

# Essay on Pleasures of Reading Literature

Literature has been defined by W. H. Hudson in the terms: "Literature is composed of those books, and of those books only, which, in the first place, because of their subject matter and their mode of treating it, are of general human interest; and in which, in the second place, the element of form and the pleasure which form gives are to be regarded as essential." The definition is clear enough to make the point clear that it is of general human interest. As such it pleases its readers. But we should exercise restraint in our indulgence in pleasure from literature.

Literature can be of certain broad forms or genres: poetry, drama, prose, novel. Each of these terms may have different sub-forms. Each of these forms affords a particular type of pleasure. The common pleasures that each of these genres provides are of several types. The first type is the pleasure provided by the intellectual element—the thought that the writer brings to bear upon his subject. The second type of pleasure is provided by the emotional element of literature. The feelings that the writer's subject arouses in the readers have some impact on their mind or, in the case of drama, the spectators. Feelings similar to those of the writer are aroused in the readers or spectators. This arousal of feelings creates some aesthetic pleasures in them. The third type of pleasure is provided by the element of imagination and fancy (an inferior type of imagination). It is the faculty of strong and intense vision. It quickens similar power of vision in the readers. When we feel that our imaginative vision is inspired and exercised by literature, we experience a subtle sense of pleasure. Another type of pleasure is based on our inborn aesthetic sense—our sense of order, symmetry, and beauty. If the author of literature fails to convey his feelings or imagination in proper order and symmetry, the beauty of his work will be lost. It will then fail to give aesthetic pleasure. So the last

type of pleasure is very basic and vital to the matter of pleasure in literature.

Besides the general form of pleasure, each of the genres gives some special type of pleasure. For example, poetry has its special pleasure in its rhythm and meter. Matthew Arnold said about poetry, "It is simply the most delightful and perfect form of utterance that human words can reach".

In novels or prose fiction, we come across the living characters in society, their mentality, their actions, and reactions. In short, we come to know all about human character, human life, and society.

The drama brings before us the real men and women in society. They appear in their physical form, they talk and act before our very eyes. We come to see not only their external activity but also come to know about their inner life. For the audience, all these provide aesthetic pleasures.

The study of literature provides all such kinds of pleasure for the readers or spectators. Indeed, Francis Bacon's saying "Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability" applies mainly to the study of literature. When we are tired and jaded in body and mind the study of a good piece of literature gives us the purest of pleasures and freshens us totally. We rise, and start our life again with fresh enthusiasm and vigor. Here we can remember another very relevant remark made by a very famous philosopher in the history of philosophy. Rene Descartes, a great French philosopher of the 17th century; said, "The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest men of past centuries." The remark is very much appropriate, and it is really a great pleasure to talk to the masterminds of the past through reading their books, especially through literary books. This is because literature grows, more than

any other kind of writing, out of the deepest feelings and realizations of the author. Reading a book gives us almost as much pleasure as we would get conversing with a living great man.

But indulgence in reading literature, and deriving pleasure from the literature should be kept within the limit, because over-indulgence may produce certain undesirable effects on the mind. Samuel Rogers has aptly said, "When literature is the sole business of life it becomes a drudgery; when we can resort to it only at certain hours it is a charming relaxation." Over-indulgence may make us indolent and indifferent. the practical necessities of life. Bacon has said, "To spend too much time in studies is sloth."

Literature does give us pleasure, but we should take care that we do not over-indulge in it.