

[PDF] Three essays: I. Book-buying, II. book-binding, III. the office of literature

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Augustine Birrell

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Augustine Birrell : Three essays: I. Book-buying, II. book-binding, III. the office of literature before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Three essays: I. Book-buying, II. book-binding, III. the office of literature:

Libraries are not made; they grow. Your first two thousand volumes present no difficulty, and cost astonishingly little money. Given L400 and five years, and an ordinary man can in the ordinary course, without undue haste or putting any pressure upon his taste, surround himself with this number of books, all in his own language, and thenceforward have at least one place in the world in which it is possible to be happy. But pride is still out of the question. To be proud of having two thousand books would be absurd. You might as well be proud of having two top-coats. After your first two thousand difficulty begins, but until you have ten thousand volumes the less you say about your library the better. Then you may begin to speak. It is no doubt a pleasant thing to have a library left you. The present writer will disclaim no such legacy, but hereby undertakes to accept it, however dusty. But good as it is to inherit a library, it is better to collect one. Each volume then, however lightly a stranger's eye may roam from shelf to shelf, has its own individuality, a history of its own. You remember where you got it, and how much you gave for it; and your word may safely be taken for the first of these facts, but not for the second. The man who has a library of his own collection is able to contemplate himself objectively, and is justified in believing in his own existence. No other man but he would

have made precisely such a combination as his. Had he been in any single respect different from what he is, his library, as it exists, never would have existed. Therefore, surely he may exclaim, as in the gloaming he contemplates the backs of his loved ones, "They are mine, and I am theirs."-----Augustine Birrell