your spiritual director, I would say to you: Whatever you read by way of spiritual reading, be it little or much, read it slowly and reflectively. You are not under obligation, as in pursuing a course of study, to rush through a certain amount. Any passage that comes home to you, or stirs your feelings, or moves your will, dwell upon it until you

shall have absorbed all its sweetness. Cultivate not many, but a few, very few, spiritual books, which you will make it a point to read and read again year after year.*

V.

SHOULD you ask me what to read, I could not give you a definite answer. The choice will greatly depend on yourself. Lists of books, except for the pursuit of special lines of study, are valueless. You have before you the whole range of literature and thought, from *Alice in Wonderland*—a child's book which we none of us are too old to profit by—to that late beautiful creation of a mother's love and a woman's genius, *Little Lord Fauntleroy;* from the primers of science to the *Mécanique Céleste* of Laplace; from the fairy-tales of boyhood to the great thinkers; historians, poets, orators, philosophers, political economists—all place their wealth at your feet and ask you to make it your own. Before selecting draw the line between the literature of the hour, that is so much foam upon the current of time, flecking its surface for a moment and passing away into oblivion, and the literature which is a possession for all time, whose foundations are deeply laid in human nature, and whose structure withstands the storms of adversity and the

* The indispensable books in every Catholic collection are: 1. *The New Testament;* 2. *The Imitation of Christ;* 3. *Spiritual Combat;* 4. *Introduction to a Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales.