

Books Do Furnish A Mind, Part IV

by Ibn Warraq (July 2015)



The Reader by Jean-Honoré Fragonard

Do I boast of my omnivorousness of reading, even apart from the romances? Certainly no! never, except in joke. It's against my theories and ratiocinations, which take upon themselves to assert that we all generally err by reading too much, and out of proportion to what we think. I should be wiser, I am persuaded, if I had not read half as much—should have had stronger and better exercised faculties, and should stand higher in my own appreciation. The fact is, that the *ne plus ultra* of intellectual indolence is this reading of books. It comes next to what the Americans call 'whittling.'

— Elizabeth Barrett
Browning (in a letter to R.H. Horne), 1843.

The answer to the skeptic's question above ["Have you read them all?"] is, of course, no, I have not read every single book I own cover to cover. First, many of my books are works of reference, such as language dictionaries (Liddell and Scott's *Greek Lexicon*